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Gender, Sexuality, and the Body: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Gay and Queer Marathoners

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**GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND THE BODY:
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GAY AND QUEER
MARATHONERS**

By

WILLIAM BRIDEL

Hon. B.A., York University, 1997

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the experiences of 12 gay and queer males within the sport of marathoning. Working within an anti-positivist paradigm that draws on queer and poststructuralist gender theories, as well as a Foucauldian perspective of the body, I investigate subjects' discursive constructions of sexuality, gender, and the body within the context of this individual sport milieu. Gathered through guided conversations, written personal stories, and my reflexive research journal, subjects' narratives were analyzed thematically and then submitted to a discourse analysis. While revealing the subjects' recitation of dominant discourses regarding gay sexuality, the analysis also suggested marathoning as a "queer positive" space for the participants. Analysis also uncovered some resistance to dominant constructions of sporting masculinity, but also an emergent masculinity specific to the marathon context that re/produced a traditional gender order. Though interpellated by dominant discourses, subjects also "blurred" the traditional rigid boundaries of sexuality and gender binaries. Finally, the subjects' discursive constructions of their bodies and marathon practices were also considered. I have suggested that queer marathon bodies can be considered as "hybrid" creations through the adoption of subject positions within dominant discourses of physical activity, running, and popular representations of gay male physicality. In focusing specifically on an individual sporting space, this study adds a unique perspective to the growing body of knowledge related to gay men in sport.

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**PART ONE: EMPIRICAL, THEORETICAL
AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I run. More specifically, I run marathons. People ask me why I run, what I get out of it, whether I enjoy it every time. There is never really one answer to any of those questions; it's complex. People ask me why I choose to run marathons; they ask me if running 42.2 kilometers hurts. The answer to that one is easy. They ask me if it makes me feel "manly" after having participated in figure skating most of my life. That one is tougher. There are days when I run because I have to and others because I want to. There are long training runs that go by quickly, and short training runs that seem to go on forever. There are runs with gay men and lesbians, straight men and women, and on my own. I have had moments when I completely lose myself in thoughts about anything other than running, and other moments when I am so astutely aware of every breath that is drawn, fascinated as each becomes shorter and shorter as the intensity of the run increases. There are days when I notice absolutely no one else around me and there are days when I am keenly aware of others out pursuing similar and completely different goals. More often than not, I notice the male runners in particular. Sometimes I notice them for their particular running style, other times for their pace. Though I try not to, there are moments when I compare myself to them and wonder who would beat whom in an actual race. I confess that sometimes I pick the pace up in training runs in order to pass these guys. And, if truth be told, there are times when I notice the other male runners, and it has nothing to do with running at all.

There is a small but growing body of academic and popular literature exploring the experiences of gay male athletes. Such studies work to debunk the myth that gay men do not participate in sport while suggesting that their involvement is not unproblematic. The goal of the present study is to add to this body of literature. More specifically, I am interested in how individual sport participants discursively construct sexuality, gender, and their bodies. While doing so, I seek to give voice to those who have yet to be represented—marathoners self-identifying as gay or queer. Of particular interest is how these athletes construct or negotiate sexuality and gender, as well as how queer marathon bodies are constructed within and beyond the marathon context.

Within socio-cultural studies of sport and physical activity, sport has been suggested to be a “male preserve,” a space for heterosexual men to express their masculinity, virility, and strength, generally to the exclusion of women and other men (Connell, 1995). Through its rituals, traditions and practices, sport has been a context in which physical aggression, force, controlled violence, dominance and hard, muscled-bodies have been celebrated (Bryson, 1990; Dunning, 1986; Hargreaves, 1986; Messner, 1990a; Whitson, 1990; Young & White, 2000). The re/production of traditional masculinity in sport works to create power imbalances: between men and women, dominant and subordinate classes, races and ethnicities and, to some extent, between men. As such, it has been argued that the culture of sport is one in which hegemonic masculinity is prevalent (Bryson, 1990; Connell, 1995).

Hegemonic masculinity currently refers to a traditional notion of the “masculine.” It is often defined by what it is not—not feminine and not gay—and indeed works to subordinate femininities and other masculinities that are seen to differ from an idealized

“performance” (Butler, 1990, 1999). Connell (1995) has suggested that it is useful to examine whether certain sport environments reproduce, renegotiate or transform hegemonic masculinity to understand the gender order in sport; a hierarchy in which typical gay masculinity falls at the bottom. In this regard, the majority of studies have explored re/production of hegemonic masculinity in team sport environments; however, it has also been suggested to be present in individual sports in varying degrees (Adams, 1997; Wheaton, 2000).

Undoubtedly the re/production of dominant forms of masculinity has significant impact on those participating in sport, particularly those who are gay and who, by virtue of their sexuality, are seen not to fit hegemonic notions of masculinity. Therefore, their involvement in sport often becomes a carefully negotiated terrain. Indeed, an underlying question in many of the studies is that of “negotiation”: how do gay men negotiate their sexuality within an environment that precludes the possibility of their existence? This is particularly relevant to the studies of athletes active in mainstream sport who remain closeted.

It has been argued that by not disclosing their sexuality in the sport environment, gay athletes contribute to a “culture of silence” that works to re/produce hegemonic heterosexuality within sport (Anderson, 2002; Le Blanc, 2002; Hekma, 1998; Price & Parker, 2003; Le Blanc, 2002; Lenskyj, 1991; Pronger, 1990a). However, as Anderson (2002, 2005) suggested, even athletes who have disclosed their sexuality to (ostensibly) heterosexual teammates may contribute to this silence by participating in homophobic discourse and/or remaining silent in the midst of heterosexist narratives.

Beyond participation in a “culture of silence” (which I would argue has significant connections to a gay liberationist agenda) it has also been argued that gay men who disclose their sexuality within mainstream sport have a greater chance of acceptance if they embody other attributes intrinsic to the core tenets of sport (i.e., competition, aggression, power). In other words, gay men are more likely to be accepted in mainstream sport if they perform traditionally masculine behaviours and are seen to be integral members of the team (Anderson, 2002; Hekma, 1998; Le Blanc, 2002).

Given these “realities” in mainstream sport and, arguably, in direct reaction to rampant and institutionalized homophobia and heteronormativity, categorical sport organizations evolved in the Western world (Elling, De Knop & Knoppers, 2001, 2003; King & Thompson, 2001; Price & Parker, 2003). It has been proposed that these sport teams and clubs are meant to provide a “safe” space for gay and lesbian athletes where sexuality does not have to be hidden. Furthermore, it has been suggested that categorical sport organizations are meant to provide an alternative to traditional sport with a greater focus on socializing, skill development, and participation. The majority of the studies however, suggest that most categorical sport organizations re/produce a traditional gender order (Elling et al., 2003; Le Blanc, 2002; Waitt, 2003; Wellard, 2002) and, in some cases, reproduce heteronormativity through the regulation of behaviour of the participants (Price & Parker, 2003). As such, even these so-called alternative sporting spaces can be seen to simply re/produce hegemonic notions of sport and therefore fail to live up to their full subversive potential (Pronger, 2000b).

Interestingly, much like the literature that explores the social construction of masculinity in sport, the literature exploring sexuality and sport has focused on team

sport environments, leaving a gap in the literature on the experiences of gay males participating in individual sport. Furthermore, when one purveys academic literature specific to distance running, there appears to be no queer representation and an absence of these voices and lived experiences. There is nevertheless a significant body of work interested in distance running that examines this particular social milieu through different lenses. As example, sport psychology literature has been interested in marathoning and motivation; the authors of these articles have suggested that the primary motivators include physical fitness and health, psychological health through relief of tension and improved moods, improved self-image, social networking, and personal and competitive achievement (Clough, Shepherd & Maughan, 1989; Ogles, Masters & Richardson, 1995; Summers, Sargent, Levey & Murray, 1982; Summers, Machin & Sargent, 1983; Ziegler, 1991). It is suggested that the motivators for women and men are similar, but often prioritized differently; while female runners more often reported improved self-image (and physical appearance) as the main reason for participation, men often reported achievement as a primary reason for participation (Ogles, Masters & Richardson, 1995; Summers, Machin & Sargent, 1983).

The sociologically-based research has explored the backgrounds and experiences of runners (Curtis & McTeer, 1981) as well as notions of class and gender (Abbas, 2004; Serravallo, 2000; Smith, 2000). Both Abbas (2004) and Serravallo (2000) have suggested that marathoning is a sport that privileges white, middle-class masculinity arguing that traditional gender roles allow men in this age-group and with this socio-economic standing greater access to the marathoning community. Conversely, Smith (2000) has argued that males in this demographic turn to distance running as an opportunity to regain

a sense of masculinity that has been “lost” as a result of the changing nature of other social roles (i.e., careers, family). He has also argued that body image and control is of importance to this particular group; as such, distance running becomes a way to manage the body. While I disagree with Smith’s arguments with respect to masculinity, there is some evidence that running has impact on self-validation and “identity.” This may be argued as an attempt to construct masculinity as Smith suggests, but has also been specifically linked to acquisition of an athletic identity that is greatly impacted by injury (Hockey, 2005) and by different manifestations of time (Allen-Collinson, 2003; Smith, 2002). While providing useful insights, these studies and the body of socio-cultural literature related to running fail to account for the specific experiences of queer runners.

In what is likely the first academic account that does explore these experiences, van Ingen (2004) undertook an ethnographic study of the Toronto Front Runners (TFR). This study focused primarily on “therapeutic landscapes,” suggested that the participants understood the group as a space in which bodies are re/made. She also argued that it is a space that reproduces popular discourses of health as an individual responsibility. The running group as a potential site for subversion of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality was briefly explored, however, as gender and sexuality were not primary foci of the study, these ideas were not fully explored. Further research would be necessary in order to determine whether such a destabilization does exist as this would provide a reading of categorical sport groups that is different from the one currently presented in the literature.

Thus, when considering the varying bodies of academic literature, we can see that a connection has been made between the negotiation of sexuality and the performance of

dominant forms of sporting masculinity. Such a relationship suggests an ironic experience of sport for gay males (Pronger, 1990b). However, studies that explore these experiences have done so largely within team sport milieus (both mainstream and categorical). Authors who have investigated individual sports have suggested both re/production and contestation of hegemonic masculinity to varying extents—either total or partial (Adams, 1997; Wellard, 2002; Wheaton, 2002). Running literature (save for van Ingen’s study) seems to negate the involvement of queer runners altogether. Hence, the present study seeks to address each of these absences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is two-fold. Primarily, I am interested in the discursive constructions of sexuality, sex/gender, and the body. Narratives gathered from gay and queer marathoners are interrogated for the recitation of and/or resistance to dominant discourses of sexuality and sex/gender. Furthermore, my research also investigates the ways in which these gay and queer athletes discursively construct their bodies within and beyond the marathon context. These particular foci are meant to de/re/construct the reification of heteronormative assumptions in this individual sport milieu. Secondly, the purpose of this study is to investigate how queer and poststructuralist gender theories may contribute to the understanding of lived experiences, and how reflexive ethnography as a methodological approach may be helpful in studying sexuality, sex/gender, and sporting bodies.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Situated in a poststructuralist paradigm, the present study borrows from queer and gender theories, as well as a Foucauldian perspective of the body. Queer theory seeks to deconstruct hegemonic notions of sexuality and gender. Typically associated with academic developments in the 1990s, queer theory stems from the notion that gay/lesbian theories were too liberal (Duggan, 1992; Jagose, 1996). Moving beyond the notion of a homosexual/heterosexual binary, which serves as a fundamental idea in gay/lesbian theories, queer theory seeks to destabilize heteronormativity, calling into question the “naturalness” of heterosexual identity and, therefore, the claim to power/dominance. The use of queer theory as a lens with which to examine the narratives of marathon runners self-identifying as gay or queer follows pleas made by a number of scholars (Abdel-Shehid, 2005; Davidson & Shogan, 1998; Messner, 1996; Pronger, 1990b, 1999; Sykes, 1998).

Poststructuralist gender theorists have suggested a deconstruction of dominant gender ideology, arguing that sex/gender is constituted through language and discourse. These discursive constructions work to create dominant/subordinate relationships based on traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, behaviours, and practices that are inscribed on bodies at birth (Butler, 1990, 1999). The application of poststructuralist gender theories is useful in calling into question the re/production or transgression of gender discourses, popular within particular social milieus—in this case, sport.

Finally, a Foucauldian perspective of the body informs the present study, an application which is supported by many scholars (Andrews, 1993, 2000; Markula, 2003; Rail & Harvey, 1995). Concepts of power/knowledge, disciplinary technologies, and

technologies of the self lend themselves nicely to the study of sport in which the body and embodied experiences are the focal point.

Methodologically, the present study is largely informed by qualitative methods and specifically draws on a reflexive autoethnographic approach that includes the collection of qualitative materials through guided conversations, written personal stories, and a reflexive research journal. Themes explored in the guided conversations and written narratives included marathon experiences and motivations, experiences of sexuality and gender in sport, and different notions of the body. All qualitative materials were first analyzed thematically, and secondly, submitted to a poststructuralist discourse analysis. Recognizing the many different understandings and/or conceptualizations of discourse analysis, we drew primarily from Foucault's perspective of discourse, which is interested in how discursive fields work to shape or constitute subjects through the appropriation of dominant and/or resistant discourses (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Foucault argues that discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention" (1972, p. 49). With this understanding, our analysis was situated in an attempt to deconstruct "truths" that shape the participants' understandings of the social and their subject position therein, in particular as related to dominant discursive constructions of sexuality, sex/gender, and the body.

Significance of the Study

Investigating the experiences of gay and queer marathoners and, more specifically, how they construct sexuality, sex/gender, and the body, will contribute

significantly to existing knowledge. There is, at present, very little academic literature documenting the experiences of gay athletes and in particular, those in individual sport.

From a theoretical and methodological standpoint, the chosen theoretical framework will contribute to theoretical knowledge in so much as there have been very few empirical studies within sport to draw on queer and poststructuralist gender theories. There has also been a plea for the application of Foucault's concept of the technology of the self (Markula, 2003) to feminist sport studies. I would offer that such a plea extends to queer sport studies as well. As such, insight from this study will fill an important gap in the Canadian literature on gender, sexuality, and the body. Methodologically, adopting an autoethnographic approach, in which I am beginning from my own experiences (as a marathoner self-identifying as queer), contributes to our knowledge in the methodological debate surrounding this form of study; very few empirical studies in sport have taken such an approach.

Beyond academic contributions, this study also has practical applications in that the participants themselves are likely to gain from their involvement in the study. By providing opportunity to share their ideas and experiences, the participants are likely to gain further insight into their own involvement in marathoning, as well as contributing back to a sport in which they have chosen to focus much attention and effort. Such knowledge can benefit both the queer and running communities. Finally, there are also personal benefits from this study in that I will come to better understand my own embodied experiences in this particular social milieu, and how such involvement works to construct/negotiate gender and sexual subjectivities.

CHAPTER II
MACHO MEN, GAY MEN, AND MEN WHO RUN:
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter explores the existing body of literature related to the experiences of gay men participating in sport and, in particular, draws from empirical research related to studies of gender and sexuality within sport milieus. While there has been a significant increase in academic literature exploring notions of masculinity in sport since the early 1980s, literature specific to the experiences of gay male athletes has increased at a slower pace, with a greater initial focus on the experiences of lesbian athletes. Recently, there have been more contributions specific to the experience of gay athletes, most of which have explored team sport milieus. This review of literature will provide an overview of studies within three areas: (a) the social construction of masculinity in sport; (b) sexuality and sport; and (c) social studies of distance running. This review will also shed light on perceived absences in the existing literature, particularly with regards to the experiences of gay and queer athletes in individual sport.

The Social Construction of Masculinity in Sport

Much has been written in the past 20 years with respect to masculinity and sport. With the integration of feminist theories and sociology of sport has come an increased interest in the notion of masculinity and its construction and re/production in sport environments (McKay, Messner & Sabo, 2000; Messner, 1990b). According to the literature, the construction of gender identity begins in early stages of social development

and is never really complete, nor is it homogeneous (Laberge & Albert, 2000; Messner, 1990b). The idea that gender identity is constructed through social interactions is prominent: “The boyhood development of masculine identity and status—truly problematic in a society that offers no official rite of passage into adulthood—results from a process of interaction with people and social institutions” (Messner, 1990a, p. 424). Connell has argued that sport becomes quite prominent in the social construction of gender as it is often considered a site of maleness from which women and gay men are excluded:

The institutional organization of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination of women. These social relations of gender are both realized and symbolized in the bodily performances. Thus men’s greater sporting prowess has become a theme of backlash against feminism. It serves as symbolic proof of men’s superiority and right to rule. (1995, p. 54)

While hesitant at first, there is now a plethora of research examining various notions of masculinities in sport (McKay et al., 2000). Many studies have explored power imbalances within sport: between men and women, dominant and subordinate classes, races and ethnicities and, to some extent, between men. Such power relationships are said to result from the re/production of traditional notions of masculinity. Indeed, Connell (1995) suggests that sport has developed as a construction of masculinity: “The device bridging the contradiction around masculine violence and social control was organized sport... The exemplary status of sport as a test of masculinity, which we now take for granted, is in no sense natural. It was produced historically” (p. 30). In fact, it has been

suggested that sport became an outlet for men to perform masculinity as society realized a shift away from physical labour, less scenarios necessitating combat, and the changing notions of the nuclear family (Connell, 1995; Dunning, 1986; Whitson, 1990). As such, sport became a “preserve” for males where the subordination of women, and some men, was not only acceptable but encouraged through rituals, ideology and behaviours (Bryson, 1990; Dunning, 1986; Messner, 1990a; Whitson, 1990).

Typically, the notion of masculine identity within sport conjures images of strength, power, aggression, competitiveness, and force (Hargreaves, 1986; Young & White, 2000), as well as hard, strong, muscled bodies capable of performing physically demanding feats. On their own or in conjunction with others within the sport environment, these characteristics have also been referred to as “machismo” (Dunning, 1986) and “hyper-masculinity.” Pronger (1990b) usefully referred to sport as a milieu in which “orthodox masculinity” was both created and celebrated. Sport is a milieu in which “men can be men” vis-à-vis successful athletic performance.

Recognizing these characteristics as the generally prevalent and performed form of Western masculinity, the notion of hegemonic masculinity evolved and has since been referred to quite extensively in sport literature. As Bryson suggests, hegemonic masculinity subordinates not only women within the sport environment but also men who do not adhere to traditionally masculine constructs:

The dominant form of masculinity has been usefully called hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985), and the message it conveys renders inferior not only femininity in all its forms but also nonhegemonic forms of masculinity. The inferiorising of the “other” is most frequently implicit, though it

is also explicitly and graphically conveyed when, for example, coaches, supporters, and commentators chastise their team for playing like girls or poofters. (1990, p. 173)

Hegemonic masculinity, based on Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony in which a dominant position or ideology is imposed not by force or violence, but by passive acceptance of subordinate groups, suggests a masculinity that marginalizes both women and other men who may not fit the generally idealized notion of masculinity. Typically, hegemonic masculinity refers to a more traditional notion of the masculine construct and it is often defined by what it is not—not feminine and not gay. As such, it is often contextualized as the binary opposite to that which is feminine: aggressive, physically strong, competitive, skilled, and unemotional (versus the passive, frail/weak, and dependent qualities typically associated with femininity). A traditional, virile masculinity is often reproduced in combative sports (i.e., sports that require/promote physical force and aggression) but can also be produced within non-combative (typically individual) sports: “In sports not requiring force and power, masculinity can also be constructed through traits such as discipline and endurance” (Young, White & McTeer, 1994, p. 181). Connell (1995) has suggested that it is useful to examine whether certain sport environments reproduce, renegotiate or transform hegemonic masculinity to understand the gender order in sport, a hierarchy in which gay masculinity falls at the bottom: “Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity” (p. 78).

In addition to acknowledging the importance of the notion of hegemonic masculinity in understanding the established gender order in sport, it is also imperative to recognize that masculinity is not static but rather temporal, spatial, and cultural: “Masculinity is a social, cultural and historical construct, dependent on and related to other factors such as class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and disability; there are many masculinities” (Wheaton, 2000, p. 438). Such being the case, the privileged masculinity within rugby, for example, would generally be quite different from that within tennis or golf, or in the case of Wheaton’s ethnographic research, windsurfing. Hegemonic masculinity, therefore, is contextual (Anderson, 2002; Connell, 1995; Young & White, 2000). As Hargreaves suggests, “a dominant, idealized form of masculinity may exist, but together with new, emergent expressions of masculinity” (1986, p. 115). Societies such as Canada are seen to encompass a range of “masculine” possibilities:

Some men embrace hegemonic masculinity, others protest it, and others feel more or less comfortable with certain aspects of it. There is, then, no single, homogenous notion of maleness or manhood that is defined by an essentially endowed set of norms and values. (Young & White, 2000, p. 111)

This being the case, one can expect to find, even within the same sport environment, a plurality of masculine identities related to space, time, and context which Connell (1995) suggests, may be determined by class, race, ethnicity, and heteronormativity.

Bryson (1990) suggests three ways in which hegemonic masculinity can be challenged: location of sport, intersection of sport with other institutions, and the development of categorical sport opportunities (e.g. women’s only organizations, gay/lesbian organizations). With respect to this last point however, many studies suggest

that categorical sport opportunities often subscribe to an “add women [or gays] and stir” philosophy, whereby dominant ideologies are re-created (Hargreaves, 1986; Price & Parker, 2003; Pronger, 2000b; Wellard, 2002; Whitson, 1990).

While much can be gained from studies of masculinity in a team environment (Harvey, 1997; McKay et al., 2000), it is also useful to look at those studies that have been conducted within individual sport environments, though they are fewer in number. McKay and his colleagues (2000) note that much of the focus of early studies in masculinity have been related to men’s experiences in traditionally “masculine” sport environments such as football, rugby, hockey, and baseball. However, studies on individual sports have revealed environments that provide the possibility of resistance to hegemonic notions of sport by virtue of participant demographics and altered rules/regulations:

Perhaps women and men who are already “turned off” by mainstream competitive sport are attracted to these alternative sports. It might also be that the less institutionalized, rationalized, and/or mediated contexts allow more room for the play of alternative gender display and relations. (McKay et al., 2000, p. 8)

Furthermore, existing literature suggests that hegemonic masculinity can be contested within individual sports, in particular those sport milieus that promote physical activity, skill development, and sociality.

Some individual sports may also challenge dominant notions of sport and in particular the idea of competition, aggression, and controlled violence (Hargreaves, 1986; Wheaton, 2000; Whitson, 1990). Such sports are often open to more individuals and, in particular, those who do not “possess” more traditional sporting bodies and/or identities,

and who, as a result, may resist hegemonic masculinity. In an ethnographic study of windsurfing in the United Kingdom, Wheaton (2000) suggested two emergent masculine identities: *laddishness*, which generally reproduced characteristics and behaviours typical of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, and *ambivalent masculinity*, a redefined/renegotiated masculinity that was less concerned with competition, male bravado, subordination of women, and demonstrative heterosexuality.

In contrast, in a study of gender ideology in figure skating, Adams (1997) argues that there was re/production of traditional masculinity. Indeed, within the figure skating milieu, there was an overt attempt to masculinize and heterosexualize a sport that calls into question traditional masculinity by virtue of its aesthetic and graceful nature. As Adams suggests: "Perhaps because of figure skating's reputation as an 'effeminate' activity for men... officials, television commentators and journalists all go to great lengths to entrench sexual difference in the sport" (p. 99). There is also significant effort to hyper-feminize the female participants in the sport, which can work to masculinize the male participants further. Though there is the possibility of an alternative masculine identity, the figure skating community works to re/produce more traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity, much like the group of *laddish* windsurfers in Wheaton's study.

Other empirical research has argued a shift, or softening, in the conceptualization of masculinity. For example, in a study of young male high school students from varying socio-economic backgrounds, Laberge and Albert (2000) found that there was both reproduction of and resistance to hegemonic notions of masculinity. The authors propose that socioeconomic class has much to do with perceptions and understandings of gender; they further note the possibility of a destabilizing notion of hegemonic masculinity: "the

construction of hegemonic masculinity is neither seamless nor unproblematic but a relational and conflictive process that is marked by differences, power relations, and ambivalence” (p. 218). As further evidence of the complexities surrounding masculinity, femininity, and the notion of gender order, men who participated in stereotypically “feminine” sports (e.g., figure skating, aerobic dance) were viewed negatively by the participants in the study and were regarded as being in opposition to masculine ideals.

Similarly, Anderson (2005) proposed that hegemonic masculinity, while still pervasive, may be softening somewhat and specifically in consideration of sexuality. He relates this to the idea of masculine capital and orthodox masculinity (a term borrowed from sociologist Brian Pronger). Anderson notes that males with higher masculine capital, by performing a dominant form of heterosexual masculinity, are permitted more transgressions of sexual norms. He states that “boys at the top of the masculine hierarchy are actually provided more leeway to transgress rigid gender boundaries... the more masculine capital one possesses, the more homoerotic activity they seem able to engage in without having their sexuality questioned” (2005, pp. 26-27). In other words, these self-identified heterosexual males can have their “beefcake and eat it too” (Pronger, 1999, p. 374).

Within sport, appropriate masculine behaviour is policed through self-regulation of gendered behaviours, as well as through written and unwritten rules that are context-specific. Though there may be what scholars have argued as a “softening” of hegemonic masculinity, I would suggest that this is likely due in part to the cultural shift that has taken place with respect to gender ideology, and more specifically, a changing notion of what it now means to “be a man” in the Western world. At the same time, it is critical to

note that though the current dominant form of masculinity is perhaps less “rigid” than it once was, it still remains at the top of a socially constructed gender order that relegates to an inferior position, other masculinities and femininities. In sport in particular, an orthodox masculinity typically reigns supreme; it is generally performed by athletes at all levels and lauded by those who stand on the sidelines (Anderson, 2005). It is undoubtedly a complex issue that becomes even more complex when considering the link between masculinity and sexuality as hegemonic masculinity is inextricably linked to heterosexuality. The study of gay athletes and their experiences, a small but growing body of literature, can lend great insight into the paradox of same-sex desire, masculine performance, and sport.

Sexuality and Sport

Gay specific sport organizations and teams have grown exponentially over the past two decades (Elling, De Knop & Knoppers, 2002, 2003; King & Thompson, 2001; Price & Parker, 2003). Of particular note is the recent creation of the Gay and Lesbian International Sport Association (GLISA), as well as the hosting of the first World Outgames in Montreal in 2006. The Gay Games, also an international sporting event for the queer community, has been held every four years since 1982 (the most recent games being held in Sydney in 2002 with close to 15,000 participants). Though sport organizations, teams and events are increasing, the study of gay male athletes has been limited, most likely because of access, and the culture of silence that pervades sport (Anderson, 2002, 2005; Collins & Kay, 2003; King & Thompson, 2001; Le Blanc, 2002). As Le Blanc has argued, “The ongoing silence of gay male athletes which permeates the

world of sports is so complex in nature that very few insights beyond its uttered existence have been written” (2002, p. 42).

Research that was published in the early 1980s through the mid-1990s tend toward theoretical development, empirical studies of closeted athletes, or attitudes of heterosexual athletes toward potentially gay teammates. During that time, there was also an emergent academic interest in lesbian experiences of sport. While lesbian issues are of the utmost importance, it is relevant to note that the experiences of gay male and lesbian athletes are suggested to be quite different; as such it is appropriate to distinguish between the two (Anderson, 2002; King & Thompson, 2001; Price & Parker, 2003).

Since 1998 there has been an emergence of empirical research on gay athletes—either those who are participating in categorical sport or, more recently, those who are “out of the closet” within mainstream sport (Anderson, 2002). Regardless of the participants’ level and/or nature of involvement in sport, studies dealing with gay athletes tend to suggest that heteronormativity is prevalent in sport, and that gay athletes must deal with hegemonic masculinity in whatever contextually-specific form (Anderson, 2002, 2005; Connell, 1995; King & Thompson, 2001; Le Blanc, 2002; Lenskyj, 1991; Messner, 1999; Miller, 1998; Price & Parker, 2003; Pronger, 1990a, 2000; Rotella & Murray, 1991; Wellard, 2002).

Heteronormativity: Creating a Culture of Silence

Many researchers and theorists who have studied mainstream sport milieus suggest that hegemonic masculinity is present, regardless of context, though the privileged form may have features distinct from more orthodox sporting masculinity. Because of the often inextricable link between hegemonic masculinity and

heterosexuality, this renders problematic the possibility of gay male athletes (Connell, 1995; Messner, 1999; Pronger, 1990a). Hegemonic masculinity typically insists on traditional masculine behaviours and roles: aggressiveness, strength, independence, active, competitive, provision, and heterosexuality. More often than not, masculinity and heterosexuality are connected in that hegemonic masculinity assumes heterosexuality and vice versa, both of which are regulated through the social realm. As Le Blanc has noted, hegemonic heterosexuality then refers to “the ideological control on sexuality issues by social institutions, which act as socializing agents regulating individual behaviours” (2002, p. 45).

Athletes who self-identify as gay are at odds with the traditional definitions of masculinity that considers gay men as fitting the traditional feminine archetype. This archetype is challenged when gay men fit more traditional definitions of masculinity, save for their sexual identity, and in particular when they are part of the masculine and heterosexual hegemonies prevalent in sport (Anderson, 2002; Hekma; 1998; Price & Parker, 2003; Pronger, 1990a). Pronger has noted that gay men can experience and perform masculinity and femininity contextually; this fluidity of gender (and of sexuality, if we follow traditional norms of masculinity) suggests the possibility of a different experience within the sport environment for gay athletes: “The world of athletics is a gymnasium of heterosexual masculinity. The unique experience that gay men have of athletics involves the special meaning they find in masculinity” (Pronger, 1990a, p. 143). Pronger refers further to this “unique experience” as a paradoxical and ironic one. In brief, based on interviews with gay male sport participants, Pronger theorizes that gay athletes have an ironic experience in sport in that their sexuality would generally preclude

consideration of their participation in the very environment in which they gain great access by virtue of the performance of orthodox masculinity. Once they have gained access, there are considerable experiences that can, depending on gaze and meaning, be considered homoerotic such as the locker room, the shower, and rugby scrums (Pronger, 1990b).

The performance of gender and sexuality is an important consideration in the experiences of gay athletes and it is evident in much of the literature that said performance often takes the form of orthodox masculine behaviours in order to “pass” and/or gain acceptance (Anderson, 2002; Hekma; 1998; Le Blanc, 2002; Price & Parker, 2003). The participants in a study of a gay rugby team in England, for example, found greater acceptance amongst their heterosexual peers as they became more successful in this traditionally-masculine sport (Price & Parker, 2003). In a study of “out” collegiate and high school athletes playing on mainstream sport teams, Anderson (2002) also noted that it seems plausible to draw the conclusion that a gay athlete would be more easily accepted if he were part of sport hegemony (i.e., fitting typical constructs of masculinity and, perhaps most importantly, contributing to a winning team). Hekma agrees with this notion of athletic ability and winning: “Coming out is easiest for those who excel in sports or have otherwise served their clubs well” (1998, p. 10).

In a study of male participants in a gay tennis club in England, Wellard (2002) suggested that a more traditional form of masculinity is privileged and encouraged even within an individually-focused categorical sport club: “Participation in sport remains an activity dominated by a particular form of masculinity based on competitiveness, aggression and elements of traditional understandings of the sporting male” (p. 235). He

referred to this as “exclusive masculinity.” Le Blanc (2002), in a phenomenological study of 15 gay rugby players in New Zealand, also found the notions of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality to be major factors in the participants’ experiences.

For most of Le Blanc’s participants, sport was viewed as an environment resistant to the possibility of gay athletes. Each of the participants was at a different stage of the coming out process but had not been open about his sexuality during his participation at that level of sport. The results of Le Blanc’s study demonstrate that heterosexist and masculine ideologies in sport had led these athletes to live in, and contribute to, a culture of silence. Hyper-masculinity led to the oppression of their sexual identity and hegemonic heterosexuality created an environment of inferiority for these players: “[the players] live in silence, remain invisible, are isolated, have thoughts of suicide and are alienated by the hegemonic heterosexuality and the oppressive nature of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union” (2002, p. 1). Many of the participants “passed” as heterosexual and therefore remained safe from potential harassment/hostility. Passing ranged from remaining silent to having girlfriends, wives and, in some cases, children (Le Blanc, 2002).

The idea of silence is one that is raised repeatedly in the literature related to gay males and sport and many have suggested that it leads to a “management” of identity within sport environments as well as the creation of sport teams and organizations catering to sexual minorities. The concept of the “conspiracy of silence” provides the basis for Le Blanc’s 2002 study of gay rugby players. Anderson (2002), in his study of collegiate and high school athletes, references the notion of “silence” and likens the experiences of his participants to the U.S. military’s “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. In a

study of gay and lesbian athletes participating in mainstream sport in the Netherlands, Hekma (1998) similarly noted that most participants felt that their sexuality was accepted as long as it was not promoted. Specifically, Hekma noted that “because the sports world is a straight one and grants space to gay men and lesbians only as long as they successfully conceal their sexual identities, this discrimination has a structural character and is thus a serious problem” (1998, p. 7).

Anderson (2002, 2005) has argued that because hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality are prevalent in sport, the athletes in his study were forced to negotiate their identities as gay males and athletes even after disclosing sexuality to teammates; most remained silent thereafter in an effort to “just be one of the guys” despite their marginalized sexuality. This necessitated a carefully negotiated and segmented identity. This took the form of participation in heterosexually-oriented narratives and silence in the face of homophobic slurs.

While the athletes in the research of Anderson (2002, 2005) and Le Blanc (2002) were participating in mainstream sport, this unwritten rule of silence also exists within categorical sport. In their ethnographic study of the gay rugby team in England, Price and Parker (2003) found that the organizers and players went to great lengths to present an image of “normality” (i.e., not gay/not feminine). This included participating in traditional masculine behaviours and limiting discussion and performance of sexuality in the locker room and in public situations. As Price and Parker explained:

The image promoted was one of normality and respectability with the club distancing itself from radical political activism. KCSRFC officials appeared to exist as a controlling influence guiding the political motivations of the club

through the maintenance of a specific team image. This was facilitated by the regulation of player behaviours through unwritten codes of conduct, especially within potentially (homo)erotic settings. (p. 121)

It appeared that with this rugby team—ostensibly created to provide a positive environment for gay athletes and identities—organizers and players conformed to hegemonic heterosexual and masculine ideologies dominating sport. Other studies have explored similar considerations within categorical sport clubs.

Categorical and Mainstream Sport Milieus

Throughout the Western world, categorical sport clubs have increased in numbers since 1982, the year the first Gay Games were hosted (King & Thompson, 2001). Organizations such as the Federation of Gay Games and GLISA currently serve to provide sport opportunities for sexual minorities. The existence of these categorical sport opportunities has created interest for academic researchers, curious to determine the experiences of those athletes participating in categorical sport, in addition to examining the culture of categorical sport. Question has also arisen as to the purpose of gay specific sport environments—should there be an adoption of a liberal approach through which acceptance in mainstream sport milieus is sought or a radical approach to re-define sport and its hegemonic notions? Such debate follows that of liberal and radical feminist approaches to the inclusion of women in sport.

Elling, De Knop and Knoppers (2001) have examined the creation of categorical sport teams in the Netherlands. Their study included categorical sport organizations based on ethnicity, ability, age, and sexuality. Their work continued with an article published in 2003, which focused specifically on gay and lesbian sport. The researchers argued that

categorical sport organizations have been created in response to dominant ideologies prevalent in mainstream sport, ideologies that discriminate against and exclude gay and lesbian persons. Categorical sport organizations, they argued, aimed to offer less competitive environments that encouraged participation and socializing.

Similar findings were reported in King and Thompson's study of gay sport teams in the United Kingdom (2001). It was determined that the three apparent themes in developing gay-focused sport teams/organizations was: (a) to acknowledge the denial of gay men in mainstream sport; (b) to create a safe space free of sexual prejudice; and (c) to provide a social outlet for gay men to meet. These results, and those of Elling and her colleagues (2001), point to an idealized notion of sport where the focus is not on performance or competition. This is somewhat problematic, however, and it raises an important question:

The motivation of most members of gay and/or lesbian sport groups has shifted from a focus on (peak) performance and competition toward more sociability. The question is to what extent initiatives such as own clubs and international events such as the Eurogames or the Gay Games are able to contribute to an increase in the long-term sport participation of lesbians and gays and possibly to their emancipation in and through sport. (Elling et al., 2001, pp. 426-427)

In their study of gay and lesbian sport clubs and events, Elling and her colleagues suggested both positive and negative outcomes of the formation of sport opportunities for sexual minorities. On one hand, the provision of such opportunity allows for a safe place for the practice of sport; on the other, such segregation can lead to further resistance to

acceptance of gay and lesbian athletes by the general public and therefore further marginalization of participants.

There are also conflicting notions of the aim of categorical sport clubs—social versus competition. The social and less competitive environment is enjoyed by many. Other gays and lesbians, however, are fairly fanatic and competitively oriented (Collins & Kay, 2003; Elling et al., 2003; King & Thompson, 2001). Exploring the notion of “exclusive masculinity,” Wellard (2002) drew specifically from the experiences of participants in a gay tennis club in England. Through interviews and observation the study proposed that the gay tennis club and its members re/produced hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality through practices and philosophies:

Marginalized sports which seek to establish an identity in contrast to the established heterosexual male based system can in due course reinforce those same ideals. This in turn reflects the popular understanding of sporting practice that promotes an aggressive, power based, “winner-takes-all” ethos. (p. 237)

In a study of a gay rugby team, Price and Parker (2003) revealed the same hegemonic ideologies and tensions. The main purpose of their study was to explore the team environment and the players’ motivations to participate on a categorical sport team. Through observation as well as interviews, the authors were able to determine a reproduction of the hegemonic ideologies present in mainstream sport. Looking at the team through a queer lens, the authors recognized the potential for subversion and the challenge to heteronormativity by moving beyond the unwritten rules of corporeal intimacy, same-sex desire and gender performance. While this potential existed, the gay

rugby team mostly operated within an environment that promoted homophobic measures that ensured conformity and therefore acceptance from (assumedly) heterosexual peers.

Similar findings were reported in other research on gay male athletes, indicating that hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality were prevalent in sport and in the practices/policies of sport organizers (Elling et al., 2003; Le Blanc, 2002; Waitt, 2003; Wellard, 2002). Such findings are important to note; while categorical sport organizations may have been created to resist the hegemonies prevalent in mainstream sport, it would seem that they tend to merely provide an alternative place to practice sport in its traditional form. As Pronger succinctly noted, a liberal agenda seems to have prevailed:

Although lesbian and gay community sports have created friendly and inclusive environments for homosexual people who like to play sports, they have not, on the whole, taken up the liberationist challenge to transform social and interpersonal relations in sport. Most lesbian and gay community sports simply have reproduced dominant sporting practices for homosexual people by making them more accessible, thus emphasizing the liberal lesbian and gay political agenda, which is not to challenge fundamental socio-cultural structures but to give lesbians and gay men the opportunity to conform to those structures. (Pronger, 2000b, p. 242)

In brief, categorical sport organizations catering to gay males in particular seem to replicate hegemonic masculinity, which most often takes the form of more orthodox masculine behaviours and bodily practices. Furthermore, suggestion has been made that sport organizations and teams specific to gay males reproduce hegemonic heterosexuality through a silencing or non-performance of sexuality within the sporting space (Price &

Parker, 2003; Pronger, 2000b; Wellard, 2002). This would suggest that the experiences of openly gay male athletes within categorical sport organizations may not be that much different from those of closeted athletes participating in mainstream sports.

I suggested earlier the need to separate the experiences of gay and lesbian athletes. Although I agree with Pronger that both gay and lesbian sport organizations reproduce the dominant sporting practices and ethos (competition, performance, aggressiveness, etc.), a number of studies dealing specifically with lesbian sport point to the subversive potential of sport in terms of gender and sexuality (Broad, 2001; Caudwell, 1999; Iannotta & Kane, 2002; Sykes, 1998). For instance, in an ethnographic study of women's rugby in the 1990s, Broad (2001) found a resistance to gender and sexual identity norms present in that particular sport milieu. Broad suggested that her participants rejected traditional notions of the expected femininity of women athletes by not apologizing for their participation in a traditionally masculine sport: "Importantly, women who played rugby were not embarrassed or ashamed of breaking the gender bounds by rejecting the beauty standards and passivity of white, middle-class femininity" (2001, p. 189). Beyond feminine gender expectations, Broad also suggested a transgression of sexual identity boundaries: "While men's rugby traditions are misogynistic, women's rugby traditions serve to destabilize categories of women's sexuality" (2001, p. 191). Specifically, the athletes' reclaimed misogynistic and homophobic rugby songs, supported the fluidity of sexual identities, and evaded a culture of silence by openly refuting homophobic and sexist comments from outsiders. As Broad noted:

A climate of sexual fluidity and multiplicity was constructed such that sexual practices rather than identities were central.... the social interactions and rituals in women's rugby not only resist patriarchal exploitations of women's passive (hetero)sexuality, but also assert queer notions of sexual multiplicity and fluidity. (2001, p. 195)

This study suggests a queer reading of sport that moves beyond a gay/lesbian liberal approach; it suggests the possibility of a resistance to heteronormative assumptions through sport participation and individual action. This is an alternative reading of how gay and lesbian athletes may do sport within a traditional sport environment: “[This may be a] tactic of resistance—where [people] are willing to conform to traditional trappings of [gender] and heterosexuality simply in order to play the game” (Broad, 2001, p. 198). Such adoption of the “traditional trappings” is not considered as a tactic of resistance in the majority of the sexuality and sport literature. Rather it is suggested that gay male athletes perform traditional masculinity and heterosexuality as a “survival” mechanism (even within categorical sport environments), therefore contributing to a “culture of silence.”

To this point, the literature on gay male athletes and sport has been mostly limited to categorical team sport or closeted gay male athletes participating in mainstream sport, as in the research conducted by Le Blanc (2002). There is a relative absence of research on the participation of openly gay male athletes in individual sports. However, in a landmark study, Anderson (2002) used the Internet and listservs to recruit a total of 26 participants, all gay male high school and collegiate athletes that had revealed their

sexuality to their (ostensibly heterosexual) teammates. He continued this line of research with the release of *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity* (2005).

Anderson's purpose for conducting this qualitative research was to determine how openly gay athletes negotiate such an environment as sport when they are considered in direct opposition to the norm by virtue of their assumed gender and sexuality. Adopting a grounded theory approach, Anderson suggested three emerging themes from the in-depth interviews: (1) coming out; (2) segmented identities; and (3) homophobic discourse. These themes reflect many of the gay athlete-related studies discussed previously (Elling et al., 2003; Hekma, 1998; Le Blanc, 2002; Price & Parker, 2003) and also recur in his 2005 publication. With respect to "coming out," Anderson noted that most athletes were pleased with their personal experiences; however, after further discussion Anderson was able to gain insights that suggested the possibility that their experiences were not as positive as initially thought:

They began by speaking of their experience as a general positive, praising their teammates, and talking about how well accepted they felt. But when I began to inquire further as to just how they were treated, when I began asking questions about their overnight trips, the way their teams treated their lovers, or how their teams talked about their homosexuality, a different story emerged. I heard stories of extreme heterosexism, silencing, and the frequent use of homophobic discourse. (2002, p. 867)

From the participant interviews, Anderson drew the conclusion that the athletes viewed their coming out experiences as more or less positive in relation to what they had perceived their experiences would be like; he refers to this as reverse relative deprivation,

which is the process of comparing oneself to others who have it worse. This differs from the notion of relative deprivation, a theoretical concept that suggests that individuals generally compare themselves to those that who it better.

The second theme to emerge from the research was the notion of “segmented identities.” While all athletes interviewed had declared their sexuality within their athletic environment and viewed their experiences as positive and their teammates as supportive, there seemed to be acceptance only if the issue remained unmentioned thereafter. Anderson notes: “the gay athletes failed to recognize that their identities were being denied, and they often took part in their own oppression by self-silencing and partaking in a heterosexual dialogue” (2002, p. 870). This suggests that within an environment of hegemonic heterosexuality, homosexual discourse is not welcome and a silencing of such by the individuals themselves often occurs. This is likely out of fear of discrimination in the form of verbal harassment or physical violence. Such repression leads to a segmented (and negotiated) identity and further contributes to a “conspiracy of silence” (Anderson, 2002; Hekma, 1998; Le Blanc, 2002; Lenskyj, 1991).

The third emergent theme of the study was that of homophobic discourse and the participants reaction to (or participation in) it. Anderson reported that the majority of participants had experienced homophobic discourse (most commonly the use of the words “fag” or “gay” amongst team members) prior to coming out. This had forced them to remain in the closet longer as presence of such discourse suggested the potential hostility of the environment. Some participants noted that after coming out to their teammates, there seemed to be less prevalence of homophobic discourse, though such was not always the case. Even more interesting was that though the gay athletes noted

they themselves tried not to use the words “gay” or “fag” within the sport environment, when they were used by other members of the team, they were not considered to be homophobic. Anderson states: “None of the informants strongly objected to the use of the word ‘gay’ by their teammates to describe things distasteful, even though they did not use the word in such a manner themselves” (2002, p. 874). This suggests an understanding that such discourse is considered just “part of the game” (Hekma, 1998; Price & Parker, 2003).

Of particular interest in both of Anderson’s studies (2002, 2005) was that the athletes interviewed were often considered either the best or amongst the best on the team. He noted that athletes who expressed interest in participating but who had to be excluded because they had not disclosed their sexuality were mostly of average athletic ability; as such, they were not likely seen as key to the team’s success. Anderson suggests that being one of the best on the team provides safety in coming out as the athlete is already established as a key contributor to one of the core tenets of sport—winning. He refers to this as “masculinity insurance.” This idea of masculinity insurance begs the question as to the experiences of out athletes that are of average athletic ability, and further, of gay athletes that are in an environment free of team expectations. When this masculinity insurance is removed by virtue of the level and nature of the sport and, as the running literature will suggest, a lack of direct competition and/or focus on winning, what then are the experiences of male athletes identifying as gay in these sport environments? This is an idea not fully explored in studies of gay athletes to date. But as Anderson suggests: “sport only tolerates openly gay athletes as long as they are valuable to the mantra of athletics—winning” (2002, p. 861).

As a point of argument, Anderson suggests that there was little difference between the experiences of those in team and individual sports. I would suggest that this result is likely due to the fact that high school and collegiate sports such as cross country running or track and field (in which the majority of the athletes participated), though individual, still have a team component through the development of race day strategies and tactics, and the scoring of each runner toward a team tally. There is greater emphasis on team placing than individual placing. He also notes that his sample is likely too small to be certain that no differences exist. This means that there is currently little information on the experiences of gay athletes in truly individual sports (where there is no “team” element). Looking at a sport like long-distance running would be interesting in that regard.

While generally an excellent article that contributes to the understanding of openly gay athletes’ experiences in mainstream sport, Anderson does not indicate the socio-economic class of his participants, which is key to understanding lived experiences. He also fails to fully explore the performance of gender though this is his stated purpose. The three emergent themes of “coming out,” “segmented identity” and “homophobic discourse” are related more to sexual identity management than gender performance though he does ultimately tie sexual identity management to the concept of masculinity insurance. There is also no question raised as to the heteronormativity inscribed on the process of “coming out.” In this case, Anderson seems to accept “coming out” as an essential process toward acceptance and, in doing so, fails to perhaps recognize the maintenance of heterosexual privilege through discursive notions of “the closet.”

Specific to his more recent contribution, Anderson (2005) further explores the issues of gender, sexuality, and sport expanding on many of the ideas explored above. He also includes a useful chapter on factors within any given sport milieu that will impact on gay athletes' experiences; these factors include the opinions/behaviours of the coach(es), peer networks, institutional attitudes, race, and the nature/origin of the sport. This last point is of particular interest in that team sport is oft considered to be more homophobic than individual sport. But as Anderson notes, "just because team sport athletes are most frequently reported making homophobic comments does not mean that these comments are germane only to them" (2005, p. 139). At the same time, he remains optimistic about the experiences of gay athletes:

It is clear that sport lags behind whatever cultural gains are made in the population at large, and that the structure of sport helps resist these gains. Still, young athletes are raised in a culture that is much more understanding of homosexuality. Thus, perhaps the cultural lag between popular culture and sport will shorten ... sport, like any institution, is not immune to social change. (2005, p. 177)

Going Long: Social Studies of Distance Running

The running (or perhaps more appropriately the jogging) boom of the 1980s is well documented in popular publications. With this increase in public interest also came an increased academic interest, which included physiological and biomechanical-oriented research, along with studies in sport psychology and sociology. Sport psychologists seemed intrigued by the reasons behind the growth in popularity of marathoning and in

particular the motivations for individuals to participate in such a physically and mentally demanding task. In addition to this early research, further studies examined gender differences in meaning of motivation for marathon participation. Through survey questionnaires, it was found that motivations included physical fitness and health, psychological health through relief of tension and improved moods, self-image, social networking, and personal and competitive achievement (Clough, Shepherd & Maughan, 1989; Ogles, Masters & Richardson, 1995; Summers, Sargent, Levey & Murray, 1982; Summers, Machin & Sargent, 1983; Ziegler, 1991). While these motivations were common to male and female runners, priorities differed. Female runners more often reported self-image (and physical appearance) as the main reason for participation, men often reported achievement as a primary reason for participation (Ogles, Masters & Richardson, 1995; Summers, Machin & Sargent, 1983). When body image was suggested as a motivator for men it was in the sense of “taking control” or “mastering the body.”

Within this literature, it was also suggested that participants re/produced traditional notions of gender—male participants through reference to competition and achievement as primary motivators, and female participants through the motivation of body image. It is interesting to note that both male and female participants suggested improved health and fitness as a reason for marathon participation. At the same time, the primary negative issue associated with marathon participation was injury. Most marathon participants had been forced to deal with injury and recovery at some point in their marathoning (Clough, Shepherd & Maughan, 1989; Ogles, Masters & Richardson, 1995; Summers, Sargent, Levey & Murray, 1982; Summers, Machin & Sargent, 1983; Ziegler, 1991).

This rather ironic finding was not explored beyond mention in this particular body of literature, however the phenomenon of injury and risk as linked to masculinity has been documented in other academic studies (Young & White, 2000; Young, White & McTeer, 1994). In particular, sport sociologists have examined how hegemonic masculinity leads to a masking of pain or a denial of the risk of physical harm in order to continue participation (Young, White & McTeer, 1994). These same authors suggest that one of the traits of hegemonic forms of sporting masculinity is the suppression of affect despite an injury and therefore that it is essential to play despite an injury in order to maintain a masculine identity. This was a common finding among both team and individual sport participants. Another commonality discussed was the notion of “invincibility” which suggests that an injury leads an athlete to recognize the vulnerability of the physical body, which calls into question one’s control or mastery over the corporeal (Young & White, 2000; Young, White & McTeer, 1994). It is noted in the literature that the sport milieu impacts on the amount of injuries: “The cultures of some sports continue systematically to produce high injury rates not only because of the financially driven emphasis on winning but also because of the connection between aggression and the process of masculinization” (Young & White, 2000, p. 126).

Studies with injury as a focal point have also been undertaken specific to running (Allen-Collinson, 2003; Hockey, 2005). In an autoethnographic study conducted when he and a running partner both sustained knee injuries, Hockey suggests that injury, beyond impacting the corporeal, also has impact on a runner’s identity though this may manifest in different ways and at different stages of the rehabilitation process. He explains the process of identity work that he and his colleague undertook as a way to stay engaged

with their self-identity as distance runners ultimately suggesting that their efforts “helped maintain [their] athletic identities during a bleak period in [their] running biographies” (2005, p. 53).

Allen-Collinson (2003) explored this same scenario, but established links between injury and temporality and the many different dimensions of time observed during the rehabilitative process. Linear, cyclical, embodied inner, and biographical times were all explored over a two-year recovery period, highlighting the importance of temporality to the injured runner, beyond “race time.” Temporality, beyond its relationship to injury and recovery as explored by Allen-Collinson, has also been suggested to play a key role in re/constructing a runner’s “self.” Indeed, Smith (2002) suggests three modes of time that impact on a runner’s sense of identity: the “calendar” year by which running events are planned and prepared for, the length of a runner’s involvement, and time specific to personal achievement over a certain distance. While the latter has typically been considered “oppressive,” Smith offers a contrasting idea:

I conclude that these temporal organizations are important symbolic resources that help to build and reaffirm the runner’s self. Rather than time alienating and exploiting runners, runners exploit it as a constructive resource that they can deploy in diverse ways. (2002, p. 343)

When considered within the existing sport psychology-based literature, studies of injuries and recoveries related to distance running (see Allen-Collinson and Hockey) as well as Smith’s study of the importance of time as a form of self-identity highlight the demands placed on the body by individuals in distance running, while also hinting at the important place that running may hold in an individual’s life, though ultimately

remaining a leisure pursuit (i.e., for most, this is not a professional occupation.) When taken to the extreme, such prioritization has been referred to as “obligatory running.” It was suggested that obligatory running could impact negatively on other aspects of a runner’s life:

Training for a marathon necessitates committing a major portion of one’s life to running. It is among these strongly committed runners that the symptoms of negative addiction are most likely to occur.... Clearly the sheer time and energy involved in training for a marathon can lead to a certain degree of conflict in the relationships of married runners (*sic*). (Summers, Machin & Sargent, 1983, p. 321)

Other empirically-based socio-cultural studies of distance running and marathoning, have been interested in participatory demographics. Using a survey questionnaire sent to participants in the 1979 National Capital Marathon, Curtis and McTeer (1981) provided a first Canadian profiling of marathoners. The results of this particular study indicated that the majority of respondents were middle-class males, with an average age of 35 years. The majority of respondents (both male and female) indicated some degree of involvement in sport when younger, but not necessarily specialized sport involvement. Most respondents (again, both male and female) also reported concurrent involvement in other sports apart from running. In the discussion of the findings, the authors included commentary on the difference in male/female participation numbers, with more men participating than women at the time. They also noted the privileged socio-economic status of participants, suggesting this as a result of greater availability of

leisure time and greater access to health and fitness-related discourse, hence an increased involvement over those less affluent.

In a study specific to long-distance running and gender, Smith (2000) explored the different motivations of non-elite runners in Great Britain, related to the changes in their social being throughout their lives. Smith suggests that running is an outlet for men who feel emasculated by virtue of their changing work and home environments. In his qualitative study including 48 in-depth interviews, Smith suggests that traditional masculinity is present in running as a result of the changing nature of the male role in society (i.e., changes to workplace functions, roles and responsibilities, and shifts in the nuclear family/home). He argues that this role has impacted middle-class white males to the greatest extent. Smith suggests that, for the participants in his research, running became an outlet in which traditional masculinity was performed: “It is in and through sport that some men are able to demonstrate their physical strength, speed, skill, and endurance together with a certain strength of character, attributes more often linked with masculinity than with femininity” (2000, pp. 188-189).

Smith uses a figurational sociological framework to analyze his data, an approach that suggests interconnectedness between societal structures. Within these figurational relationships, Smith suggests masculinity is re/produced:

A sense of masculine identity is often multidimensional and complex. It may be sustained in part by relative economic “success,” by notions of sexual attractiveness, or the fathering of children. The ability to exercise particular physical and/or mental capacities, among other attributes, may also contribute to its maintenance. (2000, p. 192)

Beyond a sense of loss of masculinity within family and career, the men in the study viewed running as a way to be present in the public gaze in a sporting context that was not combative in nature but still had its inherent recognition rewards: “For some, the particularly public demonstration of physical prowess involved in road running brings them the respect and admiration of others with respect to attributes traditionally associated with the male” (Smith, 2000, p. 205). This notion of external validation as a motivation for participation was also present in the psychological studies (e.g., Summers, Sargent, Levey & Murray, 1982).

Runners and their bodies was another theme explored in Smith’s study. It was found that many of the participants related their physicality to running, some as contributing to a youthful appearance and others in terms of maintenance or loss of body weight. It was clear that the bodies of the runners became projects or something to be produced and created through activity: “[something] to be worked at through conscious management, maintenance and molding” (p. 198).

While Smith investigates the notion of masculinity and long distance running, I would like to suggest that there is further work that can be done that calls into question heteronormativity within long-distance running, an idea that is not explored in his study. I would also argue that it is more likely *because* of new career and family environments that these men are able to participate in long-distance running. With respect to career status, as unsatisfying as it may have been to some of the participants, most were working in white-collar occupations. Such occupational status not only provides a less physically-demanding workplace (and therefore allowing the energy necessary to complete the necessary training mileage) but also more flexibility and time to train. Their privileged

socio-economic status also allows greater access to opportunity for things like equipment, training plans, and payment of race entry fees. With respect to their place as patriarch within the family, though perhaps changing, it still allows them greater flexibility to pursue athletic endeavors, as there are not necessarily similar expectations of time and workload within the home. Though long-distance running, as Smith suggests, may be a space in which traditional masculinity is re/produced, I feel that he underestimates the privileged status of the participants in his study and, therefore, their greater access to participation. It is also worth noting that running is one of very few sports where men and women participate on the same course, at the same time. And while results are normally divided by gender, overall times and placements are posted in order of finish, regardless of gender—meaning that it is one sport in which women often beat men, which certainly could be considered counterintuitive to Smith’s suggestion that men turn to distance running as a way to feel more masculine.

Other contemporary studies of long-distance runners (Abbas, 2004; Serravallo, 2000) that have explored the themes of gender and class make suggestions that are also in opposition to Smith’s arguments. Specifically, in an analysis of the demographics of the participants in the 1998 New York City Marathon, Serravallo (2000) comments that running primarily remains an activity that attracts middle- to upper- socio-economic classes, and therefore privileges white male participation. He notes that such socio-economic status allows for greater flexibility in leisure time, access to safer running routes, and enhanced access to appropriate equipment and training plans. He also links participation and gender, noting that more men than women participate. In contrast to Smith (2000), Serravallo links this to the traditional gender role of women as being

responsible for the private sphere (i.e., home and child-rearing) and therefore having less leisure time than males (it is noted that the majority of women participants in the 1998 New York City marathon were single).

Like Serravallo, Abbas (2004) discusses class and gender while also exploring ageism. For her study, Abbas undertook a content analysis of both the cover and “Letters” pages of *Runner’s World* (a popular magazine for the running community), spanning the magazine’s 20+ year history in five-year increments. She also conducted 10 in-depth interviews with runners. Abbas suggests a privileging of the male over the female body and the younger over the older body within the running community:

Much that counts as health and fitness in contemporary society is intricately related to bodily aesthetics. The establishment in public perception of running as a health promoting activity (with aesthetic implications) is important in many respects. It is a causal power in terms of attracting companies wanting to associate their products with a healthy lifestyle, for example when it comes to race sponsorship. The slim and muscular body is also believed to have currency for, and to be a causal power for, individuals in the world of work. (2004, p. 172)

Following her content analysis of the magazine and of the interviews, Abbas contends that middle-class forms of masculinity are promoted within the running community. Such promotion indicates a preference for the slender yet muscular male body, capable of covering different distances in a superior way to female and/or aged bodies. Her findings, she suggests, indicate that though running has been promoted as an accessible activity and one to be encouraged in the pursuit of a better, healthier lifestyle, it has, at the same time, reproduced a gender hierarchy reflective of general society. This

does not seem to have changed since the early stages of marathoning in America (see Cooper, 1998). Serravallo (2000) and Abbas (2004) suggest a link between class, gender, and age moving beyond a mere provision of demographics and possible motivations for marathon participation. However, the extent to which traditional or hegemonic masculinity may or may not be reproduced is not explored beyond suggesting a privileging of men and male bodies.

Somewhat related to this is the idea of the hierarchy of running. This hierarchy tends to be linked to external validation (i.e., non-runners and other runners' perceptions of the runner) and labeling. Smith (1998) has explored this hierarchy and suggested that in road running in Britain, three distinct categories emerged: *athletes*, *runners* and *joggers*. *Athletes* are individuals capable of winning races and are recognized as having such ability, both by themselves and others. *Runners* are individuals who are fairly serious in training and racing, but know that they will likely never win a race; their focus remains on personal bests or perhaps beating another known runner of similar ability. They are distinct from Smith's third category of *joggers*—individuals who may enter a race but typically refer to it as a “fun run,” who train less than runners, and whose primary interest is not racing, but body maintenance. A recent issue of *Runner's World* (October, 2004) suggests another emergent category within the hierarchy – *walkers*. This rapidly growing category of individuals completing marathons by walking the entire way further delineates and defines the running milieu. Since it has not been explored, I can only hypothesize that such a hierarchy may have links to hegemonic masculinity (and potentially heterosexuality).

In the first academic account that is specific to the experiences of runners identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, van Ingen (2004) undertook an ethnographic study of the Toronto Front Runners (TFR). The TFR is a running group for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons that is part of a larger, international organization called International Front Runners. Focusing on the Toronto-based running group as a space that acts as a therapeutic landscape, van Ingen's interest is in the members' constructions of health and in particular how dominant discursive constructions of health may be appropriated. Four main themes were explored: (a) health/ism, (b) perceptions of disease, (c) exclusion, and (d) the general complexity of social and therapeutic landscapes.

The TFR was suggested to be a space in which popular discourses of health were re/produced. Many of the group members interviewed noted that they had joined TFR as a way to acquire better health, suggesting an acceptance of the self-surveillance and personal responsibility promoted by popular health discourse. Furthermore, members of the group worked to distinguish their status as runners from other common behaviours in the gay community such as frequenting bars or bathhouses, labeling such behaviours as "unhealthy." As van Ingen notes:

The social geography of the TFR provides what is considered a healthy alternative in the gay community—a social space for contact and community that is outside of bars and bathhouses and that is perceived by several of the runners as bringing together "healthy people." (2004, p. 257)

The TFR was also suggested as a space where some of the participants were able to become comfortable with sport (after less-than-positive athletic experiences when

growing up), comfortable with their (queer) bodies, and a space where there was recognition that bodies could be re/made (van Ingen, 2004). It is also a space, as van Ingen suggests, in which healthism operates “through the promotion of a form of health consciousness that solely emphasizes the individuals’ responsibility to achieve health” (p. 260).

However, there were further complexities at work within the TFR that did not necessarily reflect a simple progression from an unhealthy to a healthy body, some of which was related to discursive operations that suggest queer bodies (and spaces) as diseased. Resistant to this ideology, which stems greatly from the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s in which dominant medical discourse iterated AIDS as a gay disease, some members of the TFR suggested the running group as a space which protected them. As van Ingen notes from one interview: “I was struck by his framing of the social space of the running club as providing a form of sanctuary that left all of his running friends uninfected” (2004, p. 262). Another participant, however, viewed the TFR as a space in which the seriousness of the disease could be escaped, noting that it was “important to have a space that was about enjoyment and pleasure without having to be “overwhelmed with all of this other stuff that was going on” (van Ingen, 2004, p. 263).

Exclusion, and specifically sociospatial exclusion, was also an issue that was raised; van Ingen noted that the TFR was a group primarily catering toward white, middle-class males. There was a notable absence of lesbian, coloured, and transgendered persons. She suggests that therapeutic landscapes can reproduce social hierarchies based on gender, race and class. It also appears that the constitution of the TFR reflects the general demographics of long-distance running participants cited in other studies (Abbas,

2004; Curtis & McTeer, 1981; Serravallo, 2000; Smith, 2000). The constitution of the TFR club, similarly to other therapeutic landscapes, leads to the complexity of researching such spaces; van Ingen notes: “Sexuality is only one part of a complex sociospatial process that produces geographies of health. Therapeutic landscapes also need to be interrogated as social constructions that are gender, race, culture and class specific” (2004, p. 267). While van Ingen’s primary interest is in shifting therapeutic landscapes, she does raise the notions of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, suggesting that the group challenges such notions through the performance of sexuality in a space that is typically heterosexual (i.e., public parks):

Each Saturday, before the group’s long run, the steady flow of runners’ bodies gathering in the park overwhelms any other image on the street. Most weekends anywhere from 40 to 60 runners converge in the park’s open space. Dressed in technical running gear, sleek and energetic bodies of striking uniformity mingle and greet one another with hugs and kisses, destabilizing the assumed heteronormativity of urban public space, as well as disrupting notions of hegemonic sporting masculinity. (2004, p. 257)

As hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity were not the primary foci of the study, they are not explored further. I would argue that given the location of the public park in question (in the heart of Toronto’s gay district) this particular space can be considered a gay or gay-friendly space in contrast to public parks outside of the Church/Wellesley corridor. Though at first glance the TFR may seem to challenge hegemonic masculinity, it has been suggested in other studies that dominant ideologies of masculinity and heterosexuality are often reproduced within team (Elling et al., 2003; Le Blanc, 2002;

Price & Parker, 2003; Waitt, 2003) and individual (Wellard, 2002) categorical sport environments. The extent to which that may or may not apply to other individual sport milieus is something that has not been considered in the literature to date.

Conclusion

The preceding review of the existing literature has covered three main areas: the social construction of masculinity in sport, sexuality and sport, socio-cultural studies of distance running in relation to gender and sexuality. Much of the literature regarding the social construction of masculinity in sport has been written within a feminist framework (ranging from liberal to radical and queer) seeking a destabilization of the taken-for-grantedness of traditional masculinity in sport. There has been an understanding that gender is socially constructed, with a tendency to lean toward a more structural approach. Some of the studies (Anderson, 2002, 2005; Laberge & Albert, 2000; Miller, 1998) have suggested a “softening” of the traditional forms of masculinity in sport and a need to disentangle heterosexuality and masculinity, however it is critical to note that though hegemonic masculinity may indeed be “softening,” it is still heterosexual and it still works to subordinate femininities and alternative masculinities. The literature specific to gay athletes and sport participation has refuted this notion to a certain extent suggesting that categorical sport organizations based on sexuality merely re/produce dominant ideologies of sport and in particular hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity (King & Thompson, 2001; Price & Parker, 2003; Pronger, 2000b; Waitt, 2003; Wellard, 2002). While exploring the lack of challenge to the normative gender order within gay male categorical sport settings and explaining the context in which gay/lesbian sport

organizations has formed, there is very little questioning of the segregation of gay/lesbian athletes from their heterosexual peers. A majority of the studies do not question gay identity labels but rather explore the experiences of gay male athletes, suggesting an acceptance of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Only a few of the studies have deconstructed sport through a queer lens, suggesting the possibility of a subversion of heteronormativity and the possibility of fluid (sexual) identities (Broad, 2001; Caudwell, 1999; Iannotta & Kane, 2002; Sykes, 1998). Interestingly, each of these studies is based on lesbian athlete experiences. Two studies related to gay male athletes sought to deconstruct sport through a queer lens (Price & Parker, 2003; Wellard, 2002), suggesting the re/production of traditional masculinity and heteronormativity within the respective sport milieu of the participants (i.e., categorical rugby and tennis clubs). Such re/production was not considered as potentially subversive or transgressive, but rather the passive acceptance of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality.

This became another area of question within the research. If categorical sport organizations were created as an alternative space to participate in sport, was there a shift away from the competitive, aggressively-based sport practices of mainstream sport toward a more social, non-competitive environment? In most, it appeared that the categorical sport environment seemed to mimic that of its mainstream counterpart, simply providing a “safe” place for gay and lesbian athletes to participate. In some cases, the social aspect of the sport (i.e., the potential of the sport space to act as a place for people to meet) was outwardly rejected through written policy and unwritten codes of behaviour (Price & Parker, 2003). It is important to note that, to a great degree, the focus of these studies has been on the team sport environment and the experiences therein of gay

participants (Anderson, 2002, 2005; Elling et al., 2001, 2003; Le Blanc, 2002; Waitt, 2003). Within the body of literature specific to gay male athletes and sport participation, there has been little consideration of athletes participating in individual sport.

The research related to marathon and long distance running has focused on motivation, self-image, gender, middle-class privilege, and the hierarchy within the running milieu. However, there is no literature on gay male runners beyond that of van Ingen's 2004 ethnographic study of the Toronto Front Runners. This particular study explored the constructions of health of group members, suggesting the re/production of popular health discourse, differing perceptions of disease, the lack of lesbians, coloured, and transgendered persons within the social landscape of the TFR, and the general complexity of social and therapeutic landscapes. With respect to this last point, van Ingen suggests that research on sexuality-based social landscapes must also take into account race, gender, and class. Her study provides insights into constructions of health amongst this particular group and does hint at the possibility that the TFR challenges hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity through some of its practices. While van Ingen's ethnographic study occurs within the context of a GLBT running group, the study is not specific to the experiences of gay runners but rather the environment of the categorical running group itself and its members' constructions of health.

Taking this all into consideration, there is a definite absence in the socio-cultural studies of sport and physical activity that is worth addressing. While the research specific to sexuality and sport has grown, a great deal has focused on lesbian experiences in sport and physical activity. The studies that have involved gay male athletes have been conducted in three areas primarily: (a) categorical sport teams; (b) closeted athletes

within mainstream sport; and (c) “out” athletes in mainstream sport. While Anderson’s study (2002) includes individual athletes (including cross country and track runners), I have argued earlier that at the high school and collegiate levels, there is a primary focus on the team aspect, regardless of sport. Furthermore, Anderson himself does not treat the individual and team sport athletes differently. One study of a categorical tennis club (Wellard, 2002) does explore an individual sport, however in the case of this sport there is direct head-to-head competition, a notion that is not equally applicable in long-distance running (Smith, 1998). Beyond van Ingen’s ethnographic study of a categorical running club (2004) and the cross country and track runners noted in Anderson’s study above, there is no mention of gay or lesbian runners in the running-specific literature.

Studies related to gender within the running literature suggest a privileging of middle-class, white males (Abbas, 2004; Curtis & McTeer, 1981; Serravallo, 2000), but there is no exploration of sexuality or the existence and potential impact of heteronormativity. Furthermore, a great deal of the running literature is quantitatively based and therefore does not provide an in-depth look at the lived experiences of those in the running community. In a qualitative study, Smith (2000) does provide some insight into the re/production of masculinity within distance running, however he does so with flawed logic, as I have suggested previously.

From a theoretical perspective, though many studies within sport have adopted Foucauldian perspectives of the “body,” there was a noticeable gap of such application within the running literature. While there was recognition that long-distance running can be physically and mentally demanding, there was no theoretical analysis directly related to notions of the body beyond the idea that running with or through injury suggests

coherence to notions of hegemonic masculinity (Young, White & McTeer, 1994), and that injury and subsequent recovery can impact on athletic identity in different ways (Allen-Collinson, 2003; Hockey, 2005). This is likely worthy of consideration.

Finally, though the experiences of lesbian athletes have been to some extent deconstructed through a queer lens, much of the sexuality and sport literature has been approached from a liberal gay/lesbian theoretical perspective. This reflects the liberal feminist approach that much of the literature on the social construction of masculinity has adopted. In taking such an approach, there is a failure to effectively question the normative gender order and heteronormativity within the sport environment, seemingly accepting the “taken-for-grantedness” of male, heterosexual privilege and in doing so positioning masculinity/femininity and homosexuality/heterosexuality in binary categories. Application of a queer theoretical perspective to sport has allowed for the deconstruction of popular gender, sexuality, and sport discourses (Broad, 2001). Similar application will help gain insights into the discursive constructions of sexuality, gender, and the body particular to gay and queer male individual sport participants.

CHAPTER III
THEORIES AND BODIES THAT PERFORM:
ARE YOU THINKING QUEERLY?

In the past 20 years, much theoretical and empirical research related to gender and the sporting body has been published. More recently, there has also been research that has sought to deconstruct the experiences of gay athletes in sport, though few through a queer lens. In the present chapter, I will focus on the various elements that constitute the theoretical framework for my research: poststructuralist theories of gender, queer theory, as well as a Foucauldian perspective on the body.

The poststructuralist perspective is rooted in the notion of subjective meaning and understanding. There is, in poststructuralism, a multiplicity of interpretations based on one's reading and understanding of texts. Indeed, there is no essential "truth" to be presented and validated: "Post-structuralism is not a theory, but a set of theoretical positions, which have at their core a self-reflexive discourse which is aware of the tentativeness, the slipperiness, the ambiguity and the complex interrelations of texts and meanings" (Lye, 1996). A poststructuralist approach seeks to deconstruct language and texts that have become institutionalized and, therefore, are presented as the "truth." Indeed, the poststructuralist perspective proposes that "truth" is rather a (re)iteration of hegemonic notions: "Truths are often vehicles for ideological assumptions, that oppress certain groups of people... particularly those in the minority or on the margins" (Salih, 2002, p. 4). Deconstruction of such supposed "truths" (such as hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity) illuminates the illusion of reality proposed by dominant ideologies, and suggestion of a "natural" or "essential" identity. Such an approach seeks

to undo discursive constructions by which individuals come to recognize themselves (i.e., the subjective position which they assume).

Though a reluctant poststructuralist, it is useful to draw on Foucault's notion of truth, as it is prevalent throughout the remainder of this chapter. At risk of oversimplifying, truth is a discursive construction; knowledge produced within and through discourse is accepted as the social norm, resulting in the production of docile bodies. As such, truth is contextual—it is temporal and located within those producing knowledge and impacts on those living in that time and place:

Truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And, it induces regular effects of power. (Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

With this understanding I now turn to theoretical considerations that frame the remainder of this thesis.

Sex/Gender and Performativity

The study of gender and its impact on and over social relations has long held academic interest, with many different theoretical perspectives offered. Two prominent perspectives—essentialist and constructionist—are important to define. An essentialist approach suggests that sex and gender are more or less one and the same and are innate, as in man/woman (sex), masculine/feminine (gender), each coupling being constituted with binary opposites. A constructionist perspective suggests that both sex and gender are constructed through language, discourse and ideology; in other words, they are something

we do, not something we are. It is the latter perspective in which I am most interested, and in particular poststructuralist considerations.

It has been suggested by Butler (1993) that sex is gender and that the two cannot be separated. It is only through discourse and ideology that sex/gender is constructed and it begins the moment it is declared at birth that “it’s a girl/boy.” One could argue that with the “advent” of medical technology, such inscription begins even earlier now. Regardless, such declaration inevitably begins sex/gender construction based on heteronormativity and ideological binaries of male/female and masculine/feminine. Sex and gender are constructed and inscribed on the body, defined and enforced through hegemonic heterosexuality:

Butler has collapsed the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that there is no sex that is not always already gender. All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and there is no existence that is not social), which means that there is no “natural body” that pre-exists its cultural inscription. (Salih, 2002, p. 62)

Such inscription, as Butler (1993) suggests, is based on the “sexed” subject—a matter determined by virtue of genitalia which, except in rare circumstances, is officially identified and classified upon physical entry into the world. Therefore the language that seems to describe the body and gender actually constitutes it (Salih, 2002). Drawing on Foucauldian, Hegelian and Freudian perspectives as well as feminist psychoanalytic theories, Butler (1990) proposes the notion of “performativity,” which has become a term oft referenced and of significant use in deconstructing sex/gender.

Performativity suggests that gender is re/produced in a specific and rigid manner or frame, established and maintained through heteronormativity which, because of its repetition, comes to be accepted as an “identity.” As Butler notes, there are regulated expectations of behaviour that are sex/gender specific: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1990, p. 33). This notion of performativity has been useful in deconstructing hegemonic masculinity in sport, as noted in recent research on the experiences of gay athletes in mainstream and categorical sport (Anderson, 2002; Price & Parker, 2003; Wellard, 2002).

Central to the notion of performativity is that there is no gender without discourse; it is only through language that gender is constructed and enforced. Dominant gender discourse has been created in order to differentiate, categorize, and otherwise marginalize/subordinate subjects that do not fit the male/masculine, female/feminine ideology. In this way, gender “identities” are constructed linguistically:

Gender is an act that brings into being what it names: in this context, a “masculine” man, or a “feminine” woman. Gender identities are constructed and constituted by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language. (Salih, 2002, p. 64)

If sex/gender is constructed through discursive practices, then there can really be no “true identity.” Instead, individuals recognize themselves as subjects of discursive constructions. Gender then is something that is performed spatially, temporally and contextually, and (if one is seeking to avoid consternation) in accordance with current dominant social norms. In an attempt to maintain normative order in a society,

male/female, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual are established as binary categories as problematic as this may be: “There is no reason to divide up human bodies in male and female sexes except that such a division suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality” (Butler, 1999, p. 143).

Given that gender is performed, there is the possibility of subversion if a subject chooses a performance that does not align with social norms. As Salih suggests, “There are ways of ‘doing’ one’s identity which will cause even further trouble for those who have a vested interest in preserving existing oppositions such as male/female, masculine/feminine, gay/straight and so on” (2002, p. 45). Similarly, Foucault noted that dominant discourses transpire power but that power is multiple, dispersed and always holds the possibility for resistance. Gender resistance (e.g., “gender fucking”) is indeed possible. Gender then is an *effect* of power and not a *cause*; to suggest otherwise would be ignoring the artificiality and constructed nature of gender categories. To perhaps over-simplify this idea, I would offer that dominant gender discourse that declares specific sex/gender roles (i.e., man/woman, male/female, boy/girl) creates artificial power structures that privileges one sex/gender (i.e., male/masculine) over another, based not on innate behaviours that create difference, but rather language that suggests, and therefore defines, these supposed differences. In other words, there is nothing “natural” that would privilege male/masculine over female/feminine (or male/feminine); this is an artificial construct of power meant to subordinate alternate gender identities. Therefore, it is imperative to look at the *effects* of power and not the *causes* of power, which is precisely the perspective

suggested within a poststructuralist paradigm. As Salih notes in the conclusion of her excellent text on Butler:

From her earliest writing to the present, Butler has engaged in an ongoing destabilization of subject-categories and the discursive structures within which they are formed, a critical exercise that is undertaken not merely for its own sake but in order to expose the limitations, contingencies, and instabilities of existing norms. (2002, p. 140)

Understanding gender theories, such as those discussed above, is critical in deconstructing the hegemonic ideologies present in sport. But while I have explored performativity and sex/gender constructs, where are we left in terms of sexuality? There is a flow (or fluidity) between the notion of gender performativity and sexuality. If sex is gender and both are constructed (and therefore, not innate), can the same be said about sexuality? Butler argues that such is indeed the case suggesting that normative desire is heterosexualized and is a logical extension of expected gender behaviours: one is male, performs masculinity, and desires a female/feminine opposite. Within heteronormativity, alternative performances of gender and sexuality are disavowed. As Butler argues, subjectivities in which gender does not follow from sex or in which practices of desire do not follow from either sex or gender is usually rejected. Enters queer theory.

Queer Theory

When considering queer theory, we must be cognizant of the early contributions of Michel Foucault and Guy Hocquenghem in suggesting a re-thinking of sexuality, ideas that were explored further by Judith Butler and that eventually developed into a queer

theoretical perspective. Like poststructuralist gender theories, queer theory calls into question “natural” sexed, gendered, and sexual identities. Defining queer theory, however, is difficult as it is always evolving. It is unfixed. In a sense, trying to define or characterize queer theory works against the very notions it seeks to dispel or deconstruct. I will nevertheless discuss queer theory in an attempt to capture some of its elements, however temporarily. I will also discuss it in relation to what it is not (i.e., gay/lesbian studies), as well as addressing some of the arguments against queer theory.

Queer theory seeks to deconstruct hegemonic notions of sexuality and gender, moving beyond a homo/hetero binary, and seeking to de-solidify heteronormativity; it calls into question the “naturalness” of heterosexuality and the notion of stable sexualities. Jagose (1996) suggests that the evolution of queer theory is “a product of specific cultural and theoretical pressures which increasingly structured debates... about questions of lesbian and gay identity” (p. 76). Queer theory calls into question understandings of identity categories and operations of power; it seeks to destabilize accepted gender and identity constructs through individual acts of resistance/subversion. Queer also claims diversity through its intended inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual persons, and really any subject (even heterosexual) that somehow deviates from normative definitions of (sexual) desire; it purports to be inclusive of any one who feels marginalized from the norm—be it a result of sexuality, intellect, culture, etc. (Giffney, 2004). Queer, then, can encompass sexuality, but is not necessarily restricted to such subjectivities. When one applies a queer lens to studies of any particular milieu, one works to reveal “queer cracks in the heteronormative façade

(i.e., 'queering'), and 'decentering' those regimes of 'normality' that bear on the sexual and gender status quo" (Green, 2002, p. 522).

It is useful at this point to explore the evolution of "queer" in order to place it historically. While it undoubtedly has its beginnings in the work of Hocquenghem and Foucault, queer theory per se is typically associated with academic developments in the 1990s. It has also been connected to the gay liberationist movement, often suggested to have begun in 1968 with the Stonewall Riot in New York.

Without going into an extensive historical overview of the gay liberation movement, it has a distinct relationship with queer theory though they are not one and the same. Early gay liberationists (circa 1960) sought to move beyond both the silence that shrouded homosexuality and the emerging polemic that, beyond same-sex preferences, homosexuals were just the same as their heterosexual peers: "Instead of representing themselves as being just like heterosexuals except in their sexual object choice, gay liberationists... challenged conventional knowledge about such matters as gendered behaviour, monogamy and the sanctity of the law" (Jagose, 1996, p. 31). In other words, gay liberation sought to destabilize the taken-for-grantedness of heteronormativity, much in the same way that queer theory seeks to undo "naturalized" categories of sexuality. At the same time, gay liberationists suggested the existence of a "gay identity" and demanded (sometimes in radical defiance) recognition of this unique identity, distinct from, yet equal to, that of heterosexuality. In this, we begin to see a distinction between gay liberationist and queer perspectives. Though there are definite links (such as the seeking of a destabilization of gender and sex ideology), the notion of a distinct and "essential" identity distinguishes the former from the latter:

Many of the ideological assumptions of gay liberation are very much in evidence in the 1990s. Yet its promotion of identity, its commitment to some 'natural' and polymorphous sexuality underlying social organisation, its understanding of power predominantly in terms of repression and its belief in the possibility of large-scale social transformation or liberation are all challenged by the new knowledges and practices mobilised around queer. (Jagose, 1996, p. 43)

Ultimately, queer theory represents a move away from the identity politics of the gay liberation movement, something which gay/lesbian studies continued to embrace, and something that has very much directed contemporary gay/lesbian politics. Halperin has suggested that this movement away from such identity politics can be understood as "a deepened understanding of the discursive structures and representational systems that determine the production of sexual meanings, and that micro-manage individual perceptions, in such a way as to maintain and reproduce the underpinnings of heterosexual privilege" (1995, p. 32).

With some groundwork laid, it is now to academic theory specifically that I turn, and attempt (albeit tentatively) to expose the tenets of queer theory. It has been written that queer theory evolved specifically as an academic discourse in reaction to gay/lesbian studies that were thought to be too liberal and too accepting of falsely constructed norms of sexuality (Duggan, 1992; Jagose, 1996). Whereas gay/lesbian studies worked to reveal unequal power relations between gay/lesbian and heterosexual identities (and, as such, strove for acceptance from the mainstream through demands for equality), queer theory took (and still takes) a more radical approach that works to deconstruct hegemonic heterosexuality. Furthermore, critics of gay/lesbian studies suggest that within the

gay/lesbian movement, there was racial, class, ability, and gender privilege (i.e., it was all about white, middle-class American males). In that regard, queer seeks to avoid such hierarchy, theorizing that sexual acts/desire should not equal sexual identity, and even further, that sexual identity is a false construct created to categorize deviant behaviour and to promote a dominant sexuality. Individuals come to recognize themselves as subjects within, or opposed to, dominant discursive constructions. As such, queer theorists claim not only homosexuality (and by extension gay/lesbian) as a false category, but also heterosexuality as a social and historical construction that defines the norm and ensures a dominance/maintenance of order:

Heterosexuality, then, is equally a construction whose meaning is dependent on changing cultural models. As a descriptive term, its provenance is historical, no matter how often it lays claim to universality.... Heterosexuality, after all, has long maintained its claim to be a natural, pure and unproblematic state which requires no explanation. (Jagose, 1996, p. 17)

It is interesting to note that, in terms of the Western world, heterosexuality was defined after homosexuality. Heterosexuality first appeared in medical discourse in 1901 and was suggested to be both abnormal and perverse; it was not until 1934 that the term was linked with normality (Messner, 1996). It, like homosexuality, is similarly a constructed social category that through discursive constructions has come to be accepted as “normal.”

Queer theory brings into question the stability of identity and identity categories proposing that a stable identity is non-existent and only comes to be understood through discursive constructions. Any claims of stability are false and work to enforce dominant

ideologies of sexuality. In taking a more liberal approach, gay/lesbian studies accept and encourage the notion of stable identity which has been useful in making political gains but does not go so far as to question or deconstruct heteronormativity and its establishment/maintenance of power.

Here we must return to the works of Foucault as queer theory relies heavily on a Foucauldian perspective of power and marginalized identities. In this case, power and knowledge are one and the same and not ascribed to a certain economic class or political entity (i.e., the state). Foucault suggests that there is neither power without knowledge, nor knowledge without power; the two are inextricably linked:

Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise. It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. (1980, p. 52)

As such, power/knowledge is heterogeneous and works at the same time to enable and negate, facilitate and obstruct, and construct and limit. Power/knowledge is present in institutions and individuals within society and maintained/resisted through discourse (Foucault, 1983). Importantly, according to Foucault, there is a significant relationship and interconnectedness between knowledge and the self:

What I have studied are the three traditional problems: (1) What are the relations we have to truth through scientific knowledge, to those “truth games” which are so important in civilization and in which we are both subject and object? (2) What are the relationships we have to others through those strange strategies and power

relationships? And (3) what are the relationships between truth, power, and self?
(1988, p. 15)

Foucault's concept of power/knowledge suggests that there is opportunity to subvert dominant discourses that establish order within social milieus. Specific to queer theory, Jagose has argued that, like power, "resistance is multiple and unstable; it coagulates at certain points, is dispersed across others, and circulates in discourse" (1996, p. 81). Much the same as subversion of gender through performativity, queer theory suggests the existence of power in resistance to heteronormativity through non-conformity. By refusing to conform, there is not only a claim of "identity" but also a political statement: "In so far as being political involves the exercise of power, individual action is political. It is subjective" (Kirsch, 2000, p. 36). For queer theorists then, the personal is political.

While to this point in time I have sought to present what queer theory is, and at the same time what it is not (in relation to gay/lesbian studies), queer is not without its critics. Though the rhetoric may vary, there are three main contestations of queer: the first has to do with the term "queer," the second has to do with political implications, and the third, with diversity. While the philosophy behind "queer" is to reclaim that which has formerly been derogatory—a label often hurled at sexual "deviants" by "normal" individuals—critics maintain that queer cannot be reclaimed as one cannot change the meaning/definition of language. Does a so-called reclaiming of queer remove the formerly (and still, at times, current) homophobic connotation? Queer theorists argue that such a reclaiming subverts heteronormativity and also moves beyond gay/lesbian identifiers which are seen as problematic and exclusionary. The power in queer comes in

that it is most typically a self-identifier. Critics of queer still find it problematic when queer is not a self-identifier, and is used in an insulting manner meant to subordinate, discriminate and marginalize. I suppose that we cannot change history, but I lean toward the belief that we can deconstruct history and that language can be reclaimed. As Butler argues,

it remains politically necessary to lay claim to “women,” “queer,” “gay,” and “lesbian,” precisely because of the way these terms, as it were, lay their claim on us prior to our full knowing. Laying claim to such terms in reverse will be necessary to refute homophobic deployments of the terms in law, public policy, on the street, in “private” life. (1993, p. 229)

Halperin (1995) also suggests resistance to dominant discourse through reclaiming of language; borrowing from Foucault’s attestation that power is everywhere, he theorizes that in discursive constructions of sexuality there must also be discursive counterpractices. Though he conceives of varying ways in which such reclamation can occur, I have chosen to highlight his idea of creative appropriation and resignification, as this has the most relevance to this particular argument. In this idea, Halperin suggests that words can be reclaimed and transformed to become a form of resistance:

I remember being told that shortly after the newspapers reported the results of Simon LeVay’s notorious study purporting to discover the anatomical and neurological cause of sexual orientation, there appeared in San Francisco a new gay disco named Club Hypothalamus. The point was clearly to reclaim a word that had contributed to our scientific objectification, to the remedicalization of

sexual orientation, and to transform it ludicrously into a badge of gay identity and a vehicle of queer pleasure. (1995, p. 48)

There are other such examples of resignification within, and outside of, the queer community, though such are also not without contest. As an example, the queer community has reclaimed the pink triangle, once used to denote homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps during World War II, as a symbol of unity and power.

Queer theory espouses the notion that the personal is political, and that there is power through the individual; in this, there is a (albeit contextual) vision of a different type of collective identity. I would offer the ironically named Queer Nation as a good example of this: Queer Nation, considered a radical group, organized itself around a collective identity, one that purports fluidity and diversity. Collective identity within queer theory therefore calls into question stable identities that are seen to be limiting and avails itself to those that refute restrictive identity labels. As Duggan offers, the queer perspective is “often used to construct a collectivity no longer defined by the gender of its members’ sexual partners. This new community is unified only by a shared dissent from the dominant organization of sex and gender” (1992, p. 20).

Critics of queer theory also suggest that it fails to consider the reality of structural power (class, patriarchy, race/ethnicity, ability) and further that it has simply re/named and then re/constructed typical power relations despite its claims of diversity (Kirsch, 2000). This is a result of a queer theory that attempts to be too encompassing. In particular, lesbian feminist theorists postulate that, by virtue of exclusion from specific articulation, lesbians become invisible as do queers of colour, differently-abled queers, etc: “Queer’s totalizing gesture is seen as having the potential to work against lesbian and

gay specificity, and to devalue those analyses of homophobia and heterocentrism” (Jagose, 1996, p. 112).

I would counter that queer theory does not exclude such subjectivities, but that it is at the core of queer theory to move beyond such descriptors of “identity,” proposing the idea of shifting subjectivities that do not limit one to heterosexist, patriarchally-defined sex/gender/sexuality roles established/maintained through discursive constructions. Jagose (1996) suggests that while queer may have developed as a “category” for alternative sexual subjectivities, it is basically anti-category and acts as a descriptor of anything resistant to that which is perceived to constitute the norm. Queer also suggests a potential “unity” of subjectivities counter to heteronormativity.

It has been suggested that queer theory fails to recognize the omnipresent sexual practices and identities that shape much of our social world and in doing so ignores the institutionalization of sexuality. However, I will suggest that as a theoretical framework, it works/encourages the deconstruction of dominant ideology, the taken-for-granted state-of-being espoused by and through heteronormativity. I argue that we should not devalue the theoretical insights of queer because of potential political shortcomings. It remains useful to turn a queer lens on different social milieus in order to continue to deconstruct hegemonic notions of sexuality and the various meanings associated with such socially constructed categories of gay/lesbian/bisexual, etc. Critics suggest that this is not enough, that queer theory is too theoretical and removed from reality. This suggestion calls up images of a privileged group of theorists perched behind laptop computers ignoring the everyday practices of heterosexism and homophobia still prevalent in society. Gay/lesbian studies and contemporary politics suggest that queer refutes all political

gains made through the gay/lesbian movement and fails to recognize the need for a collective identity in making gains. Kirsch has argued that queer theory “dichotomizes the political as personal and the political as social action into a binary that positions political actions in impossible terms” (2000, p. 97). Suggestions have been made to work toward a blending of queer theory and gay/lesbian studies, at least in terms of recognizing structural influences such as socio-economic status (Duggan, 1992; Green, 2002; Kirsch, 2000; Messner, 1996), and by acknowledging the institutionalization of sexuality that shapes the lives of those whom we study:

A more sociological, post-queer study of sexuality must retain a critical distance from the reigning categories that constitute identity so as to be mindful of the ways that individuals may use, negotiate, and resist these constructs. Surely such an effort runs through the heart of the sociological enterprise, as decades of research on deviance and medicalization have demonstrated heretofore. (Green, 2002, p. 540)

It is a blending of the purely theoretical with the possibility of a practical, political application that might satisfy both proponents and opponents of queer theory.

All this being said, can queer theory (and here I return to its original, though slippery, definition) be applied to sport in a useful way to deconstruct dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality? There have been suggestions of such (Davidson & Shogan, 1998; Messner, 1996; Pronger, 1999; Sykes, 1998). Specifically, in a recent text on sporting cultures, Abdel-Shehid writes that to queer means “to read something differently than we might initially read it, especially paying attention to the way that

'normal' sexuality is created. In other words, it means to place a queer rhythm on to a text or the world" (2005, p. 147).

Pronger (1990b, 1999) and Sykes (1998) also have suggested deconstructing sport through a queer lens in order to expose hegemonic heterosexuality suggested to be prevalent in that particular social milieu. In an intriguing (and somewhat erotic) approach, Pronger (1999) equates the ultimate objective of sport with the notion of penetration – masculinity reflected in being the penetrator (i.e., scoring on your opponent) while simultaneously avoiding penetration (i.e., being scored upon). He notes though that there is subversive possibility when athletes are gay. One could take some pleasure in being the loser (i.e., being penetrated): "The homosexual irony, of course, is that the loser is the winner. In homosexual sex, unlike competitive sport, being the penetrated loser is not without its intrinsic pleasures" (p. 385). I am including this particular text and referring to its theoretical perspective to demonstrate the possibilities when taking a poststructuralist (and queer theoretical) approach in reading sport, its hegemonies and possible subversion. Pronger's theoretical suggestions also provide a convenient flow from gender and queer theories to notions of the body in sport, though I am — all innuendos aside — less interested in penetration and more interested in discipline.

The (Sporting) Body

Over the past 20 years, many scholars have pointed to the usefulness of applying the theories of Michel Foucault to studies of sport and physical activity (Andrews, 1993, 2000; Markula, 2003, 2004; Pringle, 2005; Rail & Harvey, 1995; Whitson, 1989). Such a

turn has placed studies of sporting bodies at the centre of research questions and agendas. According to Fraser and Greco (2005), “sociology has been led to regard the body as highly relevant to any theorization of socially situated subjectivity, and simultaneously to problematise any notion that ‘the body’ can be thought of a single and coherent conceptual entity” (pp. 2-3).

In sport sociology, studies of the body have taken many approaches reflecting the possibilities that sport provides for such exploration. Structuralists have suggested that in contemporary capitalist society, sport takes on a significant role in body production/construction, suggesting that sport serves “as a major means whereby the body is produced, displayed, and evaluated” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 1577). A poststructuralist approach would not differ that significantly as structural and poststructuralist theoretical perspectives have many things in common. In fact, poststructuralism developed out of and in relation to structuralist theoretical perspectives. Both structuralist and poststructuralist theorists suggest that individuals are the subjects of language, rather than simply the users of it; both schools of thought regard language as a relational system or structure and give priority to the determining power of the language system. However, there begins to be some differences in so much as poststructuralism further challenges the notion of subjectivity and seeks to understand the meaning of social relationships—relationships that only come to be known through language, ideology, and discursive practices. Furthermore, poststructuralists suggest that there are no fixed meanings, no stable identities and that these things are temporal and spatial. Conversely, structuralists are interested in what is beneath the surface of social relationships, and suggest that there are fixed meanings to words, language and

individuals. In the case of the body, a poststructuralist approach suggests that it comes to be identified through language and discourse. Structuralists would not argue this point but they consider that the body does have a fixed meaning. Their interest is more in the social structures at play within the creation of the body. In the end, regardless of similarity and difference, one thing is for certain—both structuralist and poststructuralist theoretical perspectives have borrowed extensively from Foucault.

Rail and Harvey (1995) suggest that Foucault's work has had great impact on the sociology of sport, which has allowed "a positioning of the body at the centre of research questions" (p. 167). They point to the concepts of discipline, biopower, surveillance, panopticism, technologies of the self, and subjectification, in particular, highlighting relevant research that have applied these concepts. Of those that the authors have explored, there are a few in which I am most interested: power/knowledge, discipline, surveillance, and technologies of the self. I see these concepts working with and within each other.

Critical to our understanding of these concepts is an understanding of Foucault's perspective of discourse. For Foucault, discourse defines and dictates human behaviour. Individuals are shaped or constituted through the appropriation of dominant and/or resistant discourses. Foucault argues that discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention" (1972, p. 49). Dominant discourses, which more often than not are tied to scientific knowledge promoted by the State, establish our understanding of what "normal" is; subjects then, through technologies of power such as self-surveillance and discipline, normalize their

bodies and behaviours in accordance with that which is positioned as the “truth.” In short, bodies and behaviours are socially constructed through discourse that is contextually specific. As Jones has suggested, “for Foucault, it is through the discourses that dominate a time in history and a place in the world that people acquire their mind-set, or world-view” (2003, p. 125).

Within the Foucauldian perspective, however, the notion of power/knowledge moves beyond the repressive/negative connotation of structural hierarchy, suggesting that power is everywhere and in everyone, re/produced through and by dominant discourses that are offered as the truth. This view of power/knowledge allows for the possibility of subversion through resistant discourse. As Rail and Harvey have suggested: “By highlighting the productive side of power, Foucault suggests the existence of a body escaping repression: an active, autonomous and powerful body” (1995, p. 175). That being said, power also encourages a “normalization” of the body, which is enabled through what Foucault refers to as discipline. A concept developed through Foucault’s study of prison systems, discipline suggests that the body becomes subject to disciplinary practices in order to be normalized according to the standards established by dominant discourse. Such discipline is not viewed as repressive, as these specific forms of power do not necessarily seek to repress bodies but rather produce (and then reproduce) internalized norms that make a body functional or optimal. In other words, the concept of discipline suggests a manipulation of the body to adhere to certain standards that are temporal and spatial. As Foucault argued:

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor

at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely [*sic*]. What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. (Translation, 1995, pp. 137-138)

Therefore, the notion of power is inextricably linked to that of discipline, and specifically discipline is the form of power over the body (Rail & Harvey, 1995).

Linked to discipline is the concept of surveillance. Foucault theorized that surveillance, either direct or indirect, is a form of discipline. This surveillance is based on the concept of panopticism, which draws from Jeremy Bentham's panopticon—a particular prison design in which a single guard can watch over many prisoners while the guard remains unseen. Because the prisoner does not know if the guard is watching at any specific time, the body is disciplined or regulated in the expected way so as to avoid punishment. Foucault applies this concept beyond the prison suggesting that society exercises this same control over individuals so much so that individuals adopt a process of self-surveillance to normalize their body. Foucault defines self-surveillance as “an inspecting gaze which each individual under its weight will end by exteriorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself” (Foucault, 1980, p. 155). In other words, this gaze becomes a way of self-policing where the subject becomes her or his own monitor of behaviour within standards established through discourse and hegemonic ideologies (such as heteronormativity).

While the focus to this point has been primarily on those techniques typically considered to normalize bodies, Foucault (1988) has also suggested that individuals also possess the possibility of transforming themselves in order to “attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality” (p. 18). He refers to such possibility as the “technologies of the self” which are specific practices by which subjects constitute themselves within, and in resistance to, power. There are varying ways in which such practice can occur. In recognizing oneself as a subject of dominant discourse and through a process of self-awareness, there is opportunity to appropriate resistant discourses and to create agency. This concept allows for the possibility that subjects can resist practices of domination. Markula, commenting on technologies of the self, has suggested: “Through these technologies an individual begins to recognize her/himself as a subject and in this sense, s/he can be understood to counter the technologies of power” (2003, p. 88). This concept can be seen as having the potential to empower individuals in that there is greater subjectivity—there is some possibility of agency that allows for a resistant power within the individual. Technologies of the self are the specific practices by which individuals constitute themselves as subjects within and through systems of power such as self-care, self-knowledge, and mastery of the self (Foucault, 1988). Markula has suggested that application of this Foucauldian concept is valuable within feminist sport studies, and I would argue that this same consideration can be applied to queer studies of sport:

A careful consideration of Foucault’s concepts of [the technologies of the self] can guide feminists towards assessing how a female sport participant can transform a discursive dominance in sport. It is important not to pre-assign any

practice as “liberating” or “oppressive” without a careful consideration of the cultural context where an individual woman’s identity is formed. (2003, p. 104)

Within this concept then, individuals can be seen as adopting technologies not to normalize their bodies, but to constitute and recognize themselves, a process which Foucault refers to as “subjectification” (Rail & Harvey, 1995). In this, power is not repressive but full of possibilities, which links directly back to Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge and its positivity.

Conclusion

Society re/defines what male/female bodies are to do, and I mean to suggest this as both performance of sex/gender, sexuality, and also physical activity. Male bodies are meant to appear physically in a certain way and to perform specific tasks in a certain way, nonetheless of these tasks being heterosexual sex (Butler, 1999). The body is a surface on which sex/gender/sexuality performances are inscribed relative to space, time, and context. Queer and poststructuralist gender theories call into question the stability of identity categories such as male/female, masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual; such questioning allows the possibility of fluid identities that work to subvert/transgress established norms.

Beyond sex/gender and sexuality the body is also a subject of discipline, oft maintained through dominant discursive constructions. Power is established and maintained through these discursive practices vis-à-vis differing practices of the self with the intention and desire of maintaining normative order. However, there is also the possibility of resistant discourses as knowledge is power, which has the potential to be

everywhere. The body then, in light of Butler and Foucault, can be considered as an instrument capable of power and subversion and as a possible agent for change through thought and action. Borrowing from queer and poststructuralist gender theories, as well as a Foucauldian perspective of the body, allows a deconstruction of dominant discourses re/produced within a particular milieu, working to further our understanding of the negotiations and re/constructions of gender, sexuality, and the (sporting) body.

CHAPTER IV
FROM THE INSIDE OUT:
EXPLORING MARATHONING THROUGH REFLEXIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

This chapter outlines the methodological considerations and issues that framed the present study. Working with the understanding that autoethnography is loosely defined in a number of different ways, both with respect to approach and written form (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), I borrowed from different definitions and processes to explore the experiences of male marathoners self-identifying as gay and queer. I drew from personal experiences and the stories of others gathered through guided conversations and personal narratives. The data collected were analyzed theoretically and then interrogated drawing on discourse analysis. Of particular interest were intersections of power related to gender and sexuality, discursive constructions of the body, and the participants' appropriation of, or resistance to dominant discourse. Additionally, I explored the motivations of these participants in long-distance running and how these motivations connected to understandings of their bodies and identities.

Autoethnography at Work: The Voices of “Self” and “Others”

The goal of ethnographic research is to gain as much understanding of a particular group or culture through a plurality of data collection techniques (including participant observation, interviews, content analysis, photography, etc); it is no different for autoethnography. However, in the case of autoethnography the researcher's own experience becomes a topic of investigation in its own right. This is an idea that borrows from feminist research perspectives that suggest that research begins “from one's own

experience” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 259). Moving away from the detached, formal, and “unbiased” rhetoric of positivist writing, feminist social research seeks to include the personal voice as a way of conveying emotion, passion, and enthusiasm in the experiences specific to the researcher and the researched within a specific social milieu. An autoethnographic approach, regardless of definition, seeks to convey these same things.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) have advocated the use of autoethnography suggesting personal experience as an opportunity to move beyond a passionless and objective authoritative voice; autoethnography presents an opportunity to connect the personal to the cultural. The research becomes a personal account of experiences within and in relation to a particular culture that also draws on others’ lived experiences; the completed text seeks to engage the readers and draws them into the experiences of the author and other participants. Ellis and Bochner have suggested that autoethnography asks readers “to become co-participants, engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually” (2000, p. 745). Other scholars have also suggested that autoethnography must be considered a valid form of reporting the social (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002); this same plea has been made specifically within the study of sport (Denison & Rinehard, 2000; Holt, 2003; Sparkes, 2000).

Blurring the distinction between self and other, autoethnography is a form of research that provides opportunity for the researchers to incorporate their own life experiences with the experiences of those being studied (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnography moves beyond self-reflexivity within an ethnographic study,

encouraging researchers to write about their own experiences of the social phenomena and not solely their experiences of recording the culture. As Reed-Danahay argues:

Autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography... [Autoethnography] can be done by an autobiographer who places the story of his or her life within a story of the social context in which it occurs. (1997, p. 9)

Autoethnography emerged in the 1980s in the social sciences and more recently in the study of sport and physical education (Holt, 2003). Many evolving research methods fall under the umbrella of autoethnography: personal narratives, narratives of the self, and ethnographic short stories (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). While providing unique opportunities to share personal experiences, autoethnography can be extremely difficult to undertake for a number of reasons not the least of those being the willingness of the researcher to self-analyze: “The self-questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult. So is confronting things about yourself that are less than flattering.... Honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts – and emotional pain” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 738).

Though gaining in acceptance, autoethnography is still a contested methodological approach (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Holt, 2003; Sparkes, 2000). Questions of validity, trustworthiness, and reliability are often raised as are positivist debates of whether an autoethnographic study is more fiction than fact. I would argue that the use of academic literature, application of theoretical perspectives and concepts, and blending the researcher’s experiences with empirical materials collected from participants tends to distinguish autoethnography from pure fiction or personal memoirs. I say here “pure

fiction” in the sense that autoethnography, like most other forms of qualitative methods, recognizes the involved character of the researcher, a researcher who is not objective, not value-neutral, not omniscient; a researcher who does not find “truth” or “reality” but rather constructs it based on his or her recollections (re-constructions) as well as that of others. The fictional aspect of research is thus openly acknowledged, following an anti-positivist position.

All that being said, if autoethnography is a difficult process that has many critics, is it a valid methodological approach to choose? Though some would argue against its value, at the same time there is a long history of depersonalized, third person accounts of social phenomena that mimic the rhetoric of empirical research within the “pure” sciences. Such positivist and nomothetic approaches to the social sciences have also not been without their critics (Denison & Rinehart, 2000; Denzin, 1997; Rail, 1998; Reinharz, 1992; Sparkes; 2000). One can also argue that the researcher’s voice, intrinsic to autoethnography, should not be considered any less relevant when discussing personal experiences in the specific social realm being researched. Sparkes has suggested that in autoethnography, “it is made clear that the author ‘was there’ in the action, that the story is based on ‘real’ people, ‘real’ events, and ‘data’ that were collected in various ways” (2002, p. 3). Furthermore, a critical analysis of one’s own experiences of the social phenomenon under study works to locate the writer/researcher as a living and breathing participant. This suggests a strong tie, as queer theory proposes, between the personal and the political (Owen, 2000).

Autoethnography is not concerned with generalizability, but rather with understanding the unique experiences of cultural groups or members. This relates well to

queer theory, which is less concerned with collective identity and more interested in the lived experiences of participants, and in their unique perspectives:

In the writings of certain postmodernists and particularly within feminist and [poststructuralist] queer theory you see a renewed appreciation for emotion, intuition, personal experience, embodiment, and spirituality. They've helped... to focus attention on diversity and difference instead of unity and similarity. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, pp. 747–748)

Autoethnography is as much about the written text as it is about the mode of collection. An autoethnographic account may take the form of creative nonfiction or creative fiction, it may appear in short story, poetry, personal essays or journal format—to name but just a few of the choices. The forms typically evolve as the research progresses and relate greatly to both subject matter and author intent (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Sparkes, 2002). Additionally, autoethnography allows a certain flexibility in reading. The reader becomes an active participant in the process rather than remaining a detached purveyor of the information: “The authors privilege stories over analysis, allowing and encouraging alternative readings and multiple interpretations” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745). This polysemic potential fits well with a poststructuralist approach in that the researcher is not considered the authoritative voice but rather a conveyor of the voice of, most often, marginalized individuals who may not have had the opportunity to be heard before. In considering these voices along with the researcher's, the readers arrive at their own understanding of the lived experiences of the subject and the researcher and, therefore, their own “truth.” While there are different understandings

and definitions of autoethnography, I have adopted what Ellis and Bochner refer to as reflexive ethnography:

In reflexive ethnographies the researcher's personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study. Reflexive ethnographies range along a continuum from starting research from one's own experience to ethnographies where the researcher's experience is actually studied along with other participants... (2000, p. 740)

It is the final point in which I am most interested. I have always been fascinated by marathoning—both as participant and observer. In particular, I have always been intrigued by my experiences as a queer runner and have always questioned what impact (if any) sexuality has on my involvement; others have questioned my involvement from a gendered perspective. The impact of marathoning on the physical body has also always held fascination for me. As such, these fledgling thoughts and ideas planted a seed, which has germinated into this research. I subscribe to the opinions of the scholars expressed earlier that starting from one's own experiences provides rich opportunities for learning and understanding from a particular milieu in a certain time and place. Within this reflexive ethnographic study, my own experiences were recorded and analyzed through the adoption of traditional ethnographic techniques of observation and detailed field notes kept in a research journal. The experiences of other gay and queer marathoners were captured through the use of guided conversations and the collection of written personal narratives.

Kvale (1996) has suggested that qualitative interviews should “attempt to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples'

experiences” (p. 1). With this understanding as a guiding tenet, I again borrowed from feminist approaches to research which suggest that within the interview setting, there should be attempt to diminish power imbalances between the researcher and the researched. Such an approach seeks to move beyond positivist interviewing strategies in that the interaction is more conversational. There is disclosure of personal experiences by the researcher, and the conversation is largely participant-oriented/directed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Neuman, 2000). As Fontana and Frey have suggested:

The emphasis is shifting to allow the development of a closer relation between interviewer and respondent; researchers are attempting to minimize status differences and are doing away with the traditional hierarchical situation in interviewing. Interviewers can show their human side and answer questions and express feelings. Methodologically, this new approach provides a greater spectrum of responses and greater insight into the lives of respondents. (2000, pp. 658-659)

Conversations work well within a poststructuralist paradigm in so much as the participants take an active role in the direction of the conversation and the topics of discussion. That being said, a conversation guide was developed and used as a research instrument to gain insight into the participants’ experiences in marathoning. The use of a conversation guide permitted a more conversational flow to our interactions while at the same time ensuring that relevant conversation topics were broached. The use of the guide also allowed some consistency to be maintained between the conversation participants;

this was useful in terms of having a minimum amount of narrative materials on each theme to draw from for the data analysis stage (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

The use of personal narratives as a form of data has traditionally been marginalized within social science; however, such materials can be effective in understanding lived experiences, either generally or in relation to a specific social phenomenon. Furthermore, personal narratives allow participants to bring to light what is important to them in their own experiences, and perhaps even more so than with other qualitative approaches: “Personal narratives such as autobiographies, biographies, and life stories are likely to present fuller pictures, ones in which the meanings of events and relationships are more likely to be told than inferred” (Laslett, 1999, p. 391). Personal narratives can be seen to empower participants to be more directive in the research process thereby further reducing the impact of the roles of researcher and participant on the collected data (Bagnoli, 2004).

Many different approaches can be taken with regards to personal narratives: oral or life story interviews that are guided, recorded and transcribed; autobiographies that are told orally or in writing; and, more contemporary approaches such as diaries, journals, drawing, short films, photography or other print media (Bagnoli, 2004; Laslett, 1999; Reinharz, 1992). Each approach has its own advantages and disadvantages. However, beyond empowering the participants, using an autobiographical approach often allows access to information that might have been otherwise difficult to attain (Bagnoli, 2004; Laslett, 1999). This is not only true in terms of obtaining potentially sensitive information from participants, but also in simply recruiting participants. Taking an approach in which the participants are asked to write their own autobiography in relation to a particular

social phenomenon diminishes the temporal and spatial constraints otherwise present when using in-person interviews.

The strength of both guided conversations and personal narratives is that there is significant access to the participants' relationships to the social—their interactions, agency, notions of self, and collective identities:

Personal narratives can address several key theoretical debates in contemporary sociology: macro and micro linkages; structure; agency, and their intersection... social reproduction; and social change. They can provide access to both the individual and the social, and make it possible to see connections between them. (Laslett, 1999, p. 392)

The inclusion of the lived experiences of others seeks to address issues of validity and reliability. Such considerations are often the crux of opposition toward autoethnographic research (Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Sparkes, 2000). In the case of autoethnography, validity has been usefully defined by Ellis and Bochner as the seeking of “verisimilitude,” meaning that the work,

evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible... [Validity might also be judged by] whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers, or even [the researcher's] own. (2000, p. 751)

Reliability within an autoethnographic study can be sought through feedback from the other participants included in the research. Ellis and Bochner have suggested that “[w]hen other people are involved, you might take your work back to them and give them

a chance to comment, add materials, change their minds, and offer their interpretations” (2000, p. 751). With inclusion of the “self” in the research, reliability is unorthodox as compared to traditional, positivist definitions that have previously been applied to qualitative research. To a certain degree, there must be some “letting go” of traditional, evaluative approaches to the notions of validity and reliability. As Holt (2003) has argued:

Describing investigator responsiveness during the research process would be a constructive approach to validity, as opposed to the inclusion of evaluative checks to establish the trustworthiness of completed research (e.g., an external audit)... Constructive approaches to validity and reliability would be more appropriate criteria to judge autoethnography than the post-hoc imposition of evaluative techniques associated with the parallel perspective. (2003, pp. 11-12)

Finally, while there has been argument that autoethnography is self-indulgent, narcissistic and academic “navel-gazing” (Sparkes, 2000), I would counter by suggesting that there is within any research a degree of the personal. When a scholar chooses to study a certain social phenomenon or milieu, there is a stated interest in that phenomenon and, even further, an assumption that there will be an interest on the part of the readers. Autoethnographic research declares its intentions of including the personal, rather than proffering an “objective” epistemology that is likewise steeped in the personal. Regardless of perspective and paradigmatic positioning, Sparkes has argued that there will be,

tensions, contradictions, conflicts and differences of interpretation about what the criteria are and about the meaning of quality of particular pieces of published

research should not cause undue anxiety....If autoethnography and narratives of self do nothing else but stimulate us to think about social issues in the sociology of sport, then they will have made a significant contribution to the field. (2000, p. 38)

With that background provided, I now turn to the specific modes of data collection, transcription, and validation utilized in this study.

Recruitment of Participants

As the primary focus of this research was to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of the participants, only a small number of them was considered. Prior to and throughout the study, I was a member of two different running groups (one mainstream and one categorical) and both were constituted of runners participating in anything from short distance to marathon races. My involvement in these two groups provided the opportunity for the self-analytic component of this research. Simply put, in these situations, I was the participant. Additionally, six participants were recruited for the guided conversations and five individuals took part in the written personal narrative component. Data were collected between July 15 and October 1, 2005.

Recruitment criteria required that all participants be residents of Canada and, at the time of the study, be active within the marathoning milieu. Active in this case was defined as having completed at least one marathon or longer-distance race in the preceding two years and having the intention of participating in a similar event in the summer or fall of 2005 and/or spring of 2006. Involvement in mainstream or categorical sport groups was not considered essential; indeed such (non-)participation was considered in the analysis. Finally, participation in the research was limited to individuals

who self-identified as gay or queer though the degree to which they were “out” was not stipulated.

Conversation participants were recruited through purposive sampling via direct contact with two different gay sport organizations—the Ottawa and Toronto Front Runners (both running groups are for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons). As the names suggest, the groups are located in Ottawa and Toronto respectively. At the time of the research, the Ottawa Front Runners had an active membership of close to 30 runners with 5 members actively participating in marathon events; the Toronto club had a membership of approximately 80 individuals who ranged from beginning runners to marathon participants.

Working through each club’s executive, an email was sent to the members explaining the research project and requesting interested participants to complete a recruitment form. This form worked to gather general demographic information and also acted as a screening process. Individuals meeting the set criteria were contacted via email for further explanation of the study and the arrangement of the initial conversation. Each participant was asked to commit to the possibility of two conversations, each approximately two hours in length. The Recruitment form is attached as Appendix A. This method of recruitment resulted in six participants—three from Ottawa, and three from the greater Toronto area.

For the personal narratives portion of the study, participants were contacted in one of two ways. The first group was contacted through a website (www.outsports.com) which in 2004 boasted a membership of 7,000 worldwide, with approximately 200 Canadians registered (C. Zeigler, personal communication, December 13, 2004). A

preliminary search of the website revealed a number of registered members who listed marathon running as an interest or hobby. The operators of the Outsports website expressed an interest in assisting in the recruitment of individuals via a notification on the website, which was posted on August 3, 2005. This posting resulted in one potential participant who in the end was excluded from the research as he did not meet the residency requirement.

The second mode of recruitment was through direct contact with coordinators of Canadian Frontrunner organizations in Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Peterborough and Vancouver. Working through the club's executive, an email was sent to the members explaining the research project and requesting interested individuals to contact me via email. All individuals interested in participating in this component of the study were asked to complete the recruitment form—a screening process similar to that used with the conversation participants. Eight individuals expressed interest in participating, each of whom met the recruitment criteria. Written narratives and consent forms were received from five of the eight individuals (two withdrew from the study due to time constraints and contact was lost with the eighth).

Research Instruments

Research Journal

A research journal was the primary instrument used to record my own experiences of the marathoning milieu. This journal was rooted in personal experiences participating in mainstream and categorical running groups in preparation for the 2005 Toronto Waterfront Marathon; at the time of the study I was an active member of both the Ottawa

Front Runners and the Running Room Racing Team, the latter being a mainstream running group for non-elite athletes. Borrowing from traditional ethnographic data collection techniques, a research journal was used to record detailed field notes of each setting and personal notes of my own interactions within the milieu. The field notes taken were descriptive, detailed, and included a good deal of reflexivity (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Furthermore, in keeping with the academic nature of the present study, theoretical and methodological considerations were also recorded throughout my time in the field. Given the nature of marathoning, research journal entries were also recorded following training runs completed on my own, as well as race experiences that occurred within the time frame of the study.

Of particular interest in the recording of field notes was the exploration of gender and sexuality performance and the verification of whether or not, as previous literature had suggested, there was re/production of dominant gender and sexuality norms. I also sought to make particular note of the embodied experiences of marathon training and racing. This data collection was achieved through self-observation and focus on interactions with and between other members of the respective groups.

Conversation Guide

Conversations were conducted with the six recruited participants, using a conversation guide that outlined topics and questions to be explored. The general topics were: (a) marathon experiences; (b) sexuality and sport; (c) gender and sport; and (d) body and health. Please see Appendix B for a copy of the conversation guide. While the order of conversation topics and questions was directed by the natural flow of the interaction, the two conversations were separated into two roughly equal segments; the

first explored marathon experiences and sexuality, and the second, notions of gender and sport, and constructions of the body and health.

Personal Narrative Guide

Participants in the personal narrative component were asked to write about their own experiences as self-identified gay or queer marathoners. More specifically, general topics were provided in the form of a Personal Narrative Guide (please see Appendix C). Participants were asked to take into consideration: (a) motivation for marathon participation; (b) being gay/queer in the marathon community; (c) being a man in sport; and (d) body and health. The relative independence of composing the personal narrative provided the opportunity for the participants to determine what was most important for them to share. No length requirement was stipulated and participants were asked to compose and transmit the document electronically. Final submissions from the five participants ranged from two to seven pages.

Data Collection

Reflexive Ethnography

Qualitative materials related to my own experiences were collected with the help of an electronic research journal; my journal was comprised of detailed field notes from participation with mainstream and categorical running groups, as well as training runs and races completed independent of these groups. Given the nature of the study and my role as participant observer, the recording of field notes occurred upon completion of each practice session or race. Journal entries were written based on memory recall of my observations and experiences. The first two weeks of data collection served as a pilot to

determine the most effective means of recording my observations. As a result, a research journal template was created which included space for demographic and practice details (i.e., specific workout), observations/self-analysis, and theoretical and methodological considerations.

Pilot Conversations

Two “pilot” conversations were conducted with two runners from the Ottawa Front Runners, as a way to test the Conversation Guide in exploring the topics most relevant to the present study. Furthermore, these pilot conversations tested my effectiveness as a “conversationist.” I found that what I shared with participants (i.e., shared sport participation and self-identified sexuality) worked to provide an initial comfort zone and allowed me access to these participants with little to no apprehension on their part. The pilot interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. They resulted in some changes to the Conversation Guide as well as to my approach to the conversations themselves.

Guided Conversations

Once the Conversation Guide was revised, the conversations began. The interested and qualified participants were contacted to confirm their interest in participating in at least two conversations, each of approximately 90 minutes in length. Once this interest was confirmed, the initial conversation was scheduled to take place at a location of the participant’s choice. A copy of the Participant Consent Form was emailed to the participant for their review. Prior to the beginning of each conversation, the purpose of the study was reviewed, and the participant was provided with the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix D). Participants were reminded that participation in the

study was strictly voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw at any time. In compliance to the guidelines established by the University of Ottawa Health Sciences and Science Research Ethics Board, two copies of the Consent Form were provided for signing. Each participant kept one copy and the other copy was stored in a locked filing cabinet. Following completion of these administrative duties, the conversations began. The conversations ranged in length from 75 minutes to 140 minutes. To establish and maintain a conversational format, participants were encouraged to ask questions of me and my experiences which most did. I also involved myself in the process by sharing my own personal experiences as a queer marathoner in order to acquire more in-depth information from the participants and to create more spontaneity within the information exchange. I sought to avoid as much as possible a “clinical” or “positivist” type of interview where I simply asked a pre-determined list of questions to which the participant would respond. Effort was made to keep a relaxed and informal atmosphere during the conversations, ensuring that they remained primarily participant-directed. Almost every participant commented on his comfort level within the conversational setting as well as on my listening abilities.

All conversations were recorded with the use of a digital audio-recorder. Brief written notes were also taken throughout the interview noting information that could not be captured in recording (e.g., body language, inferences and inflections, environmental distractions, style of dress). These notes were maintained and incorporated into the transcription of the recorded data.

Following completion of each initial conversation, each participant was sent a verbatim transcription of his conversation for review. In each case, the transcription was

sent within two weeks of the conversation itself. Participants were asked to review the transcript to ensure that it adequately represented the actual conversation, and to provide an opportunity to edit, revise or delete any statements that they had made. I also reviewed the transcripts prior to the second conversation to highlight any item that I wished to re-address. In every case, the second conversation began with an exploration of one or more items raised in the first conversation. In no instance did a participant asked to have any statement deleted. Any requested revisions were for purposes of clarity only (as example, a misunderstood word from recording to transcription). A similar process was followed for the second guided conversation, in that a verbatim transcription was emailed to participants for their review. At that time, participants were asked to self-select a non-identifying pseudonym (i.e., not a nickname that would allow others to recognize them) to be used throughout the remainder of the study. Exactly half the participants chose to use their own names while the other half either self-selected a pseudonym or asked to have one assigned to them. Hard copies of the transcripts were stored in coded file folders with electronic versions burned to a CD-ROM. All data were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Personal Narratives

Potential participants responding to the recruitment posting on www.outsports.com and through the direct email to the Canadian Frontrunner groups were contacted via email to determine continued interest. Further information was provided regarding the specific topics of interest to the study as well as specific mention of the voluntary basis of the study; participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time from the study. Through the initial screening process, only one interested

participant was declined; this was due to residency. An electronic version of the Participant Consent Form was emailed to the remaining participants; they were asked to review the Consent Form and to email their consent prior to or at the same time as the submission of their personal narratives (please see Appendix E). Five participants took part in this facet of the data collection.

Participants were requested to submit their narratives electronically and no later than September 15, 2005. Participants were asked to self-select a pseudonym. They were also asked to omit from their submitted narratives any specific personal references to other individuals. In one case, a narrative was edited to delete specific reference to a third party. The narrative was sent to the participant for his review and approval, which was subsequently received. Once all the narratives had been saved in MS Word, they were recorded onto a CD-ROM and both hard copies and the CD-ROM were stored in a locked cabinet.

Data Transcription and Validation

Data collected through the guided conversations were transcribed verbatim into MS Word, and then, following approval from each participant, transferred into QSR NUD*IST Vivo, a qualitative research software. I personally transcribed each of the guided conversations to allow immersion into the information gathered. Furthermore, written notes taken during the conversations were also incorporated into the transcripts to provide a more “complete” picture of the data. That being said, I do recognize that the guided conversation transcript as a text is open to various interpretations with every reading. The nuances of the conversations recorded in written notes were detailed as

much as possible in the transcripts as well as those non-verbal moments in the conversation that were important to the context. Such was accomplished through a notation system that borrowed from ideas proposed by Poland (2002) who provides a sample notation system such that ambiguities in interpretation are avoided. As example, “the careful inclusion of pregnant pauses and interjections such as “yes-mm” and “uh-huh” could indicate receipt or assent (or resistance, in the case of refusals to provide the usual affirming responses to the speech of another” (p. 638). Like the conversations, the five personal narratives and my research journal entries were also transferred into QSR NUD*IST Vivo. After all the materials were transcribed, they were then subjected to thematic and discourse analyses.

Data Analysis

Though presented sequentially within this chapter, the analysis of data occurred concurrently with the data collection, though informally in order to allow a continued evolution of the conversation guide. The analysis of the present study drew on qualitative data analysis techniques beginning with a thematic analysis in which the varying sets of data were organized into main topics (e.g., gender, sexuality, “the body”). Once these main topics were established, the information was then sorted into more specific themes (or “nodes” to use the QSR NUD*IST Vivo terminology). Once all materials were sorted into themes and sub-themes, the refined thematic analysis allowed for the emergence of certain patterns, dominant ideas, popular terms, and preponderant ways of broaching the conversation topics. The results of this thematic analysis were summarized in a non-conventional way. That is, the main results from the study were written in the form of a “story” about a hypothetical gay runner. Furthermore, the story was written by putting

together pieces of the actual narratives collected throughout the study. The story ended up as a “composite story” profiling a hypothetical gay runner called “Don.” Once the composite story was completed, the participants were provided an opportunity to review this composite story of Don. Each participant was asked to comment as to his ability to either see himself or someone he knew in the composite story. Of 11 participants in total, 6 asked to see the story; each of these 6 indicated that it was acceptable and reflective of his experiences, either in whole or in part. As one participant noted: “Congratulations on summarizing this so eloquently. I wouldn’t change a thing. I see many of my thoughts reflected in your document, and enjoyed the perspective you’ve worked in from other folks” (Shawn M., personal communication, November 9, 2005). The composite story that was created and circulated is attached as Appendix F.

Once the thematic analysis was completed, qualitative materials were submitted to discourse analysis. As such, the materials were interrogated as to the appropriation of or resistance to dominant discourses. Of particular interest were intersections of power, discursive constructions of sexuality, gender, the body and health, and the participants’ position within discourse. Poststructuralist gender theories, queer theory, and a Foucauldian perspective of the body framed this discourse analysis.

It must be noted up front that using queer theory as a lens is not without its critics. Gamson (2000) has discussed the challenges of “queer” qualitative research, noting that the very definition of queer denies the existence of identity categories used to define participants and researchers. He even argues that there cannot be a queer approach to qualitative research suggesting that identity “cannot be taken as a starting point for social research, can never be assumed by a researcher to be standing still, ready for its close-up”

(Gamson, 2000, p. 356). While I agree with Gamson's argument, I also believe that a self-claimed identity, however ambiguous, however fluid and changing, can be used as a starting point for autoethnographic research. I would also suggest that in the case of my research, I have not sought to define "gay" or "queer"; rather, I was interested in individuals who self-identified as "gay" or "queer" (whatever their criteria may be to warrant such self-identification). In using such a strategy, I have by-passed definitional issues although I remained (and remain) very conscious of them and the challenge they can represent for research. Using a queer lens, I have explored various notions of identity, subversion and transgression. My analysis followed an alternative strategy that is similar to one suggested by Gamson, in what is ultimately his support, however cautionary, for a link between queer theory and qualitative research:

Similar substantive directions can be expected as other social processes and institutions are subjected to an analysis that asks not just how gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people fit into this picture but how particular institutions work to heterosexualize and gender, and with what material effects. (2000, p. 358)

My use of queer theory as a lens with which to examine marathon runners self-identifying as gay or queer also addressed pleas made by a number of scholars. Pronger (1999) has suggested an analytic framework combining postmodern, queer, and gay theoretical perspectives. In a 1996 paper, Messner also noted the usefulness of a queer theoretical perspective that seeks to deconstruct the construction of heterosexuality in sport. He stated that the aim should be to "uncover the mechanisms at work in the social construction of whiteness, of hegemonic masculinity, of heterosexuality" (1996, p. 231).

Davidson and Shogan (1998) similarly urged scholars to consider a queer theoretical perspective that would deconstruct sexuality and dominant ideologies within sport.

More recently, Abdel-Shehid (2005) has explored the possibility of analyzing sport through a queer lens, and more specifically of deconstructing black masculinity, its link to heterosexuality and the sexualization of black athletes. Abdel-Shehid has proposed that deconstructing sport using “black queer theory” would engage questions of visibility and recognition and would provide an alternative reading of sport culture and black masculinity: “[This] might allow us to re-read black masculinity in sport, so that we may be able to hear, see and affirm what exists both underneath and beyond the silences” (2005, p. 149). Although I agree that there is a need to re-read black masculinity in sport and that sport research in general has not paid attention to issues of race and racialization, I do contest Abdel-Shehid’s use of the adjective “black” in front of “queer.” If queer is considering, as he has suggested, “something differently than we might initially read it, especially paying attention to the way that ‘normal’ sexuality is created” (2005, p. 147) there should not be a need to include race identifiers. Abdel-Shehid’s addition weakens queer theory, which purports to be inclusive and therefore to already take into account the fact that queers do not form a homogenous group and that axes of difference (class, race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, etc.) must be considered, however unstable they may be. In the end the premise of fluid identities refutes the need for any further (seemingly stable) identity labeling.

That being said, my use of queer theory is complemented by the use of a number of concepts from poststructuralist gender theories as well as Foucault’s perspective on the body. Butler’s notion of “performativity” (1990, 1999), in particular, was applied to

explore the “performance” of gender and the re/production of current forms of dominant heterosexual and/or gay masculinity within the marathoning milieu. Specifically, the notion of performance allowed a deconstruction of traditional gender norms established by heteronormativity, and recognized through the appropriation of dominant and/or resistant discourses. The notion of performativity has been applied to sport previously in a similar effort to deconstruct gender ideology (Anderson, 2002; Price & Parker, 2003).

The discourse analysis of the materials collected for this study relied on Foucault’s concept of discourse which suggests that discourse is always present in two forms: dominant and resistant. Dominant discourse is considered as the collective ideas in society that constitute (or regulate) the norm. Dominant discourse includes written text, individual interaction, popular culture, etc.; through dominant discourse, typical behaviours and performance expectations are established. Any discourse that differs from the dominant discourse is considered resistant. The possibility of popular and resistant discourses re/cited by the participants was explored particularly in relation to gender and sexuality, as well as the Foucauldian concepts of power/knowledge, discipline, surveillance, and technologies of the self.

It is the connectedness and fluidity of the three theoretical perspectives that became important in the analysis. Interrogating the qualitative materials using this approach helped draw some comparisons between the empirical findings of my research and those offered in the existing bodies of literature. Furthermore, this interrogation also helped to explore the usefulness of the application of such a theoretical framework to the specific milieu studied and sport in general. Finally, the selected methodological approach was actively interrogated for strengths and limitations with the intention of

contributing to the seemingly on-going debate surrounding autoethnographic and other reflexive and autobiographical research methodologies used in the study of sport.

Ethical Considerations

Approval from the University of Ottawa Health Sciences and Science Research Ethics Board was sought and received (see Appendix G). In compliance with their regulations, principles of anonymity and confidentiality were ensured from the commencement of the study. Anonymity was offered to all participants through the opportunity to select (or have assigned) a pseudonym. Some participants expressed the desire to not remain anonymous and insisted that their real names be used. For other participants, pseudonyms were used as identifiers in all written documentation and other materials that were developed out of the present study. Confidentiality was ensured through the careful handling of all documentation, including the secure storage of all research notes, recordings, transcripts, and written personal narratives.

Recognizing that I was in a position of trust toward participants by virtue of being seen as a university-educated researcher, all written and verbal communication prior to, during, and after the study was framed in such a way that participants remained directive. The voluntary-basis of the study was emphasized prior to each guided conversation, and prior to the acceptance of the written personal narratives. Out of respect to the members of the respective groups that were included in my reflexive observations, no specific incidents or behavioural traits were included that may indicate a specific identity or personality to purveyors of this research.

With respect to the conversations, I believe that the conversational approach (which was participant-directed as much as possible and in which I also shared personal information and experiences) worked to create a comfortable and safe atmosphere; I made every effort to ensure an empathetic and respectful environment. The Conversation Guide was used to frame each of the guided conversations. At the beginning of each conversation, the participants were reassured that they did not have to answer *any* question that happened to cause any discomfort. At no time did any of the participants indicate any discomfort with any of the questions that were asked. Moreover, participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. Finally, I remained sensitive to the participants' sexuality and varying definitions and understandings of such, as well as the differing understandings of gender that each participant shared. Ultimately, it is my hope that the participants gained something from their participation in the study. Of utmost concern to me as a researcher was that all of my participants were treated with care and dignity; I am confident that such was indeed the case throughout the study given comments that were offered, and thanks that was received for allowing each to share his unique story. Each participant was offered a copy of the two articles summarizing the results of the study, and one participant has invited me to speak about my findings to a group of queer runners at the Outgames in August, 2006.

PART II:
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER V**“WHEN YOU DO THE DISTANCE, NO ONE REALLY CARES”:
GAY MARATHONERS’ EXPERIENCES AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF
SEXUALITY AND GENDER**

Constructing Sexuality and Gender in Marathonning

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the experiences of 12 gay and queer males within the sport of marathoning. Working within a poststructuralist paradigm, our interest was in the discursive constructions of sexuality and gender, and how each was experienced and performed within this individual sport milieu. Gathered through guided conversations, written personal stories, and the first author's reflexive research journal, narratives were analyzed thematically and then submitted to discourse analysis. While revealing the subjects' recitation of dominant discourses regarding gay sexuality, the analysis also suggested marathoning as a "queer positive" space for these subjects. Analysis also uncovered some resistance to dominant constructions of sporting masculinity, and at the same time an emergent masculinity specific to the marathon context that re/produces a traditional gender order. Though adopting subject positions within dominant discourses, subjects also can be seen to "blur" traditional rigid boundaries in relation to sexuality and gender and can be seen to contest heteronormative assumptions of sport, within this particular sport milieu.

“When You Do the Distance, No One Really Cares”:

Gay Marathoners’ Experiences and Constructions of Sexuality and Gender

Academic literature exploring the experiences of gay men in sport has increased in the past decade and includes studies of closeted athletes in mainstream sport organizations (Le Blanc 2002; Pronger 1990a), categorical sport clubs and experiences of participants therein (Elling, De Knop, and Knoppers 2001, 2003; Hekma 1998; King and Thompson 2001; Price and Parker 2003; Pronger 2000b; Waitt 2004; Wellard 2002) and, more recently, examinations of openly gay athletes in mainstream sporting spaces (Anderson 2002, 2005). These texts work to debunk the myth that gay men do not participate in sport while revealing the complexities of sexuality and gender in these particular social milieus.

Through our particular research, we seek to give voice to individual sport participants as much of the existing research of gay sexuality and sport has involved team sport milieus. More specifically, in this article, we focus on the marathon context and the experiences therein of gay and queer Canadian male marathoners (including the first author). Using poststructuralist lenses, we explore the discursive constructions of sexuality and gender within the narratives gathered from our group of marathoners, and more specifically, how embodied involvement within the marathon context may shape the constructions of sexualized and gendered identities. Such questions are rooted in our subjectivities as athlete and ex-athlete, as queers, and, most importantly, in the case of the first author, as queer marathoner.

Gay Athletes and Hegemonic Sporting Masculinities

Scholarship within our academic domain has largely suggested sport as a “male preserve” (Dunning 1986). Through its rituals, traditions and practices, most sporting spaces appear to be contexts in which power, physical aggression, force, dominance, winning and hard muscled bodies have been celebrated (Bryson 1990; Dunning 1986; Hargreaves 1986; Messner 1990a; Whitson 1990; Young and White 2000) thus promoting and rewarding “orthodox” performances of masculinity (Anderson 2005; Bryson 1990; Connell 1995; Pronger 1990b). Because of this re/production of orthodox masculinity within sporting spaces, a gender order is supported that relegates femininity and “alternative” masculinities to a subordinate position.

Sporting masculinity has also been considered from the perspective of Gramsci’s hegemony theory (1971). Hegemonic masculinity suggests that there is a certain type of masculinity that will always emerge at the top of the gender order. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity in whatever form almost always assumes heterosexuality (Connell 1995). As a result, gay athletes have been defined as a paradox—while embodying many of the “masculine” traits necessary to participate and be successful within sporting spaces, they also subvert orthodox masculinity since they have same-sex desires (Anderson 2002; Pronger 1990b). This expected performance of masculinity coupled with heteronormative assumptions has led most scholars to argue that the institution of sport is highly homophobic (Griffin 1998; Hekma 1998; Messner 1992; Pronger 1990a) and successful in maintaining orthodox masculinity (Anderson 2002).

While a majority of the research on sporting masculinities has revolved around team sport milieus, re/production of hegemonic masculinity appears to also apply to

individual sport milieus (Adams 1997; Wellard 2002), including distance running. Based on the demographic profiling of marathon participants, it has been suggested that distance running privileges white, middle-class, able-bodied males (Abbas 2004; Serravallo 2002), and that such men may turn to distance running as a way to regain a masculine identity that is no longer attained through participation in the other social realms due to the changing (and supposedly “emasculating”) nature of familial, occupational, and financial roles (Smith 2000). These studies aside, the performance of masculinity within distance running and marathoning is largely unexplored, particularly when also considering queer sexuality.

It has been argued that gay athletes are subject to, and often active participants in, a “culture of silence” primarily because of the hegemonic nature of orthodox sporting masculinity. Active participation in the culture of silence can involve gay athletes remaining closeted within presumably heterosexual sporting contexts and/or gay athletes continuing to participate in homophobic language and behaviors within their respective sporting context even after disclosing their homosexual identity to (ostensibly) heterosexual teammates (Anderson 2002, 2005; Hekma 1998; Le Blanc 2002; Lenskyj 1991; Pronger 1990a). Another manner in which athletes may be active participants in the culture of silence is by performing the form of masculinity dominant within the specific sporting context of which they are part. Specifically, research proposes that if gay athletes disclose their sexuality in mainstream sport milieus, there is a greater chance of acceptance from their presumably heterosexual peers if the gay athletes embody masculine attributes specific to that sport (Anderson 2002, 2005; Hekma 1998; Le Blanc 2002; Pronger 1990b). The expected performance of more orthodox forms of sporting

masculinity seems not only to apply to mainstream sporting spaces but also, it has been said, to categorical sporting spaces as well.

Most likely a result of heteronormative assumptions and institutionalized homophobia in sport, there has been an on-set of categorical sport organizations and teams in Western society that has provided impetus for research (Elling, De Knop and Knoppers 2001, 2003; Hekma 1998; King and Thompson 2001; Price and Parker 2003; Pronger 2000b; Waitt 2004; Wellard 2002). Though providing a “safe” space for gay and lesbian athletes, categorical sport organizations have largely been criticized for re/producing dominant notions of sport (e.g., favoring victory over participation, competition over skill development, exclusiveness versus inclusiveness and social networking) rather than providing a truly alternative sporting experience (Elling et al. 2003; Pronger 2000a; Waitt 2003; Wellard 2002).

Categorical sport organizations have also been said to stifle performances of same-sex desires and “camp” behavior (Hekma 1998; Price and Parker 2003; Pronger 2000b; Wellard 2002) thus promoting hegemonic heterosexuality even within queer sporting spaces. This re/production of heteronormativity is often inextricably linked to an expected performance of stereotypical sporting masculinity. As Price and Parker commented in a study of a rugby team for (primarily) gay and bisexual men: “In an attempt to gain some level of acceptance for players, the club [was] co-opted into mainstream rugby and continues to endure discriminative (heterosexist) practices in order to remain unchallenged” (2003, 122). As a result of these heterosexist and homophobic practices that discourage overt performances of non-normative sexuality, it has been argued that much of the transformative potential held by gay athletes is lost; sport,

therefore, maintains its rigid orthodox masculinity (Anderson 2002; Pronger 2000b; Wellard 2002), even in “queer-friendly” sport organizations.

In an ethnographic study of a queer running club, van Ingen (2004) has suggested something quite different: the Toronto Front Runners might be seen to contest hegemonic notions of sport vis-à-vis overt performances of gay/queer sexuality within the contexts of group runs occurring in public spaces. Since sexuality and gender were not the primary focus of the study, however, possible contestation was not further investigated. In fact, beyond van Ingen’s research, academic inquiry of gay and queer participants in individual sports has remained limited.¹ This void has opened up an opportunity for inquiry into constructions of sexuality and gender within individual sport milieus; an opportunity which acted as impetus for our research into the lived experiences of gay and queer Canadian male marathoners and their discursive constructions of sexuality and gender within this particular sporting context.

De/Re/Constructing Marathonning: Queer and Poststructuralist Lenses

Situated (however temporarily) in an anti-positivist paradigm, we explored the lived experiences of marathoners through queer and poststructuralist lenses. We understand the poststructuralist perspective to be rooted in the notion of subjective meaning and an attempt to deconstruct language and texts that have become institutionalized, and thus presented as “truths.” Like Foucault, we see that these truths are merely re/iterations of dominant discourses that work to establish and maintain power relations: “Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And, it induces regular effects of power” (1980, 131).

Sexuality and sex/gender, when considered from a poststructuralist perspective, are suggested to be discursive constructions. Importantly, such discursive constructions are contextual; performances of sex/gender or sexuality are spatial and temporal, defined by contemporary dominant discourses and norms. Most often positioned along binary categories of masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual, performances (problematically) follow socially-established norms and therefore contribute to the maintenance of a normative social order (Butler 1999). Queer and poststructuralist gender theories seek to deconstruct the dominant notions of sexuality and sex/gender that are created through language and texts (Jagose 1996).

Queer theory works to destabilize “truths” rooted in heteronormative assumptions that often re/produce a homosexual/heterosexual binary that privileges heterosexuality as “normal.” Though difficult to define as it is ever evolving, queer calls into question “essential” sexed, gendered, and sexual identities, striving to destabilize discursive constructions of sexuality that come to be accepted as “natural” and that maintain a dominant/subordinate power relationship (Halperin 1995; Jagose 1996.) Queer claims diversity through its inclusiveness of any subject who somehow deviates from normative definitions of (sexual) desire (Giffney 2004) and who may choose to claim “queer” as an identity label. In academe, when applying a queer lens, Green has suggested that one works to reveal “queer cracks in the heteronormative façade (i.e., ‘queering’), and ‘decentering’ those regimes of ‘normality’ that bear on the sexual and gender status quo” (2002, 522). Though queer theory is not without its critics, its use as a lens with which to examine sport follows pleas made by a number of scholars (Davidson and Shogan 1998; Messner 1996; Pronger 1990a, 1999; Sykes 1998).

Poststructuralist gender theories argue that sex/gender is constituted through language and discourse, which work to create dominant/subordinate relationships based on traditional constructs of masculinity and femininity. Through discourse, sex/gender is constructed; this process begins the moment it is declared at birth that “it’s a girl/boy” (Butler 1990, 1999). One could argue that with the “advent” of medical technology, such inscription begins even earlier now. As such, rather than distinguishing sex from gender, Butler (1990, 1999) has argued that sex *is* gender and is re/produced in a specific manner, established and maintained through heteronormativity. Because of its repetition, sex/gender comes to be accepted as a naturalized or essential “identity.” Indeed, there are regulated expectations of behavior that are sex/gender specific, as Butler has argued: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1990, 33).

The repeated acts of expected representations of gender is known as “performativity” (Butler 1990, 1999), which suggests that there is no “true” sex/gender identity, but rather expected performances of masculinity and femininity. Subjects are positioned within, and constructed through, dominant constructions of sexuality and sex/gender. On the one hand, dominant gender discourse categorizes and subordinates subjects that do not fit the male/masculine, female/feminine ideology. On the other hand, considering resistant possibilities and given that sex/gender (and sexuality) are performed, there remains the possibility of subversion when a subject performs in a way that does not align with social norms. As Salih suggests, “There are ways of ‘doing’ one’s identity which will cause even further trouble for those who have a vested interest

in preserving existing oppositions such as male/female, masculine/feminine, gay/straight and so on” (2002, 45). Similarly, Foucault has noted that dominant discourses invoke power but that power is multiple, dispersed and, as such, holds the possibility for resistance.

Considering a social milieu such as sport through these theoretical lenses provides an opportunity to uncover discursive constructions as well as performances of sexuality and sex/gender. The concept of performativity has been particularly useful to a body of scholarship that has sought to deconstruct the experiences of queer athletes within environments governed by hegemonic masculinity (Anderson 2002; Price and Parker 2003; Wellard 2002). We believe that by turning a similar critical lens to an individual sport milieu makes our research a unique contribution to the socio-cultural studies of sexuality and sporting masculinity.

From the Inside Out: A Reflexive Ethnographic Approach

To access the stories of our participants in the marathon context, we adopted a reflexive ethnographic approach. Reflexive ethnographies, according to Ellis and Bochner, range along a continuum: “from starting research from one’s own experience to ethnographies where the researcher’s experience is actually studied along with other participants...” (2000, 740). Here, the first author has always been fascinated by marathoning, both as a participant and observer and this constitutes our starting point. In particular, we remain intrigued by how sexuality is experienced within the marathon context. We were also interested in how masculinity is constructed within this individual sport experience. How do embodied experiences constitute sexual and sex/gender

subjectivities? Such questions provided the impetus for this research and required a pertinent methodological approach. As such, an ethnographic approach was adopted, an approach which has been suggested to be particularly relevant to the study of sport (Denison and Rinehard 2000; Holt 2003; Sparkes 2002).

Beyond the first author's experiences as a self-identified queer male in marathoning, we also draw on the experiences of 11 other runners who self-identified as gay or queer. Participants were recruited via direct communication with categorical running groups (Front Runners) and a posting on a website for gay athletes and sport enthusiasts (www.outsports.com). Of the 11 recruited participants, 3 resided in Ottawa, 5 in the greater-Toronto area, and three in British Columbia. Recruitment criteria required that all participants be residents of Canada and, at the time of the study, be active in marathoning (i.e., had completed at least one marathon or longer-distance race in the previous 2 years while preparing to participate in a similar event within the following 12 months). Involvement in "mainstream" or categorical sport groups was not considered essential although 8 of 12 were active participants in both types of sport group; those not active in a mainstream group were members of a Front Runners club. Mainstream groups varied from almost exclusively heterosexual to a seemingly equal representation of gay and straight sexualities. The average age of the participants was 36, all identified as Euro-Canadian, and all had completed at least an undergraduate degree. Participants were employed in various occupations that would position most in the middle to upper socio-economic classes.

The narratives we interrogate here were collected through guided conversations and written personal narratives. We used a conversation guide and a personal narrative

guide, both focusing on the themes of marathon experiences as well as sexuality and gender in sport. The first author also maintained a reflexive research journal over the two and one-half months of the study. The study was conducted following approval from the University of Ottawa Health Sciences and Science Research Ethics Board.

Once the qualitative data were collected, all conversation transcripts, written narratives, and personal journal entries were imported into QSR NUD*IST Vivo and coded. The qualitative materials were submitted first to a thematic analysis and second, to discursive analysis. The thematic analysis allowed us to sort, organize and identify the main ideas or themes emerging from the qualitative materials and in relation to the conversation and written topics favored in the study.

Working along a poststructuralist line, qualitative materials were also submitted to discourse analysis. Drawing primarily from Foucault's concept of discourse, which is interested in how discursive fields work to shape or constitute subjects through the appropriation of dominant and/or resistant discourses. Foucault argues that discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention" (1972, 49). Discourse analysis, informed by poststructuralist theory, works to uncover the interpellation of subjects by dominant discourses (Hardin 2001; Weedon 1997; Wright 1995) and their negotiation of these discourses. With this understanding, we interrogated the participants' narratives to document how they, as "subjects" (Butler 1990, 1999), positioned and constructed themselves within dominant or alternative/resistant discourses, particularly in regards to sexuality and gender. We were interested in the interpellation of these subjects by discourses as evidenced by their constructions of

sexuality and gender within the sporting space under study. We inquired about recitation or reproduction of dominant discourses that establish or maintain binary categories of heterosexual/homosexual and masculine/feminine (thus further naturalizing the idea of fixed gender and sexual identities). Through a queer lens, we explored the narratives and how (if at all) subjects constructed notions of identity, subversion and transgression in their lived experiences. The application of queer theory was complemented by the use of poststructuralist gender theories and in particular Butler's concept of performativity (1990, 1999). Drawing on such a theoretical perspective allowed us to come to some understanding of the underlying assumptions of traditional gender subjectivities. Generally, our poststructuralist discourse analysis helped us locate the "truths" that shaped the subjects' understandings of their social realm and their subject position therein, as well as to uncover power relations at play in this social milieu.

Once the analysis had been completed, the participants were provided an opportunity to read a brief "story" that we created with portions of the participants' narratives. The "composite story" was meant to summarize the main constructions and experiences discussed by the participants. Providing this story to the participants was a way for us to verify whether we had adequately captured these constructions. Each participant was asked to comment as to his ability to recognize himself (in full or in part) in the story presented. All who read the story suggested that it was representative of them and accurately reflected the ideas and experiences that they had shared. Excerpts from the narratives are used in the present paper to illustrate the various constructions of sexuality and gender within the marathon context. As required by some participants, pseudonyms are used to protect their identity.

Within the broader topics of sexuality and gender, themes fairly unique to individuals emerged, including tokenism, homoeroticism, and age-related issues. At the same time, there were many ideas about and experiences of the marathon context that emerged in fairly homogeneous ways. Our analysis is focused on these prevalent and consistent themes. Specifically, we explore self-acceptance and marathoning (i.e., “coming out”), the construction of the marathon context as a “queer positive” space, and the construction(s) of “marathon masculinity” through bodily representations and sporting behaviors.

“Coming Out” Stories: Self-Acceptance and Marathoning

Within the general topic of sexuality, the participants’ narratives were largely located within “traditional” discursive constructions—constructions that work to re/produce the hetero/homo binary. As such, naturalized categories of sexuality were generally unchallenged. In other words, there was evidence in the narratives of an unquestioned acceptance of “gay” sexuality in line with traditional definitions. Subjects primarily self-identified as “gay,” though two chose “queer” as an identity label; regardless, all discursively constructed their identity as “openly gay” within the marathon context. That being said, being gay within this sport milieu was also seen as being more or less “irrelevant,” but not something that was hidden. Indeed, most subjects linked their involvement in marathoning with self-acceptance; “coming out” stories within and beyond the marathon context were prevalent in the qualitative materials gathered. More specifically, self-acceptance was connected to membership in categorical running groups. All participants were members of a Canadian Front Runner organization and ran with

their group at least once per week. The participants' discursively constructed the club as an important social network through which they encountered other gay male runners. The availability of this social network and the "safe" sporting space that was experienced therein were important in the coming out process, particularly for those subjects who had not begun coming out prior to joining the group. The following excerpts illustrate well the role played by the Front Runners in the initial coming out process of a number of participants:

A gay running group was an obvious bonus to someone emerging from the closet. From a combination of not being a good runner and fear of finally acknowledging my being gay, I almost chickened out. Fortunately I didn't, and with lots of encouragement from the group, I was soon hooked on running. (Doug)

While very accepting of myself and those perceived as different, I was essentially still living in a heterosexual and non running world. Gay role models were few and far between, and the only known bisexual in town was high on speed, abusive and certainly not the kind of person I wanted to identify with. (Wolf)

For others, though the coming out process may have begun (or taken place) prior to initial involvement with the Front Runners, the categorical running group was suggested to provide a space where a greater comfort with sexuality was gained. Leigh's commentary is a good example of this:

In a sense the Front Runners did help because first of all it gave me an opportunity.... Yes, gay athletes. And yeah, it had a really profound influence on allowing me to express one very important part of my, of who I am. And to say, "I'm a gay athlete." (Leigh)

Whether the Front Runners provided impetus for initial coming out experiences or led participants to a further acceptance of their sexuality, the narratives related to the queer sporting space offered by the Front Runners suggested that there was a greater focus on the creation of a strong social network, with sport performance being secondary. This finding speaks to the alternative experience of categorical clubs and teams and contrasts with other findings suggesting that sporting hegemonies are re/produced within these milieus, often resulting in gay or queer sexuality being stifled or downplayed (Elling, et al. 2003; Price and Parker 2003; Pronger 2000b; Waitt 2003; Wellard 2002). As such, the Front Runner context seemed to provide gay and queer marathoners a space in which self-acceptance was heightened, as summarized by Wolf's sentiment:

With the passion and strength of a runner, I stepped into the social world around me and discovered a few gay runners in my midst and a gay runner organization called Front Runners International. It was a meaningful way for me to identify with being gay and to embrace the gay world around me... I found myself more comfortable with identifying as a gay runner.

Marathoning as a "Queer Positive" Sporting Space

Beyond the categorical sporting space of the Front Runners, being a "gay" runner was also constructed as positively experienced within the other contexts of marathoning (i.e., mainstream training groups and races). While participation in mainstream training groups (groups most often associated with commercial running stores in the participants' city of residence) was primarily positioned within the narratives as providing more specific marathon training opportunities, the groups also acted as a segue for the

participants into the world of “straight” sport as openly gay men. It was within these contexts that the participants’ discursive constructions of their identities as “openly gay men” began to differ. It was also within the context of mainstream groups and marathon races that the ability to run 26.2 miles began to take on a more significant meaning for the participants.

All of the eight participants who ran with a mainstream marathon training group constructed themselves as “openly gay” subjects within that sporting space. Being openly gay was associated with behaviors that were same-sex oriented and, as such, linked to traditional constructs of gay sexuality. This included both the initial and continued act of disclosure (i.e., declaring gay and queer sexuality openly) to other members of the group, commenting on other male runners to self-identified heterosexual runners in their group (often in response to commentary made about female runners), and the inclusion of same-sex partners in club social activities and event-related functions. Rick’s comment on being “comfortable” is representative of the experiences of mainstream marathon groups, as constructed by most participants:

I find it’s very comfortable. I mean the joking around crosses gender and sexualities.... The kibitzing and the chatter that happens in between the work sections of a speed workout or the distance that you’re running together on a comfortable run or something like that, it’s very comfortable.

Other runners spoke of more covert performances of their gay sexuality: being open about sexuality if asked by others, wearing Front Runner clothing at mainstream group practices, and commenting in more subtle ways about other male runners. One participant noted that he had a tattoo of a runner and a rainbow flag on his calf—

something that is visible to other runners (at least for a good part of the Canadian running calendar).

Regardless of the extent, “gay” sexuality was constructed fairly consistently as something that is performed openly within mainstream sporting spaces. This seems to differ from what scholars to this point have considered as a pervasive “culture of silence” within the experiences of gay male athletes (Hekma 1998; Le Blanc 2002; Lenskyj 1991; Price and Parker 2003; Pronger 1990a, 1990b) and can likely be considered as transgressing heteronormative assumptions of sporting spaces (van Ingen 2004). The subjects in our study seemed neither to experience physical or verbal forms of homophobia within the marathoning context, nor to take part in what Anderson (2002) has referred to as a “don’t ask don’t tell silence” surrounding their sexual identity. In other words, within the narratives of this particular group of gay and queer athletes, sexuality was constructed as something that is performed openly and without repercussions. As such, this particular sporting space was very much constructed as a positive one in which gay men could participate. Acceptance of (or at least openness to) non-normative sexuality was also present in the participants’ stories about the marathon milieu and the heterosexual runners who dominate it. For instance, Shawn recounted the following exchange he had with his coach during a race, and Rick commented on the societal shift away from heterosexist assumptions:

Coach says, “You’re no fun at all today. You’re just no fun at all.” He said, “There’s all this beautiful scenery” meaning the girls in front. And I said, “Coach, there’s no scenery for me here.” And then he says, “How about this guy here?”

And I said, "In a minute! I'd take him home in a minute." And he said, "You know what. I think I would almost to. He looks that good." (Shawn)

Well, I think society is moving along a continuum of sexuality, it's not so much the major issue that it was 10 years ago. People don't see you as much as "other" as they used to. (Rick)

Both narratives seem to blur the rigid distinctions between normative and non-normative sexualities. Shawn's story also suggests a situation far removed from what has been argued as the one usually involving authority figures (e.g., coaches) and their use of derisory and homophobic language within sporting contexts (Parker 1996; Price and Parker 2003). Experiences such as those recounted by Shawn and Rick were common and used by many of the participants to construct the marathon sporting space (categorical or mainstream) as a space within which sexuality is "irrelevant." It is however crucial to note that such was not the case for all participants. For example, Mary Ann offered the following comment:

For the most part, I really don't differentiate myself as being gay when I run. I see myself as just another athlete. Where I find the distinction and find myself in uncomfortable situations is at pre- and post- race functions. Most functions are designed to accommodate mainstream heterosexual society. I feel I can't quite be myself (i.e., dancing with another man). I don't feel it would be acceptable or tolerated in these settings. To overcome this marginalization, I joined a gay running group. Being in a group, I feel comfortable being myself: safety in numbers. We also plan our own parties. I guess we're still marginalizing ourselves from mainstream society but it's not in isolation.

Mary Ann's commentary tends to confirm an observation about the importance of the Front Runner clubs to the participants. It also presents a contrasting opinion of mainstream sporting spaces within the marathon context and suggests the continued prevalence of heteronormative assumptions that subjugate non-normative sexualities within the marathon milieu. Finally, Mary Ann raises another idea that emerged from many narratives, that of "athleticism." Having the ability to run 26.2 miles was suggested by many of the participants to play a significant role in their "positive" experiences of this sport milieu. Having the physical skills to cover such a long distance seemed to act as a "normalizing" factor for many of the participants, leading to a common sentiment that, "When you do the distance, no one really cares" (Shawn). Rick further explains this sentiment:

You could see that the marathon had a certain aura around it. Like, she [a stranger encountered on the subway after the race] couldn't conceive doing it, and it was a big deal. And so there was that few seconds of fame where I was shining in her eyes for that reason. And for that same reason, I think, you know, you could run through Harlem in a pink dress on the marathon and nobody's going to give you any problems. Uh... because the fact that you're out there doing something that a lot of the people standing on the sidelines don't see as a task that they could accomplish for themselves, or if they could, they know what it takes to do it, to run a marathon.

The ability to run a marathon was portrayed in the narratives as a way to earn respect from others. In ways similar to the way in which gay male athletes have been suggested to gain "athletic capital" through sporting performance, and a greater

acceptance from teammates through the performance of contextually specific and expected orthodox sporting masculinities (Anderson 2002, 2005), possessing the mental and physical fortitude to run 26.2 miles was also constructed as gaining a sort of “capital” that places gay and queer marathoners on an equal playing field to heterosexual marathoners while also gaining them recognition from family, friends, and peers. Importantly, this athletic capital did not have a “normalizing function” as has been found in other studies. Indeed it did not result in a silencing of non-normative sexuality, nor did it seem to act as a catalyst for any sort of expected performance of masculinity, as has been suggested to be the case in existing scholarship (Anderson 2002, 2005; Hekma 1998; Price and Parker 2003; Pronger 1990a). At the same time, our results are nuanced as the subjects’ constructions of gender (and masculinity in particular) were not always removed from hegemonic gender ideology.

Marathoning and Masculinity: Constructing Marathon Bodies and Behaviors

Within the narratives gathered for our research, gender was primarily constructed drawing from traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, and linked to certain behaviors and body types. There was also some recognition of the possibility of multiple masculinities, in which the participants’ constructions of “marathon masculinity” can be located. There was also some evidence in two of the narratives of a resistance to the traditional sex/gender binary that links expected performances of gender to biological sex. In brief, divergent constructions of gender emerged from the narratives even though marathoning behaviors and bodies were discursively constructed in largely similar ways by the participants.

Within the narratives, the performance of masculinity within the marathon milieu was often constructed out of (and in contrast to) traditional notions of orthodox sporting masculinity. Primarily, marathoning was presented as an activity within which there was little or no interest in winning, a characteristic often linked with orthodox forms of sporting masculinity. There was a reported focus on personal achievement and success unrelated to comparison with other athletes who were positioned as peers rather than opponents, and respected for their willingness and ability to stand at the marathon start line. Physical contact and head-to-head competition were presented as non-existent in the experiences of this particular group of athletes. Instead, masculinity was constructed drawing from elements more or less specific to the marathon context (endurance, discipline, and strength of spirit), as illustrated in the following excerpt:

There's a level of discipline for the kind of things that we do, that, you know, that hockey players or baseball players don't ever experience because there's this sustained quality to it that they don't, that most people don't experience in their sport. You know? So, it's kind of on a, in some respects, it's kind of all by itself with a few other sports, like Tour de France-type activities or Ironman kind of stuff. (Shawn)

The marathon body was also discursively constructed as masculine, despite its suggested differences from traditional bodily representations of masculinity. Indeed, the marathoning body was depicted as lean, waif-like, under-fed, sinewy, thin and sleek, but with strong, muscled legs and very little upper body development. This body was conceptualized as capable of enduring the rigors of the sport, as reflected in the following excerpt from Bjorn's narrative:

It's definitely a masculine body. Because it's lean, it's efficient, it's muscular. It's masculine in terms of its accomplishment, but it's definitely—I don't want to say a frailer body, but a lighter body.

Though the traditional thin, sleek and “light” marathon body was constructed in contrast to representations of those masculine bodies dominant in mainstream sport and “health” media (Pronger 1990a, 2000a), the typical running body was considered as “masculine” primarily because of its perceived ability to run 26.2 miles. The gendered nature of the marathon body was tied to ability more than to image, as well as further distanced from traditional sporting masculinities. Conversation with Leigh brought these issues to light:

Male marathon runners are masculine. That they fit into a societal definition of masculinity in sport is much more difficult to see. In the same way that Lance Armstrong, for example, is a fantastic cyclist, I think that it's very difficult for most of America to think of him in the traditional ways of men and sport. And it's not just because he rides the Tour de France; it's because of what he looks like at the end of the Tour de France.... At the end of the day, his body is just not a masculine sports kind of body! (Leigh)

The constructions of what we would call “marathon masculinity” draw mostly on the notions of discipline and endurance. In that sense, it contrasts with traditionally-defined sporting masculinity, while not offering that much resistance vis-à-vis stereotypical conceptualizations. The insistence on the sport and its practitioners as masculine works to re/produce a traditional gender order, albeit involving an alternative notion of masculinity (Connell 1995; Hargreaves 1986; Pronger 1990b). Despite a stated

desire to move away from traditional gender constructs, there remained a prevalence of thinking among the subjects and it was best summarized by Shawn's comment that: "Whatever he looks like, it is still important for a man to act like a man" (Shawn).

Not monolithic, the construction of the marathoning body was quite distinct for two of the participants who conceptualized it as a "feminine" body when considering their own corporeality. Though their construction was located within traditional gendered representations of the corporeal, what made it interesting was that it was presented as being more or less a non-issue. In fact, potential "femininity" of the body was embraced:

I just don't fit the definition of how I conceptualize masculinity. My body would be considered feminine for sure. But personally, it doesn't bother me at all. So that's just it. And the fact that I realized that, you know, my body is actually good for something which is marathoning. (Jim)

Marathoning has sometimes been considered "gender-neutral" (Koivula 2001) as it is removed from the more traditionally masculine sports by virtue of its lack of body contact and physical aggression against opponents. At the same time, it is removed from more stereotypically feminine sports as there is no aesthetic component to marathoning—a component that has been suggested to be present in sports such as figure skating and gymnastics (Adams 1997; Koivula 2001; Pronger 1990a). Marathoning was constructed as a gender neutral sport by many participants and this was suggested to be a key difference from other sports. This gender neutrality transpired in the narratives in the fact that participants conceptualized marathon behaviors and bodies in multiple ways and did not seem to expect one dominant and rigid type of masculinity in their sport. By and

large, there appeared to be a feeling amongst the marathoners that gender (like sexuality, as we have seen previously) was not such a big issue:

I don't think it's an issue. I don't think people care at all. I think 90% of the people that do marathons are people who are doing it for themselves. Who are going for a time that's good for them or going for a time that's better than their previous marathons. Whether or not the person next to them is feminine or masculine, or gay or straight, or male or female, they don't really care. (Thomas)

Within the narratives, there was some evidence of a desire to move beyond traditional definitions of gender, some participants referring to it as "old fashioned" and others as "out dated" though this was not always consistent with their general considerations of gender in relation to marathoning behaviors and bodies. It is important to note that the traditional constructions of gender were not totally uncontested despite the fact that gender binaries remained most useful in the participants' constructions of gender. Perry's commentary reflects quite well this paradox:

Hmmm. What is "masculine?" I feel "masculine" when pushing myself to the limit in a marathon. I feel powerful, vibrant, relentless and whole. But then I also have a very alive "feminine" side which I cherish equally. I guess in my perfect world, there wouldn't be a definite line, more like an almost invisible dotted line which bridged rather than separated masculine from feminine.

Further reflecting the complexity of gender, it is clear that in the subjects' constructions of marathon behaviors and bodies as "masculine," hegemonic gender ideology was largely re/produced although traditional sporting masculinity was resisted. This reflects similar findings in other academic inquiries that suggest that even within

non-combative and non-team sport milieus, a form of masculinity specific to that sport is likely to emerge (Adams 1997; Anderson 2002; Wellard 2002; Wheaton 2000). In addition, some participants have constructed their own identity in the gray zone in between the traditional gender categories as was illustrated by Perry's statement that in a "perfect world, there wouldn't be a definite line" separating masculine from feminine. If we consider this in addition to relatively open performances of gay sexuality within the marathoning context, there does appear to be some blurring of traditional (gender and sexuality) binaries. Such suggests that perhaps an individual sport such as marathoning, and experiences therein, can be seen as a space of potential transgression—an idea which both supports and augments a suggestion made by Anderson when he stated that: "Hegemony in the athletic arena is not seamless, and sport will remain contested terrain for years to come" (2002, 875).

Conclusions

Throughout this article, we have presented the results of our examination of the constructions of sexuality and gender. While they have been presented as distinct, it is likely impossible to completely disentangle one from the other (Edwards 2005), in particular when considering the idea that the experiences of gay male athletes are largely governed by the expected performance of orthodox forms of sporting masculinity (Anderson 2002, 2005; Price and Parker 2003; Pronger, 1990a). Interestingly, such was not entirely the case as we found out following our analysis of the ideas and experiences re/constructed by our subjects. However, these re/constructions did largely suggest an interpellation of our subjects by dominant sexuality and gender discourses. In constructing "gay" sexuality within the marathon context (e.g., associated to the

performance of behaviors that were same-sex oriented), there is an adoption of subject positions within traditional discourses, reproducing binary categories (i.e., gay/straight). Similarly, the participants adopted subject positions within dominant gender discourses that re/produced the masculine/feminine binary. In both cases, there was no questioning of the nature of sexuality and gender binaries but rather constructions of the subjects' identity were either within or in-between binary categories. While sexuality and gender were considered as being "irrelevant" within the marathon context, both remained a construction based on "otherness" and difference. As such, "naturalized" identities, established by heteronormative assumptions, remained unchallenged and hegemonic gender ideology was largely re/produced.

Albeit located in relation to traditional binaries, there were alternative constructions of both sexuality and gender, and this points to the marathon milieu as a sporting space with transgressive potential. In particular, we found evidence of the discursive constructions of a "marathon masculinity" that draws on traditional gender ideology, but that is partially resistant to dominant or orthodox views of sporting masculinity. Furthermore, two of the participants considered their own marathon bodies as "feminine" which can also be seen to transgress heteronormative constructions of gender (Butler 1990, 1999). This suggests a potential softening of typically rigid boundaries, while highlighting the continued complexity of sex/gender issues and the difficulty of thinking outside the traditional gender binary.

We also saw the circulation of alternative sexuality discourses beyond the categorical sporting space of the Front Runners, suggesting a "queering" of mainstream sport, at least in the experiences of our subjects. Encouragingly, subjects constructed marathoning as a "queer positive" sporting space where non-normative sexuality could be openly performed and accepted. This contrasts with results from other studies suggesting that the presence of heterosexist traditions lead to a concealment of sexuality from mainstream peers in sport (Price and Parker 2003). Within the marathon milieu, there did

not appear to be a re/production of the “culture of silence” as reported in relation to other gay male athletes’ experiences of sport (Hekma 1998; Le Blanc 2002; Lenskyj 1991; Price and Parker 2003; Pronger 1990a, 1990b). Though sexuality was discursively constructed along traditional binaries, there was evidence of a blurring of sexuality boundaries in the subjects’ stories.

Much of the blurring of sexuality and sex/gender boundaries can likely be tied to what has been referred to as the “gender-neutrality” of the sport (Koivula 2001). Indeed, it was suggested by all participants that an individual sport is likely a far easier space than team sports within which to perform a gay/queer sexuality or alternative genders. It is likely that other characteristics also played a role in what were constructed as positive experiences by openly gay men in the marathon milieu. For example, all subjects were white, middle-class, able-bodied males. Having such characteristics has been suggested to gain individuals easier access to the marathon context (Abbas 2004; Serravallo 2000) and it arguably provides privileges that could be seen as “compensating” the risks and negative constitutions sometimes associated to being gay/queer. Furthermore, mention must be made of geography; all subjects resided within (or just outside of) large Canadian cities. As such, their experiences are specific to an urban setting in a country that can likely be considered as fairly progressive with respect to GLBTQ issues, which potentially has influence on subject experiences and discursive constructions.

It would be useful to continue research in this area to further explore gendered experiences in individual sport and in particular the experiences of gay men in varying individual sport milieus so as to continue to explore the extent to which heteronormativity may be (un)contested. As evidenced by the narratives gathered for our research, there is still much “chipping away” to be done at dominant sexuality and gender discourses that continue to marginalize too many individuals. We have revealed the transgressive potential within the marathon milieu through the experiences of gay and

queer male athletes therein. Hopefully our study contributes to the circulation of more alternative discourses on both the sport and academic discursive fields.

¹ Here, it is important to note that Wellard (2002) has contributed to the literature of gay and queer individual sport participants in an ethnographic study of a gay tennis club in England. In this study, he examined the idea of “exclusive masculinity” and bodily performances. However, while tennis is largely an individual sport, there remains an element of head-to-head competition as well as club membership which, he argues, works to re/produce exclusive masculinity even within the queer-friendly space of the categorical sport organization. As such, there is great similarity between this particular sporting space and team sports investigated in other academic research of gay and queer athletes.

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CHAPTER VI

“YOU DON’T NEED TO BE PRETTY, JUST EFFICIENT”:

DE/RE/CONSTRUCTING QUEER BODIES AND BODILY PRACTICES IN THE

MARATHON CONTEXT

Queer Bodies and Bodily Practices in the Marathon Context

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ABSTRACT

Placing the body and the Foucauldian perspective at the centre of our research inquiry, this article explores the ways in which 12 Canadian gay and queer male marathoners discursively construct their bodies within and beyond the marathon context. Qualitative materials gathered through guided conversations, written stories, and the first author's research journal were analyzed thematically to reveal four main themes: self-governed bodily practices, the injured body, body modification, and the marathoning body within queer culture. Materials were then submitted to a poststructuralist discourse analysis; this analysis suggested that the subjects' discursive constructions of their bodies were "hybrid" creations, located within (and sometimes in contest to) dominant discourses of physical activity, running, and popular representations of gay male physicality. Our study adds a different perspective to the literature exploring gay athletes and sport, which has largely explored more specifically experiences of gender and sexuality within team sport milieus.

“You Don’t Need To Be Pretty, Just Efficient”:

De/Re/Constructing Queer Bodies and Bodily Practices in the Marathon Context

Over the past 20 years, many scholars have pointed to the usefulness of applying the theories of Michel Foucault to studies of sport and physical activity (Andrews, 1993, 2000; Markula, 2003, 2004; Pringle, 2005; Rail & Harvey, 1995; Whitson, 1989). Such a turn has placed studies of sporting bodies at the centre of research questions and agendas. In particular, scholars have noted the use of a Foucauldian framework by feminist sport theorists to deconstruct gendered power relations within sport and physical activity milieus (Chapman, 1997; Markula, 2003, 2004; Pringle, 2005; Rail & Harvey, 1995). Our interest in Foucauldian perspectives of the body frames this study of self-identified gay and queer male marathon runners.

More specifically, using a Foucauldian framework, we explore here the technologies of power and of the self within the bodily practices of a group of gay and queer male marathoners. We are interested in the ways in which gay and queer marathoners discursively construct their bodies within and beyond the marathon context and in particular, we consider the marathoners’ recitation of or resistance to various dominant discourses of the body—discourses of physical activity, running and dominant representations of gay male physicality. Such considerations, we feel, augment the existing bodies of research on gay male athletes and socio-cultural studies of distance running which, in the case of the former, largely exclude gay men participating in individual sport, and the latter which generally include only (ostensibly) heterosexual participants or that have focused on other experiences of the running milieu. We begin by highlighting the scholarly texts that work as a starting point for our research.

Considering Contemporary Inquiries of Gay Males' Experiences of Sport

Although the use of a Foucauldian perspective has become prevalent in our research domain, such does not specifically apply to the body of work interrogating gay male sporting experiences. A similar argument has been made with respect to considerations of sporting masculinities despite an extensive body of work in this area (Andrews, 2000; Pringle, 2005). Academic explorations of both sporting masculinities and the experiences of gay male athletes have largely been framed by Gramsci's hegemony theory (1971) and, more specifically, Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" (1995). Pringle (2005) has argued that the Foucauldian perspective can offer an alternative view of sporting masculinities, suggesting that rather than a justification of that which is already known, a turn to Foucault will "encourage researchers to ask new questions, think differently and allow for the creation of new understandings and possibilities" (2005, p. 273). While not exploring sporting masculinities within the context of this article (for such an exploration see Bridel & Rail, submitted), we do begin with a similar attestation when considering the academic texts focused on gay males in sport.

At the risk of oversimplifying, we can say that contemporary academic studies of gay male athletes largely point to the reproduction of hegemonic notions of sport within categorical sporting spaces, including a continued focus on competition and domination of opponents, and the prioritization of victories over social networking (Elling, de Knop, & Knoppers, 2001, 2003; King & Thompson, 2001; Price & Parker, 2003; Pronger, 2000b; Wellard, 2002). In brief, though these sporting spaces may become a "safe" place for gay and lesbian athletes, practices of sport seem not to differ.

Numerous studies of hegemony and gay males' experiences of sport have highlighted the expected performance of orthodox forms of sporting masculinity, both within mainstream and categorical sporting spaces. This applies to such performances by both closeted gay athletes in order to "pass" within their chosen sporting spaces (Hekma, 1998; Le Blanc, 2002; Pronger, 1990) and by openly gay athletes as a way to gain acceptance from their (ostensibly) heterosexual team/club mates, both before and after disclosing their sexuality (Anderson, 2002, 2005). Performances of hegemonic sporting masculinity may include playing with aggression and force, making critical contributions to the "winningness" of the team or club, and/or participation in a "culture of silence" (Anderson, 2002; Connell, 1995; Le Blanc, 2002; Pronger, 1990) whereby "openly" gay athletes continue to participate in heterosexist and/or homophobic dialogue in the various contexts of the sporting environment. This suggests that gay sexuality in the sporting domain may only be acceptable when it is accompanied by a performance of the dominant form of sporting masculinity.

Undoubtedly, the academic literature on gay male athletes provides important insights into the continued problematic influence of dominant discourses of sexuality and gender within sport, a milieu dominated by heteronormative ideology. As such, hegemony theory has proven useful. At the same time, we wonder whether an application of the Foucauldian framework to empirical research of gay males in sport could allow for different considerations and questions.

Distance Running in Sport Academe

A Foucauldian perspective of the body has not yet been specifically applied to empirical studies of distance running; instead, the literature (beyond myriad biomedical studies) has largely explored the positive and negative outcomes of participation in distance running. Positive outcomes have been suggested to include improved health, a sense of personal achievement (Major, 2001; Ogles, Masters, & Richardson, 1995; Smith, 2000; Summers, Machin, & Sargent, 1983), and the acquisition of a greater sense of “self” through participation and success—success often defined by the attainment of personal records that are temporally motivated (Hockey, 2005b; Major, 2001; Smith, 2002). Negative outcomes of participation in distance running have been primarily related to the sustaining of injury, which seems to be an almost taken-for-granted state of being within this milieu (Hockey, 2005b; Major, 2001) and which can also be seen to impact on a runner’s “athletic identity” (Allen-Collinson, 2003; Hockey, 2005a). On the prevalence of injury, Hockey has noted that, “[n]arratives of injury (along with narratives of performance) predominate... and the spectre of injury is part of commonplace discourse and concern” (2005b, para. 4.5).

Though the injured body may be commonplace within this particular social milieu, body modification through running is often referenced as a primary participatory motivation and outcome. In this instance, body modification has been considered as the desire to lose weight, to change musculature and/or shape, or to become more “physically attractive” (Major, 2001; Ogles, Masters, & Richardson, 1995; Smith, 2000; Summers, Machin, & Sargent, 1983; van Ingen, 2004). The idea of running as a practice of body modification has been attributed to contemporary representations of healthy bodies

propagated through images and texts in the media. In a realist analysis of the embodiment of class, gender and age through distance running, Abbas (2004) has proposed that though running has oft been promoted as an accessible activity that contributes to the pursuit of a “healthy lifestyle,” there is concurrently a representation of a dominant body type that shapes participants’ expectations and pursuits. Depictions of the distance running body are often lean, muscular, masculine, and youthful—a privileged body-type that, she suggests, subordinates aging and/or female bodies (Abbas, 2004). The visual representations promoted within the running community seem to both reflect the general participatory demographics of marathoning (which have been suggested to favor white, middle-class, able-bodied males) and the body type that is often linked with distance running success (Abbas, 2004; Johns & Johns, 2000; Serravallo, 2000; Smith, 2000).

Existing socio-cultural/psychological studies of distance running serve as a useful starting point for our study. Our goal here is to accrue our understanding of distance running as a social phenomenon through the discursive constructions of marathon bodies by gay males active in the milieu. As such, in our work, we seek to place marathon bodies at the centre of inquiry, situated within a framework that draws on technologies of power and technologies of the self. Thus, we next consider insights from previous Foucauldian-based sport studies.

Discipline, Surveillance, and Transformation

In Foucault’s early works, he argued that the body was a subject of technologies of power—technologies established through discourses of “expertise” such as medicine, law, and science. Through these discourses or “truth games” (Foucault, 1988),

individuals develop knowledge about themselves, while bodies become the site of domination through technologies of power and practices of discipline and surveillance. Foucault used the metaphor of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon to describe the normalizing "gaze" that leads to a self-policing of the body (1980). The panopticon (a prison design in which prisoners are unaware of when they are being watched but always aware of the possibility) works to regulate human behaviour as prisoners come to self-police to avoid punishment. Foucault envisioned the panoptic gaze within the general social realm; discourses and their acceptance as "truth" lead to panoptic mechanisms by which individuals self-regulate or self-govern their behaviours with no need for physical means of enforcement or punishment. Instead, this self-governance works to make each individual "his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself" (Foucault, 1980, p. 155). In other words, discourses of expertise work to produce docile bodies through self-surveillance or panopticism.

Foucault has argued that while the body as an object disciplined by social discourses may have become prominent in the classical age, similar domination continues with various practices of discipline and self-regulation. Many have suggested that this is the case within contemporary systems of health, fitness, sport, and physical activity. Sport theorists have drawn from Foucault's technologies of power in different ways, including feminist interrogations of power, female sporting bodies, and constructions of femininity (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Chapman, 1997; Markula, 2000; Rail, 2006; Evans, Davies & Wright, 2004) and hierarchal power relations in high performance sport (Johns & Johns, 2000; Shogan, 1999), each text noting the diverse ways in which sporting practices work to produce and then make use of docile bodies.

Pronger (2000a) has also drawn extensively from Foucault in his consideration of the physical fitness industry. In particular, drawing from Foucault's concept of discourse, he refers to contemporary discourses of health and fitness and the creation of optimal bodies as the "technology of physical activity." He defines this as a "discourse of texts, socio-cultural practices, and bodily procedures that produce human life in controlled ways" (p. xiv). There appears to be no escape from the powerful context in which idealized body images appear in the everyday social realm: "The omnipresence of these popular representations of the fit body undoubtedly contextualize the ways in which people read bodies" (Pronger, 2000a, p. 144). As such, contemporary technologies of physical activity work to normalize bodies according to (Westernized) social norms; male bodies are expected to be muscular, strong and "fit," with the onus placed on the individual to create such a body type.

Though Foucault (1972) argued that individuals within any given society are subjects of power/knowledge and come to acquire their understanding of the social and their subject position through dominant discourses, he also considered power beyond domination, arguing that power is in everyone and everywhere (1980, 1988). In other words, power is not structural, but practiced. Such conceptualization of power allows for the possibility that subjects can resist practices of domination and patterns of social regulation. This is significant when considering ideas of transformation; it allows for, as Rail and Harvey have noted, "the existence of a body escaping repression: an active, autonomous and powerful body" (1995, p. 175). Transformation, Foucault argued, allows a certain emancipation or, as he wrote, "a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Foucault referred to this particular use

of power as the technologies of the self—specific practices by and through which subjects knowingly constitute themselves within and in resistance to power. There are varying ways in which such practices can occur: self-care, self-knowledge, and mastery of the self (Foucault, 1988).

Academic inquiries of sport and physical activity, though largely highlighting technologies of power, have also considered technologies of the self and the transformative possibility of sporting practices (Chapman, 1997; Johns & Johns, 2000; Markula, 2003, 2004). We are interested in similar questions of transformative possibility in sport, and in particular for those “othered” by dominant discourses of sexuality. Our empirical investigation thus brings us to interrogate marathon practices and bodies as well as their articulation with power and regulatory discourses.

Eleven Runners and a Researcher who Runs: Voices from the Road

For this study, we collected our qualitative materials through an autoethnographic methodology; more specifically, we adopted a reflexive ethnographic approach (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Blurring the distinction between self and other, we understand autoethnography as a form of research that provides opportunity for the researcher to incorporate his or her own life experiences with the experiences of those being studied (Reed-Danahay, 1997). In this instance, both the first and second authors self-identify as queer; the former is an active marathoner. We assume the perspective that the researcher’s voice, intrinsic to autoethnography, should not be considered any less relevant when discussing personal experiences in the social phenomenon being studied,

and that such an approach is entirely useful when considering embodied experiences of sport and physical activity.

Beyond the first author's experiences in marathoning, we also draw on the experiences of 11 other runners recruited via purposive sampling of Canadian Front Runner groups—categorical running clubs for the GLBTQ community. All participants self-identified as gay and/or queer. We selected participants who were residents of Canada, who had completed at least one marathon or a longer-distance race in the previous 2 years, and who were preparing to participate in a similar event within the 12 months following the study.

In our sample, it turned out that all participants had completed at least 4 marathons; 10 was the average for the group, with the number of years of involvement in the sport ranging from 5 to 15 years. The average age of the participants was 36, all identified as Euro-Canadian, and all had completed at least an undergraduate degree. Participants were employed in various occupations that would position most in the middle to upper socio-economic classes. Three Canadian geographic locations were represented: the greater Toronto-area, Ottawa, and Vancouver.

The narratives interrogated for this study were collected through in-depth conversations, written personal stories collected via e-mail, and the first author's research journal. We used conversation and personal narrative guides to focus the research, while at the same time encouraging a certain degree of flexibility. Both guides focused on marathon experiences and motivations, and different notions of the body and bodily practices. Qualitative materials were collected between July and October 2005 and the

study was conducted in compliance with regulations established by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board.

The qualitative materials were transcribed and the texts were then transferred into QSR NUD*IST VIVO and coded. The texts were submitted first to a thematic analysis. Organizing the material thematically allowed us to identify the major themes and sub-themes emerging from the texts. Of particular interest were the constructions of, and meanings assigned to, the body as well as the ways in which the participants' spoke of their queer running bodies.

To further interrogate the texts, we submitted the research materials to a poststructuralist discourse analysis. We draw from Foucault's concept of discourse, which argues that discourses shape or constitute subjects through appropriation or resistance and that discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention" (1972, p. 49). Discourse analysis, informed by poststructuralist theory, works to uncover the interpellation of subjects by dominant discourses (Hardin, 2001, 2003; Weedon, 1997; Wright, 1995). With this understanding, our analysis involved an attempt to deconstruct "truths" that shape the participants' understandings of the social and their subject position therein, in particular as related to dominant discourses of the body within contemporary technologies of sport and physical activity.

Once the texts had been interrogated, participants were provided an opportunity to read a brief "story" that we created from portions of the participants' narratives. The "composite story" was meant to summarize the main themes and experiences as

constructed by the participants. Returning the story to them was a way for us to verify whether we had adequately captured these themes and experiences. Each participant was asked to comment as to his ability to recognize his own ideas and experiences (in full or in part) in the story presented. All who reviewed the story indicated that they were adequately represented by the story. We use excerpts from the participants' narratives in the present paper to give voice to this particular group of gay and queer athletes. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants.

The thematic analysis revealed constructions and experiences of and within the marathon context unique to each of the 11 participants and the first author. At the same time, there were clear trends with regards to four themes related to representations and discursive constructions of the corporeal. We consider these four main themes here: (a) self-governed disciplinary marathon practices; (b) the "ironic" inevitability of injury from participation; (c) marathoning as a practice of body modification; and (d) the (suggested) oppositional nature of the marathon body to dominant representations of gay male physicality.

Marathon Practices: Self-Surveillance and Discipline in the Running Context

Participants constructed their physical investment in the marathon context in largely similar ways, which we have labeled as "marathon practices." These included the interconnected practices of the physical act of running, diet, and rest/recovery. First and foremost, participants' training regimens were constructed in homogeneous ways and included both running independently and with "mainstream" training groups.¹ The physical act of running included runs of various lengths and intensities, each with its own

purpose. For most participants, a high-mileage training week consisted of 60 or more kilometers of running. Leigh's commentary represents an approach to marathon training that resonated throughout the narratives (to greater or lesser extents):

If I'm training for a marathon, the training week is five days of running, two days of not running. And, the running is of different distances with each day of the week. Often they have different speeds as well. I really believe that if you want to have a good experience in marathoning, it's really important to do very good training.

Participants also seemed to pay special attention to diet, which was most often referenced as "appropriate" caloric intake so as to avoid weight gain. Such dietary focus was constructed as being connected to both marathon training and health in general. Bjorn's comment is representative of the subjects' rather similar constructions of marathoners' diets:

We eat a remarkably low amount of processed food... We like cooking fresher meals and that sort of thing. I don't know that we eat necessarily healthy all the time, but for the most part I think we have a pretty balanced diet. You know, we don't sidle up to the old country buffet and pile on the macaroni and cheese.

Rest and recovery were also constructed as integral to marathon training. Many participants made reference to getting proper rest so as to maximize training opportunities and to let their bodies recover from (and for) the physical act of running. The voluntary training regimen to which all participants subscribed led to demands on the body that were constructed as being grueling, exhausting, challenging, and brutal. At the same time, such demands of the body were positioned as necessary in order to achieve personal

marathoning goals. The following commentary highlights such a construction of the body and efforts to exceed physical limits:

Whenever my body starts to feel fatigue and is starting to get into that zone where, you know, I'm not having, where I'm not enjoying myself. And I usually just tell myself to, kind of: "keep your pace, keep your pace, keep your pace." And essentially, that's how I get myself out of that rut. It's pushing yourself to kind of a boundary that, you know, not a lot of people actually go to that level, go to that boundary. It's just training to go past what you think you're capable of doing so that your body is at its optimal for success. (Jim)

In the subjects' constructions of marathon practices, the corporeal became something that is mastered and pushed beyond physical limitations to create bodies capable of covering 26.2 miles on race day. Marathon practices seemed to rely on what we could call a "marathon body" subject to disciplinary practices and careful self-surveillance. At the same time, while this regulation in terms of training, diet, and rest/recovery was constructed as largely self-policed, 8 of the 12 marathoners were also members of mainstream running groups. Though the hierarchal relationship of coach/official and athlete evidenced in high performance sport (Johns & Johns, 2000; Shogan, 1999) was not as prominent within these recreational training groups, the provision of specific training plans and group runs as well as the use of other runners' abilities as extra incentive to improve running worked as a regulatory power, much in the same way as physical education classes create docile bodies (Evans, Davies & Wright, 2004; Pronger, 2000a; Rail, 2005). Yet, participation in such practices seemed primarily (though not exclusively) rooted in personal achievement and enjoyment. Indeed,

marathoning was constructed as an activity providing enjoyment to participants, as Leigh's narrative illustrates:

It's brought a new dimension to my life as an adult and just a tremendous amount of enjoyment. That it's had deep, deep meaning for me, no. But that it's brought me great joy and, and a lot of fun, yeah. I think that's for me what's really important. The secondary consequence of that is a better level of fitness. But it's not the fitness that I think of first. It's the sense of enjoyment.

Interestingly, despite their sense of enjoyment and their calculated and self-regulated approach to marathon practices, the participants constructed marathon bodies in ways that always brought back the issue of injury.

Marathon Bodies and the (Ironic) Inevitability of Injury

In effort to create a body that was constructed by the subjects as efficient at completing the distance of the marathon, disciplinary techniques were adopted, many of which relied on a pushing of the body beyond its physical limitations. Not surprisingly then, injury was a topic prevalent in the narratives, as participants spoke of the active management of current injuries or the expressed "reality" of being injured in the future. The irony in this is that "marathon bodies" were discursively constructed as functional and efficient vessels that become healthier through marathoning pursuits. This construction is paradoxical when we consider the reported prevalence of injury. Perry's commentary represents a typical construction of marathon bodies, injury, and limitations:

I am a person that takes things on and pushes, pushes, pushes. So, when I take on training for a marathon, I push, push, push myself. This of course results in

injuries, fool that I am. I had to cancel out on the Vancouver Marathon two years ago with a hamstring injury, which unfortunately is reoccurring. My soft spot, I guess. I am aging, I know that. I'm 48 and 3/4! Therefore, my body will NOT recover as quickly as before. I HATE being injured to the point of not being able to run/train/compete. I don't feel whole, complete, integrated unless I am training.

Though constructing the marathon body as an object to be pushed beyond limits, often to the point of injury, there was at the same time a conscious effort by the participants to diminish the nature of injuries and their impact. In other words, the "severity" of an injury was relative to the ability to maintain participation. In this regard, Jacques commented: "I've never been injured seriously, but suffer occasionally from pulled hamstrings and quads. I don't take to it well, but have luckily usually recovered within a few days. I've never had to stop running for more than a week." Other runners constructed their injured bodies in relation to feelings of weakness and self-blame:

[Injury] sort of makes you feel weak in a way you know. Definitely you feel that there is something faulty with your body that you should have, that you should have been able to overcome this. This shouldn't have happened. So there's a lot of self blame, I think, when I injure myself. I didn't stretch enough, uh, I should have bought new shoes earlier. I'm not fit enough. I shouldn't have tried this or stuff like that. It's a lot of self blame and feeling inadequate. (Bjorn)

Such pushing of the body is in line with dominant high performance sport discourses in that it is seen as a necessary means though which one would bring one's body to its optimal functional state: "Maximum efficiency in resource management is the ideal embodiment of the modern subject of the technology of physical activity" (Pronger,

2000, p. 217). What is somewhat problematic is the presence of running-related magazines and books encouraging such quest for maximum efficiency while running with and through injury. Nor surprisingly then, conversations with our participants were similar to those noted in other studies in that they were steeped in injury-related narratives (Hockey, 2005b) to the point of considering injury a “symptom of running” (Major, 2001). In both Jacques’ and Perry’s conceptualizations of their bodies, physical limitations and injury, the importance of just being able to run emerged. Participants primarily identified themselves as “runners,” a construction that relied on the disciplinary practices of marathoning for the creation of a functional body, which in this milieu seemed to be one that was often compromised by injury ironically sustained through the attempt to acquire better health and/or to modify the corporeal in one way or another. The discursive constructions of the “functional marathon body” can be located within dominant running discourses interpellating our subjects. At the same time, the latter constructs participation in marathoning as a “healthy” practice, which suggests that constructions of marathon bodies and practices are also adopted from popular physical activity and health discourses. This point becomes even more prevalent when we consider the construction of marathon practices as a way to modify the body for benefits both within and beyond the marathon context.

Body Modification: Questions of Efficiency and “Lookin’ Good”

The construction of the body as an object to be modified through marathon practices was evident in all the subjects’ stories although the motivations varied. Some subjects constructed bodily modification in relation to a gain in efficiency within marathoning; others constructed it in relation to beautification and ensuing social gains,

and others still as a combination of both. We will leave to the physiologists the specific question of whether a sport can shape someone's body; our interest here is rather in the discursive constructions of the bodily modification within and beyond the marathon context.

For some of the subjects, body modifications (e.g., losing weight, gaining leg muscle, "toning") were conceptualized as by-products of training that would enable the achievement of personal marathon goals with little to no emphasis on "aesthetics." This construction, common in many of the narratives, is best summarized by Shawn, who suggested:

You don't carry a lot of weight, a lot of extra weight. Marathoners create a body that works efficiently. It gets you from point A to point B. Part of the efficiency I think for me is not carrying around a lot of extra weight. Not eating stuff that you shouldn't eat. You don't need to be pretty, just efficient. Your body has to be efficient, to sort of get you through those, or that long distance.

Other participants constructed the modification of their bodies through marathoning as providing benefits within and beyond the sport itself. In this regard, many participants (including the first author) constructed marathon involvement as a way to lose weight, change body shape, or simply to become "healthier," each of which was positioned as having aesthetic implications:

I, like many gay men, am a bit narcissistic. Running, for me, keeps my body weight down. You have to look good. It also has health benefits as well. I do have hypertension. Marathons help to keep my BP in check. Type-2 diabetes in males is a familial trait. I hope marathon running will help with this possible aspect of my health. (Mary Ann)

The running is very good for my self-image and about the only thing I can say I've been good at athletically. I still haven't achieved my weight loss objective, which is to lose another 5 to 10 pounds. I've also been doing muscle-training at home and have got my waist down to 29 inches. (Jacques)

The creation of the marathon body was also constructed as bringing the participants happiness and joy, as represented in the following excerpt from Doug's story:

In the midst of an existing mid life crisis mode, I happened upon a notice for Front Runners, the local gay running group and, in an attempt to lose weight and become more comfortable with myself, I took the first step in coming out as gay and a runner. My enjoyment of running is certainly tied closely to the social component as well as to weight control and better health.

Though there were differing conceptualizations of body modification through marathon practices, the subjects' discursive constructions of "typical" marathon bodies were similar and mostly pointed to an "optimal" body shape and size. This "optimal marathon body" was constructed as muscled but lean with strong, efficient legs and an advanced cardio-vascular endurance system despite less developed upper bodies. As two participants noted, the optimal marathon body is "sinewy and looks under-fed," but is fit and efficient. Others constructed it as "sleek" and "thin." Regardless of their terminology, all subjects conceptualized themselves as a total or partial embodiment of their discursive constructions. Some positioned this embodiment as their "natural" build; others commented that though looking very much the part of a runner, such was not their "natural" morphology, but rather the end result of active participation in the practices of

marathoning. Here we see the unquestioned use of modern, essentialist categories to classify the corporeal as being “natural” or “not natural.” This binary, in fact, pervaded many of the narratives, which speaks to the prevalence of biomedical discourses as “truths” within the running milieu.

The optimal marathon body was the most often recited construction and thus speaks to the unproblematic acceptance of the idea that to be successful (however defined), bodies should be thin, sleek, sinewy yet strong. Such normative ideas seem to be largely rooted in popular and academic discourses on running (Johns & Johns, 2000) as well as the re/production of corporeal typologies that dominate the running world. Popular representations of the typical marathon body within literature and magazines promote a specific body type that is slender, muscular, youthful, traditionally masculine, (ostensibly) heterosexual, and able-bodied (Abbas, 2004; Pronger, 2000a). This body is suggested to be optimal for success within the marathon context—even when the creation of such a body may result in injury. Similar arguments have been made in contemporary sport academe that running bodies are projects to be worked on in accordance with dominant biomedical discourses and/or normative bodily representations (Abbas, 2004; Johns & Johns, 2000; Markula, 2000; Smith, 2000).

It is important to recognize that although we have considered the constructions of the body primarily within the marathoning context and the re/production of dominant running discourse through active and voluntary participation in self-regulated marathon practices, marathoners are subjects of (and located within) multiple and competing discourses of the body. Their bodies are created (physically and discursively) not only

within the marathon context but also within the context of gay culture. It is to this final theme that we now turn.

Queer Marathon Bodies: Locating “Thin and Sleek” in “Buff” Culture

Participants constructed their bodies not only as a vessel used in the achievement of personal goals within the sport of marathoning, but also as a resource beyond the marathon context and particularly within the gay community. The importance of body image in the gay community resonated extensively throughout the narratives. The gay community was constructed as a space in which there was definite pressures to “look good.” As Bjorn, tongue-in-cheek, stated in this regard, “No one likes a fat fag.” Marathon bodies were constructed as projecting a certain “image” beyond marathoning: one that was seen as healthy and aesthetically-pleasing to others. Consider the following excerpt from Perry’s narrative:

Marathoning has changed my body totally. I am extremely lean, and in top training, ripped. I love the feeling of being ripped. True confessions, I WANT to look this way. I want to garner attention for my body, it makes me feel good. I like lookin’ good.

Interestingly, while body modification was constructed as a means to “look good,” there was also a clear delineation made between marathon bodies and the dominant male body type purportedly promoted in, and embodied by, much of gay culture. The participants’ discursive constructions of the dominant gay male body were relatively uniform. Leigh’s statement is a good illustration of such constructions:

Big chest, big arms, washboard abs. You know, that was sort of the three combination. And so, they, they were basically all breast meat! You know, they were these enormous men with these great big *poitrines* [chest]. And the other thing is that they didn't work on their legs. So they had these tiny little legs and enormous upper bodies. (Leigh)

Leigh's construction was typical in that other participants similarly characterized the gay community's current "idealized" body type. This is not different from what has been found in a number of studies: the "buff" body is of high importance to gay men who may spend hours in fitness centers and gyms and participate in "risky" behaviours (e.g., disordered eating, steroid use) in order to achieve a heavily muscled, well-defined frame that is considered among most of their peers as aesthetically pleasing (Conner, Johnson, & Grogan, 2004; Drummond, 2005; Halkitis, 2000; Russell & Keel, 2002). Some have labeled this phenomenon the "buff agenda," an agenda that seeks to both hyper-masculinize gay male bodies and to distance them from diseased-connotations connected with the 1980s AIDS-epidemic (Halkitis, 2000). Our participants contrasted this "buff" image with that of their own bodies and runners in general:

Most marathon runners are really kind of lanky. Uh, most marathon runners don't really have a lot of definition in terms of arms, and chest, and back... We actually have more of a feminine body [laughs]. That's probably a more accurate description because we don't have those harder muscles because if you're going to run that far, all those muscles are just going to get in the way. (Thomas)

By virtue of their sexuality, gay and queer marathoners seemed thus to be part of milieus circulating very different body images: the "thin and sleek" marathoning body

versus the “buff” gay male body. The buff, hyper-masculine image has been reported to be dominant in gay media and pornography (Drummond, 2005; Kassel & Franko, 2000; Wood, 2004) and embodied in the creation of “gym bodies” that are put on display in gay spaces in an attempt to attract the male “gaze” (Duggan & McCreary, 2004; Hart & Heinberg, 2001; Kassel & Franko, 2000; Yelland & Tiggemann, 2003). Despite the overwhelming presence of such physical and discursive representations, marathoners within our study offered some resistance to them. We illustrate this point with the following two narratives:

Well, I mean, just going to a club and, you know, most of the guys, they take their shirts off and if you look at a club that’s packed, you know, like 80% are trying to achieve that body type. I’ve come to kind of accept what I look like and the reality is that I’m not going to get that gay ideal body and I’m not even going to aim for it. (Jim)

They tend to be more muscled, more focused on upper body strength. I know I’ve seen some physiques in certain ads and magazines and, it’s like, to me they’re gym body physiques. They don’t really look like they’re, uh, they’re nice to look at but they don’t project a sense that they are trained to do something. So, they’re not “working” bodies. (Rick)

Both Jim and Rick constructed their bodies as a form of resistance to images of gay male physicality dominating the culture of which they are part (both discursively and through active involvement in the gay “community”). At the same time, there remained evidence of a conscious creation of bodies that project certain images beyond the

marathoning milieu—despite not fitting the idealized gay body image, marathon bodies were still constructed as bodies that “looked good.”

Borrowing from Bourdieu, Pronger (2000a) has noted the importance of looking good (i.e., physically fit as defined through contemporary Western texts) within the concept of “physical capital.” According to this notion, the body comes to have exchange value in multiple respects: “The body has the social exchange value of tastes, needs, and habits that operate in the social exchange within and between social groups” (Pronger, 2000a, p. 105). Indeed, in a number of our subjects’ stories, we found discursive constructions of the marathon body as a body that may gain recognition beyond the sport milieu. The following excerpt reflects such a conceptualization:

People look at me and say: “Oh, you look like a runner.” And that’s very nice. That’s a nice compliment to have, but in fact, at least in my eyes, I don’t really look like a marathon runner. I do have more body fat than they do. (Leigh)

While noting that he himself did not necessarily look like a marathoner, Leigh suggested that there is a “running image” prominent in Western culture, one that is likely to garner compliments from others. Here, we conclude that while there was a resistance to contemporary representations of the “buff” gay male body through the creation and valuing of “thin and sleek” marathon bodies, there was also a re/citation of dominant discourses of physical activity and health that suggest that certain body types have more social exchange value than others (Pronger, 2000a). Reproducing contemporary Western discourses of healthy bodies, the marathon body was constructed as having physical capital in so much as it constituted an embodiment of popular representations of a healthy body and/or succeeded at times in attracting the male “gaze.” Finally, though subjects

constructed their selves and bodies in resistance to dominant representations of the gay male body, they still found a “place” for such bodies within queer culture.

Conclusions

When considering the constructions of marathon practices and bodies that emerged as the main themes explored here, this group of gay and queer Canadian male marathoners seem to be re-citing one dominant bodily representation (the optimal marathon body), while contesting another (the “buff” gay male body). The “production” of the body as a conscious endeavor to simultaneously attract the gay/queer male gaze and gain social capital in the “straight” world suggests the presence of two sets of regulatory practices of the body. We propose then that subjects discursively construct queer marathoning bodies as “hybrid” creations resulting from the subjects’ interpellation by multiple and, at times, competing bodily discourses (i.e., discourses of health and physical activity, discourses of running, discourses of the idealized gay male physique, and discourses of gender and sexuality).

Subjects discursively constructed their bodies with characteristics that are optimal for achieving in the marathon context, and in a way that contested contemporary dominant bodily representations of queer male bodies. At the same time, these constructions pointed to the reification of an aesthetic value associated with dominant physical representations of the male body in contemporary Western texts or discourses. As Pronger wrote, “all these texts describe, inscribe, and prescribe a narrative of the body that is made intelligible and legitimate by reference to a mythology of the body” (Pronger, 2000, p. 147). Beyond these dominant representations of idealized healthy male

bodies, the constructions of marathon bodies were also located within dominant discourses of running that not only promote certain body types as ideal (Abbas, 2004; Johns & Johns, 2000) but that also encourage pushing the corporeal beyond its limitations, often to the point of injury, which comes to be seen as “natural” within this particular sport milieu (Major, 2001). These same bodies were also constructed as “masculine,” which demonstrates the participants’ adoption of subject positions within dominant gender discourses, an idea that is explored more fully elsewhere (see Bridel & Rail, submitted). Turning to Foucault (1988) and his theory that the body is never constructed outside of discourse is helpful in understanding the constructions of queer marathoning bodies in the present study. While such constructions resisted one bodily discourse, another was reproduced. This result is not so different from feminist inquiries into sport and physical activity that have suggested that female sporting bodies go against some dominant discourses but are often created within technologies of power that propagate conventional images of femininity (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Chapman, 1997; Markula, 2000).

We commented earlier that Foucault envisioned transformative potential through certain technologies of the self that allow or permit the attainment of “a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). He suggested the possibility of specific practices by and through which subjects knowingly constitute themselves within and in resistance to power. When considering the participants’ narratives as well as the suggested interconnectedness of marathon practices and body modification, it is not impossible to consider marathon involvement as having transformative possibility and meaning for these runners. Though marathon practices

have been primarily positioned within Foucault's concepts of discipline and self-surveillance, and despite the notion that bodily constructions have emerged as a rearticulation of dominant physical activity and running discourses, there remains still evidence of a conscious resistance, on the part of subjects, to dominant discourses of the male body propagated in gay culture, as well as a recitation of notions of transformation and happiness as discursive materials for the construction of marathon involvement and experiences. Foucault proposed that technologies of power and of the self do not exist in isolation from each other. Perhaps in the constructions of marathon practices and bodies by this particular group of gay and queer subjects, such a theoretical perspective can be confirmed by empirical resources.

Placing the body and the Foucauldian perspective at the centre of research questions remains relevant to our academic domain, in particular when considering multiple subjectivities, sport, physical activity, and dominant discourses of the body prevalent in contemporary Western society. There is also, we suggest, other opportunity to consider sport through a Foucauldian lens and that is at the intersection of gay sexuality and sport. Existing literature largely references gay male athletes as subjects of (and in some cases, contributors to) a propagation of the core tenets of sport and expected performances of orthodox sporting masculinity. As such, the experiences of most gay men in sport has been argued to be governed by hegemonic notions of sexuality and gender that lead to a "culture of silence" within most sporting spaces—both mainstream and categorical (Anderson, 2002, 2005; Connell, 1995; King & Thompson, 2001; Le Blanc, 2002; Price & Parker, 2003; Pronger, 1990, 2000b; Wellard, 2002). For our particular group of gay and queer male athletes, marathoning was not a space of silence

but rather one in which sexual and athletic subjectivities seemed to more or less merge un-problematically. Active voluntary participation within this milieu, the construction of marathon practices and bodies, and the sense of personal achievement seemed to positively influence gay and queer marathoners' sense of "self" and simultaneously contest dominant discourses that work to subjugate alternative sexualities within heteronormative assumptions and, in particular, in the world of sport that is often considered a (heterosexual) "male preserve" (Dunning, 1986).

While beyond the scope of the present academic project, the potential contestation of heteronormative ideals explored by drawing from Foucault's concept of the technologies of the self may potentially offer a different reading of the experiences of gay and queer men in sport. Rather than focusing solely on external and repressive powers, perhaps sporting experiences can also be considered as exercises of freedom in which varied modes of self may be created (Chapman, 1997). We humbly suggest that Foucault offers the potential of re-thinking the queer male sporting body and self, as well as their location within sporting spaces and discourses. In this sense, we consider the present study as impetus for future research considerations.

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¹ The “mainstream” running groups in which the participants were active were most typically associated with running stores located in the city in which the participants’ lived. These groups provided detailed training plans as well as the opportunity to run with other athletes of similar or higher skill-level.

PART III:
CONCLUSIONS OF THE ARTICLES

CHAPTER VII

BRINGING IT ALTOGETHER (HOWEVER TEMPORARILY)

Just as every marathoner hopes that on race day everything comes together, it is my hope that within the contexts of this graduate thesis I have achieved what it was I set out to do. Primarily (though by no means exclusively), my interest was in presenting voices that to this point in time have yet to be represented in academic scholarship—those belonging to gay and queer males who participate in individual sport. While a growing body of literature has considered the experiences of gay males in both mainstream and categorical team sport milieus (Anderson, 2002, 2005; Elling, et al., 2001, 2003; Hekma, 1998; King & Thompson, 2001; Le Blanc, 2002; Price & Parker, 2003; Pronger, 2000b; Waitt, 2004; Wellard, 2002), for the most part individual sport participants have been left on the sidelines—metaphorically and literally.

My research explored the ideas and experiences of 11 self-identified gay and queer male marathoners, as well as my own as a queer marathoner, in terms of the constructions of sexuality, gender, and the body within the marathoning context. These experiences were located within an anti-positivist paradigm that borrowed at different times from queer and poststructuralist gender theories, as well as from a Foucauldian perspective of the body. Applying these theoretical approaches to the qualitative materials I gathered allowed a different understanding of sporting experiences for this particular group of gay male athletes than exists in contemporary sport academe. These different experiences of sexuality, gender, and the body within marathoning were

explored within Chapters 5 and 6—the former focusing on sexuality and gender, and the latter on bodily practices and constructions.

I am hopeful of what this group of Canadian gay and queer male runners described as positive experiences within the marathon context. The narratives gathered through both guided conversations and written personal stories suggested an experience of this particular sporting space that differed from those published within sport academe to date, in particular when considering experiences of sexuality and gender. In these narratives, there were constructions of sexuality and gender that both recited and resisted dominant discourses. More specifically, I argued in Chapter 5 that there appeared to be a softening of the rigid boundaries of sexuality and gender evidenced in the narratives gathered for this research. Indeed, most participants constructed marathoning as a “queer positive” sporting space, one in which they gained a greater sense of self-acceptance through the availability of social networks, and through sporting achievement. While other researchers have suggested that gay are subject to a “don’t ask, don’t tell” silence about sexuality once they disclose within their respective sporting environment (Anderson, 2002), the same did not appear to hold true for the participants in my study, nor for my own experiences in the marathon context.

Traditionally it has been argued that gay athletes seem to perform orthodox forms of sporting masculinity in order to gain acceptance from (ostensibly) heterosexual teammates (Anderson, 2002; 2005; Pronger, 1990b). Within the marathon context there did not appear to be one expected performance of masculinity; though the majority of participants continued to define their bodies and marathon practices as masculine, the definition of “marathon masculinity” does not match the traditional forms of sporting

masculinity that seem to pervade most sporting milieus (Anderson, 2005; Bryson, 1990; Connell, 1995; Pronger, 1990b). Furthermore, two participants saw their bodies and certain performances of sporting behaviours within marathoning as feminine. Thus, while participants largely drew on traditional binaries of hetero/homo and masculine/feminine, there remained evidence of the construction and performance of less rigid forms of sexuality and gender, which though not “fluid” were perhaps “blurred.”

The positioning of marathoning as a queer positive space and one in which alternative gender constructions can emerge is likely connected to the “nature” of the sport itself, which has been considered in traditional definitions as “gender-neutral” (Koivula, 2001) and also to the social characteristics of the participants— their socio-economic standing, gender, and race/ethnicity (Abbas, 2004; Serravallo, 2000). That being said, much can still be learned from this particular group of marathoners when interrogating their narratives for the re/citation of or resistance to dominant constructions of sexuality and gender, in particular when locating their experiences relative to those that have been explored in the existing scholarship. As such, I do feel that my objective of presenting previously unheard voices has been met. In achieving this objective I have gained greater understanding of the discursive constructions of sexuality and gender and of the interpellation of subjects by dominant sexuality and gender discourses, and I have used this understanding to de/re/construct performances of sexuality and gender within marathoning.

While there has been some opposition to the use of queer theory in empirical research (Green, 2002; Jagose, 1996; Kirsch, 2000), I believe that for purposes of continuing to “chip away” at heteronormative assumptions of sporting spaces, queer

theory remains entirely useful; such focus continues the work of a small number of sport theorists before me who have turned a queer lens on various sport and physical activity milieus, with a view of de/re/constructing heterosexual privilege. In my particular research, the application of queer theory to the marathon context revealed the extent to which sexuality binaries are evident in both dialogue and structures within the lives of these particular gay men—naturalized identity categories that remained largely unquestioned.

The concept of performativity (Butler, 1990, 1999) also remains entirely useful in exploring gendered subjectivities, in particular within sporting spaces which have been suggested to largely re/produce hegemonic forms of masculinity—a re/production that subjugates femininities and alternative masculinities. In much the same way that queer theory seeks to chip away at naturalized sexual identities of heterosexual and homosexual, poststructuralist gender theories seek to deconstruct essentialized sex/gender binaries; such a perspective helped locate the constructions of gender within this milieu, unveiling what I considered the “blurring” of boundaries by this group of marathoners.

Through the interrogation of the qualitative materials gathered, I also explored marathon practices and how these specific practices worked to shape not only the physical bodies, but also the discursive constructions of queer marathon bodies within and beyond the marathon context (see Chapter 6). This inquiry allowed me to immerse myself in the Foucauldian perspective of the body and in particular to consider marathon practices and the meanings assigned to the marathon body within the technologies of power and of the self. Marathon bodies within the narratives gathered for this research were considered as sites of both resistance and reproduction, in so much as the corporeal

was a subject of multiple, and at times, competing discursive fields. As such, marathon bodies were considered as “hybrid” creations from multiple discourses—physical activity, running, dominant representations of gay male physicality, sexuality and gender.

Having been immersed in the narratives as well as my own research journal for the duration of this study, I feel that I have not only contributed to existing knowledge of gay and queer males in sport, but also have come to greater understanding of my own experiences as a queer marathoner. In particular, I was able to locate my approach to marathoning in relation to the physical representation of my body in the social realm—addressing, perhaps for the first time, the social capital which I perceived to be gained from my involvement. In other words, though my body differs from the dominant representation of male physicality in gay culture, I was able to finally appreciate that I still attached the importance of being the recipient of the male “gaze.” As such, perspectives of both Foucault and Pronger (2000b) helped me locate or understand my own constructions of my queer marathon body. Furthermore, in sharing my own experiences within the marathon milieu with the recruited participants, in particular within the conversation setting, uncovered the (important) finding that my own experiences as an “openly queer runner” were similar to others, suggesting that the marathon milieu was perhaps a sporting space with transgressive potential—potential that is likely worth further study, in particular when considering constructions of gender in a sporting space in which women and men participate on the same terrain, at the same time.

It was from my own subject positions as queer, athlete, and specifically as queer marathoner, from which this research was borne, hence the appropriateness of selecting reflexive ethnography as the methodological approach. As noted in Chapter 4,

autoethnographic approaches to research are not without their critics. However, in the particular academic domain in which I am situated at present, I would argue that such an approach is entirely useful. Beginning with one's own experiences within a particular social phenomenon not only locates a starting point for the research, but also gains one access to the milieu. Arguably, as a queer marathoner, I gained access into the experiences of this particular group of marathoners because of our shared interests and characteristics. Furthermore, in sharing my own experiences with the participants within the context of the guided conversations, a more equitable relationship was established within the conversation setting, helping to alleviate some of the power imbalances often created between interviewer and interviewee. Likely one could argue that my own voice could have emerged more within Chapters 5 and 6; I will not dispute this fact. Such exclusion likely reflects a subconscious leaning toward more positivistic approaches to research that suggest the voice of another may have more "merit" than my own. With further exploration of autoethnographic research I hope to gain more confidence and move beyond such a sentiment.

Within the objectives of my research, I was keenly interested in the practices to which the corporeal was subjected. In this case, my active participation in marathoning and the interconnected practices of running, diet, rest and recovery, provided direct access to lived experiences within this milieu. At the same time, the recording of my own experiences (in particular the physical act of running) remained a challenge as experiences were always recounted within my research journal after I had returned home. As such, my corporeal experiences were already filtered through a critical lens to a certain extent prior to being recorded. Such questions of recording the experiences of the

body will likely continue to present challenges to the socio-cultural studies of sport and physical activity (for an excellent text that explores the writing and theorizing of the moving body, see Denison & Markula, 2003).

For most marathoners, marathoning is constructed as an incredible journey, one that is often mitigated by obstacles and challenges. At times this research project felt startlingly similar to the sport it investigated. In the same way that one often learns different things about themselves in the process of running 26.2 miles, with the completion of this research I also learned a great deal about not only my own abilities, strengths and weaknesses, but more importantly about social theories, poststructuralist methodology, and, more generally, the art of social research. While this served to increase my knowledge and comfort within this academic domain, it was not always easy. Nor would I have wished it to be. I had the privilege of working with the stories of 11 men who were willing to openly discuss sexuality, gender, and their bodies. Their passion for the sport and for the opportunity to share their experiences was evident. I hope that I have done them justice while contributing to the academic field of which I feel that I am now part.

PART FOUR:
STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTORS



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April 21, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

The present is to confirm that William Bridel contributed to the articles and the thesis as a whole by doing the original research (i.e., data collection, data analysis, writing of results). Genevieve Rail, in her role as supervisor, guided the thesis work and made editorial suggestions for the thesis and articles.

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PART FIVE:
REFERENCES AND APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT FORM

RECRUITMENT FORM

Title of Study: Gender, Sexuality and the Body: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Gay/Queer Marathoners

Researchers: Professor Geneviève Rail (University of Ottawa)
Graduate Student William Bridel (University of Ottawa)

Name:	Place of Residence:
Highest Level of Education:	Current Employment (if applicable):
Ethnicity:	Religious Affiliation (if applicable):
Age: 18–24 <input type="checkbox"/> 25–34 <input type="checkbox"/> 35–44 <input type="checkbox"/> 45–54 <input type="checkbox"/> 55+ <input type="checkbox"/>	
Sexuality (I.e., How do you self-identify?):	

In how many marathons have you participated? 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2–3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4–5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6+ <input type="checkbox"/>
In what year was your last marathon?
In which marathon(s) are you intending to participate in 2005 or Spring of 2006?
Please provide the contact information for your preferred method of communication: Phone (Daytime): Phone (Evening): Email: Other:

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Please forward your completed form to, or for further information regarding the study please contact William Bridel at bbrid012@uottawa.ca.

APPENDIX B
CONVERSATION GUIDE

CONVERSATION GUIDE

Introduction:

- a) Purpose of the study
- b) Overview and signature of the consent form
- c) Information on the recording of the interview

PART I: Marathon Experience(s)

- a) What got you interested in marathoning? What are your present goals? What are your future goals?
- b) How would you describe the sources of enjoyment / constraints in your marathon experiences?
- c) How would you describe yourself as an athlete? What does sport mean to you?
- d) What would you consider your best marathon experience and why? What would you consider your worst marathon experience and why?
- e) If someone asked you why you run marathons, what would you tell them? Would you encourage someone else to run a marathon – why or why not?
- f) Do you participate in other sports (or have you participated in other sports?) If yes, what differences do (or did) you experience in your participation in marathoning and other sports?
- g) Do you typically train on your own or with a group? If combination of both, what sort of time is spent on your own and with the group?
- h) If you could pick one or two words to define how you feel at the end of a marathon what would they be?

PART II: Sexuality and Sport

- a) How would you best describe your involvement in gay sport? Have you participated in the Gay Games? Will you participate in Gay Games or Outgames? In what sport(s)? Do you have specific goals for this event (if participating)?
- b) Do you participate with Frontrunners? How often? What is your general opinion of sport organizations specific for the GLBT community?

- c) How would you describe your experiences as gay (or queer) male athlete in a mainstream sport organisation (i.e., do you train with a “mainstream” training group)?
- d) Do you openly speak about your sexuality within the running culture (e.g., within categorical and mainstream sport groups, with running partners etc?) If so, how were reactions to your sexuality? Did you face any barriers or obstacles before or after coming out? What encouraged you to “come out?”
- e) Do you feel that your sexuality has any impact on your involvement in marathoning?
- f) Would you describe yourself as a gay male athlete? If so, how would you describe yourself? If not, how then do you identify?
- g) Have you ever experienced, or witnessed, homophobia (e.g., language, discrimination, harassment, etc.) within the “marathon culture?” What form did it take? If so, how did you react? Would you react differently now? Do you feel that there are strategies in place (either personally or by the organization) to deal with homophobia?
- h) Do you find it easy to be “out” within this sport? How would you compare it to other aspects of your life where you may or may not be “out” (e.g., family, workplace, school, etc.)?
- i) Do you think it is important for gay males to gain acceptance within the mainstream sport community (both at the non-elite and elite levels?)

PART III: Gender and Sport

- a) In an ideal or perfect world, how would you define what it is to be a “man?” In this same world, how would you define what it is to be “masculine?”
- b) Do you think it’s possible to be gay or queer and “masculine” as you would define it? In what ways do you see that as possible? Problematic?
- c) Have you ever witnessed any adverse reaction within the running community (either in Frontrunners, in your mainstream group or during training runs or races

on your own) to a runner who could be considered a “flaming queen?” What about a runner who is openly gay (i.e. wearing something that defines him/herself as gay or queer)?

- d) In your opinion, would you define marathoning as “masculine,” “feminine” or a “mix?” Explain...
- e) How do you think marathoning compares (or doesn’t compare) to more traditionally “masculine” sports? On the other hand, how do you think it compares to more traditionally “feminine” sports (e.g. figure skating...)
- f) Have you ever witnessed other men in training runs or races worried about being beaten by a woman? Has this ever been a concern to you?

Part IV: The Body

- a) How would you describe the typical “marathon body?” In what ways do you feel different? In what ways do you feel the same?
- b) Describe your approach to training for a marathon.
- c) Do you feel that there is an ideal body image for gay men? In what ways do you feel different? In what ways do you feel the same? Does this matter to you?
- d) Did you get involved in marathoning as a way to change your body? Is marathoning a way for you to stay healthy?
- e) Have you had any injuries? If so, how have you dealt with them? Would you do anything differently? How did the injury (or injuries) make you feel?

Part V: Concepts of Health & Fitness

- a) What does “being healthy,” mean to you? What are key words that you would use to define health? Can you describe to me what a healthy individual would look like?
- b) Do you care about health? How much? Why?
- c) Where do you think your ideas on health come from? Where do you get information on health? Is there a lot of information out there? Are you interested in this information? Why/Why not?
- d) Do your parents believe in health the same way you do? Why do you think this is

- so? How are they the same (or different)? Why do you think this is so?
- e) What are the ideas of health in the gay community? How are they the same (or different) from yours? Why?
 - f) Do you think that being gay plays a role in your health habits? How?
 - g) What does “being fit” mean to you? What are key words that you would use to define fitness?
 - h) Do you care about fitness? How much? Why?
 - i) Where do you think your ideas on fitness come from? Where do you get information on fitness? Is there a lot of information out there? Are you interested in this information? Why/Why not?

Part VI: General

- a) What is your relationship to the gay/queer community in general? Do you participate in “gay” activities such as Pride? Do you go out in the gay community?
- b) If you are able to, how would you describe reactions of members of the gay/queer community to your involvement in marathoning? How do these reactions (if applicable) make you feel?
- c) Do you view being “out” as a political statement? In what ways?
- d) If you could realize a dream (or in a perfect world), what would sport look like? What would people in sport look like?

Part VII: Conclusion

- a) Review of purpose
- b) Additional information participant may wish to add
- c) Next steps

APPENDIX C
PERSONAL NARRATIVE GUIDE

PERSONAL NARRATIVE GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study. We would like you to write your own vignettes of your personal story in relation to your experiences as a gay or queer marathoner. Please feel free to write a story on all or any of the issues listed below! Do not hesitate to contact William Bridel should you have any questions. We ask that completed stories be sent to William via email at bbrid012@uottawa.ca. Thank you for your time and energy!

Story Topics:

1. Motivation for Marathon Participation

Suggestions: You could write about what got you interested in marathoning, why you participate in marathoning and not team sports, why you may choose marathoning over shorter races, what your ultimate objectives in marathoning are, etc.

2. Being Gay or Queer in the Running Community

Suggestions: You could write about your experiences of being in/out of the closet, experiences of homophobia or gay/queer solidarity or your experiences within a mainstream or gay-specific training/running group. You could also write about how you identify yourself as a gay/queer athlete and whether there are other ways in which you describe yourself, or whether how you identify yourself changes in different contexts.

3. Being a Man in Sport

Suggestions: You could write about what, in an ideal or perfect world, your definition of what it is to be a “man” and what it is to be “masculine” would be. You could also talk about whether you would define marathoning as a predominantly masculine, feminine or “mixed” sport and why you feel that way. Finally, you may wish to comment on how you feel marathoning compares to what have been considered more traditionally masculine sports (such as football, hockey, baseball, rugby, etc.) or more feminine sports such as figure skating, gymnastics, etc.

4. Body and Health

Suggestions: You could write about whether marathoning has been a way to change or maintain your body, or if marathoning has health benefits for you. You could also talk about any injuries that you have had to deal with, how you have dealt with them and how being injured made you feel.

APPENDIX D
GUIDED CONVERSATION CONSENT FORM



Université d'Ottawa • University of Ottawa

Faculté des sciences de la santé
Cabinet du doyen

Faculty of Health Sciences
Office of the Dean

GUIDED CONVERSATION CONSENT FORM

Gender, Sexuality and the Body:

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Gay/Queer Marathoners

Principal Researcher:

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.....
I, _____, hereby accept to participate in this study conducted by Dr. Geneviève Rail and Mr. William Bridel, master's student, both of the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa.

I understand that the general goal of this study is to examine gay men's experiences in marathoning. The specific objectives of this study are to explore: (a) Marathon experiences and motivations; (b) Sexuality and sport; (c) Gender and sport; and (d) Body

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and health. My participation will consist of participating in two interview sessions to discuss these themes. I further understand that interviews will last approximately 90-120 minutes each and will take place at a time and place of my choosing. I further understand that part of the data collected will be used for William Bridel's graduate thesis.

I accept that all materials collected as a result of my participation will be used only for research purposes, and that confidentiality will be protected at all times. I am assured that the digital recordings of each interview and the resultant transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office of Dr. Rail, accessible only to Dr. Rail and Mr. William Bridel. I also understand that the digital recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the study (June/2006), and that the transcripts of the interviews will be stored for 10 years in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Rail's office, after which time they too will be destroyed.

I have also been assured by the researcher that any information that I have shared will remain strictly confidential. My anonymity is also guaranteed. I will be assigned a pseudonym by the researchers, and this pseudonym will be used in the interview transcription. Should the researchers cite parts of my interview in their study, my pseudonym will be used and all information that may reveal my identity will be deleted.

I acknowledge that given the nature of this research, I will be required to express or share personal information and as a result there may be a minimal level of emotional discomfort at certain moments. I have received assurance that the researcher will do everything he can to minimize the risk of discomfort. Moreover, I will not be required to respond to any questions that may bring discomfort, and should I choose not to answer a question, there will be no negative consequences for me. The interview will be conducted in a very informal manner where the questions will be posed in simple language. In the event that I do not understand a question being posed, it will be rephrased in such a manner that it can be better understood. Finally, I am free to withdraw from the study at any time before or during the interview, without prejudice.

I understand that I will be asked to sign both copies of the consent form, and that one of the copies will be for me (the other, for the researchers).

For any additional information, I have been informed that I can contact William Bridel or Dr. Rail at any time. If I have any questions with regards to the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, tel.: (613) 562-5841, email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

Please choose one of the following options:

If I choose to withdraw from the study, I want that all data gathered from me until the time of withdrawal be destroyed:

Even if I withdraw from the study, I accept that the data gathered from me can be used for this study:

I grant permission for the digital recording of my interviews for the purpose of this study. I understand that my interviews will be transcribed and provided to me at a later date where I will have the opportunity to re-read and change, remove or correct any passages that I feel may not be appropriate. I agree to, and understand, each of these stipulations:

Yes:

No:

I wish to review a brief written narrative produced by the researchers based on the preliminary findings.

Yes:

No:

I freely and voluntarily consent to take part in this research project.

Participant :

Signature

Date

Interviewer:

I, _____, declare having explained the objectives, the nature and any inconvenience of the study to the participant mentioned above. I commit myself to the strictest confidentiality with respect to the information received in this study.

Interviewer :

Signature

Date

APPENDIX E
PERSONAL NARRATIVE CONSENT FORM



Université d'Ottawa • University of Ottawa

Faculté des sciences de la santé
Cabinet du doyen

Faculty of Health Sciences
Office of the Dean

PERSONAL NARRATIVE CONSENT FORM

Gender, Sexuality and the Body: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Gay/Queer Marathoners

Principal Researcher:

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Email: genrail@uottawa.ca

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I, _____, hereby accept to participate in this study conducted by Dr. Geneviève Rail and Mr. William Bridel, master's student, both of the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa.

I understand that the general goal of this study is to examine gay men's experiences in marathoning. The specific objectives of this study are to explore: (a) Marathon experiences and motivations; (b) Sexuality and sport; (c) Gender and sport; and (d) Body and health. My participation will consist of completing a written narrative related to my experiences in marathoning. I further understand that part of the data collected will be used for William Bridel's graduate thesis.

I accept that all materials collected as a result of my participation will be used only for research purposes, and that confidentiality will be protected at all times. I am assured that my written narrative will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office of Dr. Rail, accessible only to Dr. Rail and Mr. William Bridel. I also understand that all electronic mail correspondence and a CD containing the written narrative will be deleted and discarded at the completion of the study (June/2006), and that a hard copy will be stored for 10 years in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Rail's office, after which it too will be destroyed.

I have also been assured by the researcher that any information that I have shared will remain strictly confidential. My anonymity is also guaranteed. I will be assigned a pseudonym by the researchers. Should the researchers cite parts of my written narrative in their study, my pseudonym will be used and all information that may reveal my identity will be deleted. I acknowledge that given the nature of this research, I will be required to express or share personal information and as a result there may be a minimal level of emotional discomfort at certain moments. I have received assurance that the researcher will do everything he can to minimize the risk of discomfort. Moreover, I will not be required to include any information in my written narrative that may bring discomfort, and there will be no negative consequences for me. Finally, I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice.

For any additional information, I have been informed that I can contact William Bridel or Dr. Rail at any time. If I have any questions with regards to the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, tel.: (613) 562-5841, email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

Please copy and paste the following text into an email and return to bbrid012@uottawa.ca:

I, _____, hereby accept to participate in this study entitled "Gender, Sexuality and the Body: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Gay/Queer Marathoners," conducted by Dr. Geneviève Rail and Mr. William Bridel, master's student, both of the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa. My participation will consist of writing and submitting a personal story, the length and format to be at my own discretion. I grant permission for the collection of a written personal story for the purpose of this study. I understand that my story will be transferred to a software program for analysis and that should the researchers make any deletions to the story for privacy or confidentiality concerns, the story will be re-sent to me for my review. I understand and agree to each of these stipulations:

Yes: No:

I wish to review a brief written narrative produced by the researchers based on the preliminary findings.

Yes: No:

APPENDIX F
COMPOSITE STORY OF "DON"

Don's Story

I am a gay male. I have not always been able to state this so openly and certainly never when I was younger and suffering through mandatory phys-ed classes in high school. Sports, and team sports in particular, held no interest for me. In fact, they were torture. I never felt like I belonged. As an adult, life stresses, including issues surrounding my sexuality, led me to running. Even though I had begun to come out to people prior, through running (on my own and with a running group for gays and lesbians that I found out about) I came to accept, and even celebrate, my sexuality. Through the gay running group I met other men, gay and queer men, who had run marathons. They encouraged me to do the same and I thought this seemed like a good personal challenge. I decided to join a mainstream running group, a group that was specifically training for marathons. With a new found comfort with my sexuality I was open within this group, and at times even found myself very "in your face" with other group members to gage and test their reactions. There were none and so I did not shrink back into the closet or into silence within this space. I even wore clothing from my gay running group when training with this mainstream group and in races. I have never experienced homophobia within marathoning, and feel that it is a good place to be as a gay male. In fact, I believe within this particular sport sexuality is irrelevant. No one really cares. But it is not hidden. It is important to me, but does not always define who I am. In this sport I am a marathoner who is gay. The sport and my accomplishments within it have empowered me to say that. I also recognize that the reactions of others have had influence on this validation or empowerment that I feel. Most people think I'm crazy. And, to be honest, I kind of like that. I feel like I am undoing stereotypical notions of gay men by claiming space that has

a sense of heterosexual entitlement. People respect my athletic abilities, and I have found a meaningful way for me to identify with being gay and to express one part of who I am – through sport.

Sport to me was always a place for the masculine boys. There was a certain physical strength, a certain body type, and a certain attitude that was required. As such, I shied away from sport. In marathoning though, I have found a sport that not only has allowed me to express my sexuality, but also one that, while incredibly challenging physically and mentally, does not require me to really care about how people construe me with respect to gender. I mean, hasn't society struggled with this issue long enough? I guess I would love to see a time when there was not a distinct line between masculine and feminine, but more of an invisible line that bridges rather than separates. I see that to a certain extent in marathoning. In my experience, no one really cares if you're a man or a woman, masculine or feminine – it's more about ability which is gender neutral. Time...to get a better time for yourself, that's the goal. It's not about competing against others. There's no violence. You'd be hard pressed to find a fist fight in marathoning and it wouldn't be cheered on. And unless you're in the lead at the Olympic marathon and physically accosted by a crazed ex-priest, there's no body contact. It's very individual, which probably allows you to be more free. You don't have to worry about being all macho. In this sport in fact, that's more of a detriment. You can't be super aggressive, or you'll die. You have to be patient. You can't have one of those big, buff bodies. That's not functional or useful over 26 miles. Maybe one of the best things about marathoning for me is that I finally found something that my skinny, little body is good for – and I like that. I like that my involvement keeps my body like this. Some people may consider my

body feminine, but I don't care. This body has run marathons. I think that the typical marathon body, the lean, sinewy, skinny body that most elite runners possess, is masculine in a way, just because of the discipline and strength that is required to run the distance. In most sports, and even in the gay community, my body would be marginalized. But I just don't care. Does running marathons make me masculine—maybe in some ways, but not like someone who plays football or hockey. It's different. Can I be gay and masculine? Absolutely. But again, it's different than that hyper-masculine image you see in the gay community. But you know what? I don't want to be considered masculine the way most people would traditionally define it.

I got involved in running, and marathoning in particular, because of the personal challenge it would provide, but also very much for health and fitness reasons. Running became a healthy and productive way to deal with stress in my life, and to deal with some health issues that had presented themselves. Though that might have been my primary reason for getting involved initially, I appreciate the other things that I have received from my involvement. I have created a great social network through both the Frontrunners, and with other groups as well. Marathoning has also given me a lot of personal satisfaction. I love setting time goals to try to achieve at different races. I also like the opportunity it provides to run in spaces that are normally off-limits to pedestrians. I like the admiration I receive from other people (some might call it an "ego stroke!"), but mostly I just like the challenge of the distance, and the euphoric feeling that I get from completing a race. If it happens to be in a time that is quicker than previous races, great! If not, I'll try again. I don't really compete against the others who are out

there racing, though I may use them for some encouragement. On occasion, I may even steal a glance or two at some of the other guys out there running.

While there are many great things that I have gained from my involvement, at the same time, marathoning is demanding. I take good care of my body, but occasionally it becomes fatigued, or worse. Injury is something that most marathoners have to deal with at some point in time. It can be frustrating, especially when it is serious enough that you have to stop running. When that happens I become very frustrated and I know I'm not necessarily a good patient. I have run when I know I probably shouldn't, both in training and racing, but I think every marathoner has probably done that.

Ultimately what it comes right down to is that running and being gay are very much integrated into my daily life, and it is a good life.

APPENDIX G
ETHICS APPROVAL

Ethics Approval

June 29, 2005

Dr. Genevieve Rail
School of Human Kinetics
University of Ottawa
451 Smyth Road
Room 3028F
Ottawa, ON K1H 8M5

William Bridel

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RE: Sexuality, gender and the body: Exploring the lived experiences of gay / queer marathoners (file H 05-05-05)

Dear Dr. Rail and Mr. Bridel,

You will find enclosed the Health Sciences and Science REB ethical clearance for the abovementioned study.

Please note that it is your obligation to notify the REB prior to the institution of any modifications to your study or any adverse events which may occur during the course of this study.

This certificate of ethical clearance is valid until June 29, 2006. Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer in June 2006 to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:
<http://web10.uottawa.ca/services/rgessrd/ethics/index.asp>

A copy of this approval will be sent to research services, if necessary.

If you have any questions, you may contact the undersigned at the number 562-5387.

Sincerely yours,

Rita D'Alessandro
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Dr. Daniel Lagarec, Chair of the Health Sciences and Science REB

HEALTH SCIENCES AND SCIENCE RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL**

This is to certify that the University of Ottawa Health Sciences and Science Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical approval of the research project entitled **Sexuality, gender and the body: Exploring the lived experiences of gay / queer marathoners (file H 05-05-05)** submitted by Dr. Geneviève Rail and William Bridel, master's student, both of the School of Human Kinetics. The Board found that this research project met appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement and in the Procedures of the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Boards, and accordingly gave it a Category 1a (approval). This certification is valid one year from the date indicated below.

Rita D'Alessandro
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Dr. Daniel Lagarec, Chair of the
Health Sciences and Science REB

June 29, 2005
Date