



“Just tape it up for me, ok?”: Masculinities, injury and embodied emotion



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ABSTRACT

In this autoethnography, I consider the emotionality of sustaining and exacerbating an athletic injury. I interrogate youth sport experiences in which coaches and teammates lauded my willingness to play sport with little regard for my physical well-being, and the anxieties, doubts, and frustrations I experienced through the process of ‘recovering’ from my injury. In the process, I forefront my (athletic) identity, and the embodied emotionality of confronting a ‘failing’ body upon which it rest(s)ed. Additionally, I critically interrogate violence as a thread running through practices and discourses of masculinity, situating my researching body at the “intersecting vectors of power, knowledge and identity” (Giardina and Newman, 2011a: 524).

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1. Cast of (main) characters¹

Boys

(‘Wanna be’) athletes, deeply – and unreflexively – pursuing an imagined and imaginary masculine ideal

Men

(‘Has been’) athletes experiencing bodily “betrayal” (see Sparkes, 2012), ambivalently trying – and often failing – to extract themselves from the pursuit of an imagined and imaginary masculine ideal

I have two intentions in mind with the pluralization of “boy” and “man” here.² On one hand, I intend to suggest that I am interrogating the gender projects of others (if not as centrally as my own) in the narratives that follow. On the other, it is meant to reflect the idea that identity is neither stable nor fixed. The boy I was at age 17, for example, is not the same boy I was at 13, though he struggled with and against some common issues. The point is not simply that there is a multiplicity of masculinities, either in a social setting or across a lifespan;

*rather, the point is that how boys and men embody masculinity, and endeavour (or don’t) to accrue ‘masculine capital’ (de Visser and McDonnell, 2013) has important implications for men’s relationships with themselves and their bodies, as well as with other social actors and **their** bodies (Smith, 2013). Put differently, masculinities are inextricably and (intra/inter)corporeally relational (Drummond, 2010; Schippers, 2007).*

2. “There is no ghost so difficult to lay as the ghost of an injury”³

May, 2004

I lie on the floor, and Julie,⁴ my great friend and physiotherapist, prepares to administer the “Gokavi Transverse Technique,” a treatment she has performed on me numerous times since *the injury*. The procedure involves inserting a needle-like instrument into a tight muscle; the muscle contracts in response, and when it relaxes, it is longer than before the treatment. With the warm, afternoon sun pouring in through the kitchen windows, I lie very still, conscious of the trickle of sweat running down my armpit. I tense in anticipation, holding my breath. And then, a bolt of

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¹ I gratefully borrow this device from Adams (2006).

² As elsewhere (Laurendeau, 2011), readers might think of these italicized sections as analytic memos written at various points of this project. The aim, following authors like Ellis (2011), Markula (2012), Diversi and Henhawk (2012), and Newman (2013), is to employ polyvocality and *show* readers the process of working on/with/through ideas *throughout* the process of writing an autoethnographic project.

³ This quote comes from Scottish poet and essayist Alexander Smith (see http://thinkexist.com/quotation/there_is_no_ghost_so_difficult_to_lay_as_the/174492.html, accessed March 15, 2013).

⁴ I employ the real names of central characters in these stories, each of whom has consented to their inclusion in this work. I have provided more peripheral characters with pseudonyms.

lightning strikes me, running several inches from the point of insertion.

I see the look on Julie's face, and rewind the track in my head, knowing something went awry. As I replay the last seconds, I see it: As she inserted the 'needle,' I hit her. Not a tap. Not a playful shoulder punch. I hit her. Utterly, totally involuntarily. And hard.

How on earth did I end up (t)here?

3. (Writing) emotion, embodiment, masculinities

Emotions, Williams argues, are "complex, multifaceted human compounds which arise, sociologically speaking, in a variety of sociorelational contexts [and link] larger social structures with the emotional experiences and expressions of embodied individuals" (2001: 1).⁵ Of particular note in this excerpt is the emphasis on *embodied* individuals; as "a thinking, moving, feeling 'complex' – rather than a static, unidimensional 'thing' – emotion is *embodied* through and through" (Williams, 2001: 132, emphasis in original). Kern, for example, highlights the sociological import of considering emotion and embodiment together in order to explore the ways in which bodies, as "corporeal, material entities [are] given meaning within (historically specific) social and spatial contexts" (2012: 30).

More to the point for the current paper, it is not simply that emotions and embodiment are co-constitutive. Rather, our "embodied practices" (Kern, 2012) are undertaken in relation to other bodies and emotions (our own and those of others). Following Walby and his colleagues, I consider emotions "as the experience of *social relations*" (Walby et al., 2012: 4, emphasis in original). Central to my project here, this conceptualization: attends to the articulation of self and social structure; concerns itself with the complexity and layering of emotions; and calls forth the methodological bricoleur who draws on research methods that forefront "emotions in situ as they occur during sequences of interaction" (Walby et al., 2012: 5). This conceptualization highlights how we both experience and become aware of emotion in bodily ways, in the context of (inter)corporeal action in particular social situations (see Francombe, 2013; Hubbard, 2005; Williams, 2001).

Following Ellis (1995: 313), I aim to bring "readers into the emotional complexity" of the experiences I consider in this paper. From this perspective, it is not enough to write about emotion. Rather, "we should study emotions emotionally and feel and care for our selves, participants, readers, and topics of study" (Ellis, 2009: 110). My aim, then, is to construct autoethnographic narratives in which readers can see (and feel) themselves and their own embodied emotions. This is not to romanticize the therapeutic potential of narratives (Smith, 1999). As Sotirin suggests, though, narratives might open up "lines of thought, sensate experiences, and imagination that depart from the narrative–lines of flight that do not converge upon shared passions or pain but that disrupt or disregard ready commonalities and assumed connections" (2010: 10). In so doing, perhaps they become one part of a complex of narrative resources upon which readers might draw as they (re) construct their selves.

In this autoethnography, I focus on emotion and embodiment as made manifest in a variety of intercorporeal moments over more than two decades. Beyond that, though, I interrogate my gender project in the process, exploring masculinities as "*constructed, performed, and read* via complex webs of on-going social

⁵ In contrast to my earlier autoethnographic writing (Laurendeau, 2011), in this work I draw significantly on the words of other writers in particular sections. I do so, to borrow from the Editor of *Emotion, Space and Society*, in an effort to more explicitly write "with and through other texts," and thus situate this work in conversation with the writings that have shaped this project as it has developed.

interactions in specific relation to the workings of discourses and associated power relations that are allegorically connected to male bodies" (Pringle and Hickey, 2010: 119, emphasis in original). My aim in undertaking this project is to move my "tacit, sensuous body, its fleshy sinews, its movement and its (in)activity" (Francombe, 2013) into the texts I produce. So what I want to move "out of the shadows" (Giardina and Newman, 2011a: 530) are my own embodied (hyper)masculine performances and the ways in which they might be conceptualized as part of a pursuit of an impossible (and imaginary) ideal (Pringle and Hickey, 2010).

As part of this project, I "reflect on some deep-rooted anxieties that I hold about the injured, impaired, and disabled body" (Sparkes, 2012: 181). Following Newman (2013), my aim in this paper is to use somatic experience as an entry point into broader discussions of hybrid identities and the creation of the self within the confines of powerful (but not all-powerful) discourses (also see Crocket, 2012; Pringle, 2005). I understand identity as fragmented, unstable, and always 'under construction' (see Helstein, 2007; Peers, 2012). So my ableism is one of a number of layers I explore here as I forefront masculinity(ies), emotion and embodiment through a consideration of my "problematic [body] in social space" (Eldridge, 2010).⁶

4. (Embodied) pleasure and pain

May, 2000

Behind the back. White sand. Under the legs. Crystal clear water. Leaping, lunging, lounging, being.

I am spending four weeks in Venezuela with two of my best friends. As our time here winds down, we have a tiny island to ourselves for the day. As Nika relaxes with a novel, Mike and I throw a Frisbee for hours. We are *entirely* in the moment. We take inordinate pleasure in creative moments of play. We play not against each other, but *with* each other in every sense. We celebrate successes – our own and each other's – and disavow the very idea of failure, if only for a few glorious hours.

*****⁷

September, 2003

The summer "ultimate"⁸ season is my first sustained experience with the activity, and I'm getting pretty good.

Today, early in the fall season, we're playing on the most chewed up field I've seen. But I don't care, because I have legs. Everything our handlers launch, I track down. I go long, and Fred finds me. I cut back along the sidelines, and the disc is in the perfect spot; I am in the proverbial 'zone.' In the second half, the opponents' frustration goes into overdrive, as does my competitiveness. I'm defending one of their best players, and as he starts to make his cut, I anticipate where he hopes to meet the disc, and close the gap. As he reaches out, face grimacing with effort, I lunge, and feel the plastic against my fingertips as I knock it down.

"Foul!" he cries, *much* too loudly and certainly for my liking.

"Contest!" I yell, even before I've thought it through.⁹

⁶ I should acknowledge here that I use this phrase in a rather different vein than does Eldridge.

⁷ I employ this device to mark the transition between narratives, whether these narratives take place in very different spatio-historical 'moments' (as is the case here) or simply later the same day.

⁸ For more on the sport of ultimate frisbee, commonly known by practitioners as "ultimate," see Crocket (2012) and Thornton (2004).

⁹ As Crocket (2012) explains, recreational Ultimate is a self-refereed game. A player on whom a foul is called, for example, may accept the call and the consequences (the disc being advanced for the opposing team). Alternatively, he/she may contest the call, returning the disc to the player last in possession of it (essentially forcing a replay).

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