Exploring the Pain Contest in Competitive Male Rowers

by:

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Science
Department of Exercise Science
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of a group of competitive male rowers, to enhance understandings of pain, identity, and embodiment in sport culture. Ethnographic methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews were employed to access the cultural norms and ideologies that were later used to explain the shared embodied practices and perceptions relevant to the group of male athletes under scrutiny. The application of Goffman’s theoretical framework of dramaturgy also helped to address the cultural significance of non-injury related pain and suffering in relation to social constructs, such as masculinity, identity, and self-objectification. Further, this study unpacks the cultural complexities of pain in rowing culture and vividly presents the ways in which rowers contextually interpret, convey, and experience their bodies through the analysis of three major themes: pain, efficiency, and closeness. Specifically, this study presents rich descriptions of the unique and paradoxical relationships male rowers developed with pain and their embodied identities. Ultimately suggesting that male rowers engaged in risky and painful practices to uphold idealized performances of idealized rower identities, to enhance meaningful male bonding and to avoid feelings of shame, humiliation, or rejection in the sporting context.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Background

Historically, sport research has neglected to consider the body as a primary focus of theoretical analysis (Wellard, 2016). Despite the centrality of the body in sport and physical activity, academic literature discussing these topics often overlook the essential theoretical contributions that the body can offer as a subjective and material entity (Woodward, 2009). For example, sport research has established the notion that sport cultures consist of unique social norms and understandings that not only influence lived experiences, but also become embodied by athletes and contribute to their sense of self and identities (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Atkinson and Young, 2008; Butler, 1993; Larsson, 2014; Pickard 2016; Turner and Wainwright, 2004; Wellard, 2016; Woodward, 2006). As a result, scholars have utilized embodied approaches in order to move theoretical understandings of the body beyond a traditional mind-body dualism perspective and place the body at the forefront of contextual analyses of sport phenomena (see Wellard, 2016). Specifically, embodied approaches aim to present the body as a social construction that can be shaped and reshaped by individual and contextual factors, as opposed to a static and completely objective entity (Bourdieu, 1984; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Woodward, 2006). In addition, this approach opposed the view that identity and body are exclusively distinct and instead advocates that the two are mutually dependent and complexly related. Literature in the fields of “sociology of sport” and “sociology of the body” have set the groundwork for embodied approaches and have allowed scholars to encompass the physical, psychological, social, and emotional properties of the body and human life in their work (Bourdieu 1984; Butler, 1993; Featherstone, 1991; Foucault, 1981; Frank, 1990; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1994; Wacquant, 1995). Embodied thinking is a poststructuralist approach and has provided
fundamental insights for sport research, as it grants scholars permission to address the personal and subjective realities of individuals who engage/participate in various physical cultures (Larsson, 2016). This study expands and further develops embodied approaches by conducting an ethnographic exploration of a rowing team and deconstructing males’ relationships with their bodies, identities, and pain.

Pain is a complex aspect of human life that scholars have struggled to understand. For example, there are many paradoxes and complex explanations as to how/why humans are able to withstand, accept, and even find pleasure in pain (Bale, 2006; Good, Brodwin & Good, 1994; Howe, 2004; Nixon, 1994; Woodward, 2006; Young and Atkinson, 2008). In sport, the concepts of pain and suffering are often omitted from theoretical inquiry because of the ways sport culture has normalized the experience of pain and downplayed its significance in sporting contexts (Curry, 1993; Howe, 2004; Katarbu, 1983; Young, White & McTeer, 1994;). Sport literature has a plethora of bio-physical and psychological perspectives examining pain in terms of how to prevent, diagnosis, and/or treat injury or sensations of pain, which created a limited view of how pain operates in everyday life (Bale, 2006; Bendelow, 2000; Morris, 1993; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). It is not to say that these interpretations of pain are not valuable, however these dominant perspectives have prevented the full investigation of many mechanisms and factors operating in the lives of those experiencing pain. Human life is complex, and to neglect the social, historical, and embodied aspects of pain prevents a true reflection of everyday realities.

Recent sociological explorations have challenged assumptions that pain and suffering are inherently bad and have demonstrated the subjective, ambiguous, and paradoxical aspects of pain in sport deserving of theoretical recognition (Leder, 1990; Roderick, 2006; Waddington, Loland
& Skistad, 2006). For example, sport researchers have now recognized that pain and suffering are dependent on living bodies, capable of producing unique meanings and interpretations connected to background, social interaction, individual factors, and/or context, which means the two (pain and suffering) can be experienced in a variety of ways (Leder, 1990). It is important to acknowledge that the terms pain and suffering are often used interchangeably in many research studies, however for the purposes of this project these two terms will be differentiated. Thus, when discussing pain, the researcher will be referring to acute and immediate embodied sensations and suffering will refer to the chronic negative responses and sensations that occur from an individual’s interpretations of pain (i.e. anxiety or fear surrounding a specific pain) (Fordyce, 1988). This study aims to continue the progress sociologists of sport have made through their rich theoretical analysis of pain and further develop key interpretations established through these analyses. Specifically, this project focuses on the body and athletes’ relationships with pain and suffering. Thus, it is rooted in perspectives that present the body as symbolic and pain as a form of bodily capital (Shilling, 2003). Since the study is focused on male rowers’ experiences of pain, the study draws from the research of many scholars that consider pain behaviours to be “gendered practices” and deeply connected to identity (Bendelow, 2000; Messner, 1992; Roderick, 2006; Young and White, 1995; Young, 1993; Young, White & McTeer, 1994). Moreover, by employing a sociological approach, this study not only contributed to the current deficiency of physical cultural interpretations of pain in sport literature (in comparison to bio-physical approaches), but also provided further evidence that these approaches are necessary to advance current conceptualizations and issues surrounding pain in sport.

Sociological perspectives have recognized athletes’ behaviours, attitudes, and understandings are often learned socially, culturally justified, and deemed normative depending on the sport context. Alluding to the notion that specific sport cultures need to be investigated in
order to make definitive conclusions about the human condition in terms of shared body experiences, gendered norms, distinctive embodied beliefs, and any other practices relating to pain and suffering in sport. This project focused on a specific group of male athletes participating in elite rowing for two principal reasons. First, the focus of this study was to extend analyses of pain in sport that were unrelated to injury (i.e. the result of fatigue and/or exhaustion during training or competition) (Bale, 2006). As Heikkala (1993) outlined, “the essence of sport is the feeling of muscular pain and exhaustion” (p. 81); advocating that this unique aspect of sport is an important area of study. Further, endurance sports have been identified as key areas of interrogation for scholars wishing to explore pain and suffering in sport (Bale, 2006). Specifically, those that were not dominated by technical skill, athletic concerns, or variable performance factors (McNamee, 2006). For example, scholars such as Bale (2006), Howe (2004), and Atkinson (2006) have explored endurance running and cycling and found pain to hold unique value and meaning since these sporting cultures centered on pain. In addition, these studies introduced concepts such as ‘positive pain’, pain as an ‘investment or deposit’, and ‘peak flow’ (Bale, 2006; Howe, 2004; Young and Atkinson, 2008). All of which demonstrate the complex and paradoxical aspects of pain.

Rowing is both an endurance sport that requires vigorous and extensive physical training and frequently pushes the physical, emotional, and psychological limits of its members and a sport that has not received a large amount of attention in Canadian research compared to other endurance sports. Rowing is also a sport connected to a deep history of tradition, sexism, whiteness, militaristic ideals, and classism (Rankka, 1998; Caudwell, 2011; Leonard, 2016; Spracklen, 2013: Mandell, 1999; Porto, 2016). All of which suggested rowing was an ideal sport to employ a cultural investigation. Second, although many studies of pain in sport have considered the perspectives of men, studies discussing embodied perspectives are limited
(Woodward, 2009). Sport and PCS literature addressing embodiment in sport and literature have often neglected male perspectives as most accounts are predominately female (Noland, 2009). This study addressed this gap by including the embodied perspectives of men in relation to pain and identity. Overall, the explorations of male body perceptions and practices in competitive rowers is a necessary extension to the innovative scholars that have recognized pain as an important social aspect of sport.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the complex ways males embody pain, sport and identity in order to learn more about the human condition. Specifically, the study investigated what it meant to be a competitive male rower and communicated the lived experiences of these athletes through ethnographic methods. The cultural significance of pain was addressed in relation to social constructs, such as masculinity, identity, and the self in order to enhance current understandings of pain in sport as well as generalized assumptions about the human experience. Ethnographic methods ensured the cultural complexities of pain in rowing culture were unpacked and ensured the purpose of this paper was realized as they helped to vividly present the ways in which rowers contextually interpreted, conveyed, and experienced their bodies. Theoretically, Goffman’s dramaturgical approach and his conceptualizations of shame, the body, and human interaction were predominantly used explain and make sense of the unique behaviours and perceptions of the specific male rowers under scrutiny. All of which were informed by the overall purpose of the study, which was to address the following three research questions:

1. How is pain culturally interpreted and embodied in rowing culture?

2. How do male rowers negotiate and embody their athletic and masculine identities?
3. How are these identities and presentations of the self-related to risk behaviours and/or experiences of pain in sport?
Chapter 2
Literature Review

Nixon (1992, 1993) and Kevin Young (2008) have labeled sport a ‘culture of risk’ or ‘pain cultures’ as athletes inevitably experience some degree of pain and/or suffering whenever they are in a sporting contexts. This realization has urged social scholars to recognize how the normalcy of pain and suffering in sport cultures, had caused a disregard of these topics in sport literature (Curry 1993; Young, White, & McTeer, 1994). Prior to 1983, when Joseph Katarba published *Chronic Pain*, the normalization of pain had prevented extensive academic inquiry because no sociologist had ever considered pain as a social aspect of high-level sport. Though Katarba’s (1983) research primarily focused on pain associated with disease/injury, it was an important precursor to the physical cultural studies that have since investigated the unique relationships athletes have with their bodies and pain. Said literature has investigated the sociological elements of pain and shown the paradoxical nature of pain in sport as well as the ways in which experiences of pain can influence and are influenced by identity, gender, their bodies and the bodies of others (Bendelow, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Lupton, 1999; Nixon, 1992; Roderick, 2016; Sands, 1999; Young 1993; Young, White, and McTeer, 1994; White and Young, 1995). Specifically, the use of embodied approaches on sport literature has provided innovative and crucial perceptions of the ‘lived’ experiences of pain and their significant contribution to sociology’s predominant pursuit to describe and understand the human condition (Leder, 1990).

Sport literature has also predominantly examined the body as a systematic, predictable, and relatively static vessel used to carry both the mind and an individual’s sense of self through an ever-changing world. However, sociology of sport and physical cultural scholars have established that bodies must be understood beyond these dominant biological and/or
psychological conceptualizations as social studies have determined the body is also socially constructed, symbolically relevant and culturally experienced (Armengol, 2013; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Mauss, 1973; Orbach, 2010; Thapan, 1997). As noted by Mauss (1973), the body must always be included and connected to the study of individual’s attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours. From this perspective, the dominant notions have suggested a ‘mind-body dualism’ or other variations of compartmentalizing human thought, feeling, and action are incredibly limiting to researchers exploring human life as they have separated individuals into bio-physical, spiritual, mental or additional categories. This is problematic when investigating the human experience because as Mauss (1924) has eloquently stated, “there is no such thing as a human being divided up into separate faculties. We are always dealing with the corporeal and the mental in their entirety, given once and all at the same time”. In addition, multiple scholars have demonstrated that physical sensations, behaviours and practices are all affected by socialization and have challenged the idea of a ‘natural’ or ‘organic’ body. Instead, recent studies have established the body as a material and an extremely important resource to investigate social phenomenon as the living bodies have agency (Shilling, 2012; Crossley, 2006). As described by Thapan (1997), even though cultural forces are constantly bombarding individuals’ and their bodies, not all forces control or interact in the same way. Cultural forces can be resisted, altered, or reproduced by an individual or group (Williams and Bendelow, 1998). These theories and ideologies have been especially useful when applied to sport. However, continued exploration is needed to maintain and enhance interdisciplinary understandings of sport, movement, and physical activity. This study contributed to this objective by building and developing the theoretical analyzes discussed in the following chapters. Specifically, this chapter will present a review of literature that has examined pain, identity, and embodiment in sport and outline key concepts and theories that have supplemented the formation of this research project.
2.1 The Embodied Perspective

First, the concept of embodiment is imperative to understanding the underlying perspectives that have influenced this project. The term embodiment was created to replace language such as ‘the body’ and ‘bodies’ in order to avoid the objectified standpoints these terms often insinuate (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Wellard, 2016; Woodward, 2009). The concept of embodiment presents a solution to the problematic ways empirical research has separated the self/mind from the body as embodied approaches view the self and body are an inseparable whole (Frank, 1990; Larsson, 2016; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Weiss and Haber, 1999). Using an embodied approach, sport scholars have been able to include culture, emotion, and the self as always being present and entangled with corporeality (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Larsson, 2016; Woodward, 2009). For example, many social theorists have outlined that the lived body is subject to multiple discourses and practices, which offer ideas on how the body should act, look, and feel (Bordo, 1993; Bourdieu, 1986; Butler, 1993; Cregan 2012; Foucault, 1978; Frank, 1991; Larsson, 2014; Noland, 2009; Shilling 2004; Turner, 1984; Woodworth, 2009). Prior to these realizations, bodies and embodied experiences were underappreciated as significant aspects of humanity in sport research. According to Orbach (2010), the body is often influenced by social relations, which have the capability to shape, control, and provide ideas about body ideals, imageries, and practices that are often internalized. Orbach (2010) also states that there is no aspect of human life, including heart rate, blood pressure, dance moves, and all other physical attributes that are not affected by socialization Thus emphasizing the importance of investigating social bodies in sport and physical cultural studies.

2.2 Embodiment and Sport Research

Sport contexts require athletes to use their bodies as tools to achieve performance goals, which has encouraged unique relationships with their bodies and the bodies of others. Research
has effectively shown an athlete’s body is intricately bound to identities, statuses, and roles in both their constructions and expressions (Connell, 1995; Mauss, 1978; McKay, Messner, & Sabo, 2000). Bodies can display gender identities, increase cultural capital, represent power, and/or demonstrate success (Atkinson, 2007; Drummond, 2010; Wellard, 2009). Within sport groups, athletes may adopt particular norms or strategies unique to a sport’s specific objectives that often manifest as methods that control, manipulate, or govern the body. In this regard, the body becomes deeply intertwined with controlling and fulfilling an athlete’s sense of self. As Turner and Wainwright (2004) have described, competitive sport is not merely a series of actions that an athlete “does”, sport is a part of who athletes “are”. By participating in elite sport as a ‘serious leisure’ (Stebbins, 1992), athletes are able to embody their individual and group identities (Turner and Wainwright, 2004). Providing strong evidence that further exploration of the embodiment in a sport context will yield valuable and meaningful data. In competitive sport, athletes are suggested to be more vulnerable to the adoption and acceptance of cultural norms and practices communicated through social interaction (David, 2005; Stirling and Kerr, 2007). Athletes are considered to have a heightened vulnerability to the influences of culture as a result of the extensive amount of time athletes spend with their team/group and the all-consuming ideologies of sport practices that are often still present outside of a specific sport context. In other words, if one were to study a rugby players’ embodied experiences, many of them could not be generalized for all athletes as other sports such as cross-country running or tennis athletes may have created very different meanings towards bodies and body practices and unique social norms. This reminds scholars of the importance of investigating the unique discourses and cultural-specific assumptions underlying embodied experiences of athletes. Kath Woodward’s (2016) work *Bodies in the Zone*, is an important example of how the embodied approach has been developed to fit to sport literature. Woodward’s examinations provided deeper
understandings of embodiment by analyzing the experience of being ‘in the zone’ as a social and cultural phenomenon instead of using restricting psychological accounts that focus primarily on mental states. Once again, Woodworth (2016) showed the value of embodied approaches in sport literature by centralizing the body in her explanations and presenting bodies as material and an arrangement of ‘enfleshed’ capabilities that are governed by both individualized agency and structural/social influences. Overall, embodied approaches have challenged, improved, and altered traditional ways of thinking about the body and bodies in sport and this study has continued this trend by incorporating embodiment as a central aspect of the investigation of pain and identity in sport.

2.3 Embodied Pain in Sporting Contexts

Pain is an everyday experience of the human condition. Leder (1990) argues the body ‘disappears’ in daily life, unless pain or illness is present. Pain is difficult to ignore and presents an immediate disruption of the normalized body practices and experiences an individual is accustomed to performing/feeling. In this regard, pain/suffering forces people to recognize their bodies and the many ways pain and suffering underpin human life as universal realities (Wilkinson and Kleinman 2016; Wilkinson, 2005). Similar to studies of the body, medical models also dominate pain research. This view reduces pain to represent a biological defense mechanism that signals or warns humans of a physiological problem (Lolan, Skirstad, Waddington, 2006). Theoretically, medical approaches propose that pain is a sensation humans should avoid as it is fundamentally damaging or bad. This approach suggests pain is predictable and highly detached from a person’s mind, emotions, and/or cultural experiences (i.e. purely biological). Similar to the dominant conceptualizations of the body outlined, pain has also been reduced to a ‘medicalized’ view that splits body and mind as two distinct aspects that experience pain at different levels of human consciousness (Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Current
scholars are challenging this view by highlighting that in everyday life, pain operates as a biological, psychological and social phenomenon (Honkasalo, 1998; Roderick, Waddington, Parker, 2000; Waddington, 2004; Roderick, 2006; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Zborowski (1958) found there were significant differences between ethnic groups in terms of how they managed and negotiated the meaning of their pain. Implying social factors were influencing the way these groups perceived and understood pain. Koos (1954) also confirmed the undeniable influence of culture when investigating patients with similar or identical diagnoses of illness. In theory, these patients should have had similar responses to their pain, however Koo found his participants disclosed various meanings of and responses to pain. Overall, social scientists have exposed the importance of examining pain as a lived, embodied, physical and emotional experience (Leder, 1990). An experience that is constantly influenced by past experiences, representations, and social norms (Wilkinson, 2005).

In sport literature, scientists have found sport cultures often foster unique relationships with pain. Individuals involved in sporting communities are often subjected to insulated strategies of how to interpret, negotiate, and/or endure bouts of pain and suffering. Thus, sociologists such as Nixon (1992) have suggested that the ideologies present within what he refers to as a ‘sportsnet’, greatly influences an athlete’s willingness to endure pain and suffer through injury without questioning it. Bale (2006), along with Nixon (1992), Sands (1999) and Shilling (2003), have all shown the ways in which pain holds symbolic value and is a body practice that can increase an athlete’s social capital within their respective sports team. To athletes, pain is seen as a normalized and necessary challenge in all sport cultures. In this regard, pain has instrumental value in the lives of athletes. Without pain, athletes are unable to reach desired levels of fitness, which are needed to be successful and/or win (Bale, 2006). For example, Sands (1999) and Phillips (2001) have recognized that runners voluntarily suffer
through pain during training as a form of ‘investment’ or ‘deposit’ to achieve greater performances on competition days (i.e. increased speed). This idea correlates with the widely accepted phrase ‘no pain, no gain’, which implied that through pain, athlete’s will gain a higher level of performance or status. Sport culture has been known to produce and reproduce notions of the ‘no pain, no gain’ mentalities and ‘win-at-all-costs’ mentalities, which encourage athletes to sacrifice, manipulate, and damage their bodies and accept pain as normal for the sake of sport (Hughes and Coackley, 1991; Sabo, 1986, 2004; Young, 2004). In other words, athlete’s dependence on their bodies produces unique relationships with pain because sport culture promotes pain as necessary to attain success and an unquestionable reality of being an athlete (Nixon, 1993).

Endurance sports have been identified as significant sites of ‘pain work’ and rich contextual areas to examine suffering (McNamee, 2006; Young and Atkinson, 2008). From a physiological and psychological standpoint, exhausting bodily systems past their limits causes a great deal of pain, discomfort, and distress. Thus, athletes participating in endurance sports must arguably learn to accept pain as more frequent and prolonged everyday occurrences compared to other sports (McNamee, 2006; Young, White, and McTeer. 1994). Endurance sports are of particular interest in relation to this project because they are ideal contexts to investigate pain that is not associated with injury (Bale, 2006). Since rowing is considered a endurance sport, it is understandable that the data resulted in rich discussions of the pain/exhaustion associated with pushing physiological limits during training and competition (Bale, 2006). Young and Atkinson (2008) defined, ‘pain work’ as a “process [that] involves experiencing the body as a moving, hurting, enduring, and thinning tool of competition” (p.112). Interestingly, athletes learned to objectify their lean, thin and toned bodies through and consider their efficient and conditioned bodies as representations of their discipline, control and dedication to sport. Athletes were found
to find great pleasure and satisfaction from enduring painful experiences and reaching new physiological limits. A concept Atkinson and Young (2008) referred to as ‘deep flow’ and Maslow (1970) labeled ‘peak experience’. Maslow’s (1970) concept of peak experience is referred to as the rewarding moment when an individual who is in pain realizes that they have surpassed the level of pain that they had previously believed they could not overcome. Scholars in sport research have begun to explore these concepts in sport and found that triathletes, distance runners, and other endurance athletes find that ‘sport-induced physical pain’ athletes can experience pleasure, a sense of purpose, physical honestly, and personal trust (Bale, 2004; Le Breton 2000; Callois 1967; Young and Atkinson, 2008). Le Breton (2000), also outlined that the moment of peak experience could also be interpreted as a symbolic death in which individuals experience a type of rebirth following complete physical exhaustion or collapse from training or competition. In addition, scholars have examined pain in sport and found cultural ideologies influence an athlete’s sense of self and identity to such a degree that refuting the normalization of pain threatened their existence within sport (Young, White, McTeer, 1994). Loland, Waddington, and Skirstad (2006) suggested enduring pain for the purposes of sport “tested an athlete’s spirit” (p.54), reinforcing the importance of examining cultural influences when exploring pain in sport.

2.4 Masculinity, Embodiment, and Pain in Sport

In sociology, the concept of identity is understood as a representation of the self. The ‘self’ is the internalized understanding of ‘who we are’ separate from others whereas, identity is defined, confirmed, and created through others in external social environments (Goffman, 1959). The construction of an individual’s identity is first realized through social interactions existing outside of an individual’s sense of self (Woodward, 2006). Thus, an individual is constantly
working towards an identity they desire to represent, while existing as a present individualized self (Jenkins, 2014). Given embodied approaches conceptualize bodies as social symbols, it is not surprising that social scientists have also labeled the bodies as sites for identity performance and construction (Featherstone, 1991; Roderick, 2006; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1984). Specific to the focus of this research project, studies have illuminated the intimate and unspoken powers of male bodies and how embodied practices can construct, maintain, and validate masculine and athletic identities (Armengol, 2013; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Drummond, 2010; Hearn, 2013; Kehler and Atkinson, 2010; Tuana, 2002; Wellard, 2006). For example, sociologists have found the number of males actively involved in bodywork and body projects has escalated substantially since 2008 (Hakim, 2015). Male bodywork and body projects are behaviours men engage in to create a desired body form congruent with group ideals and individual identity (Gidden, 1991; Shilling, 1993; Thualagan, 2015). Muscular bodies are suggested to be the primary aspiration of males regardless of socio-economic status (Hakim, 2015). The construction of a fit and muscular body through embodied practices have been identified as means to represent competitive, individualist, and neoliberal ideals (i.e. maleness). By achieving desirable body representations and embodied forms, males are able to accumulate social capital by reinforcing dominant notions of masculinity (Shilling, 2004; Wellard, 2002; Young, White, McTeer, 1994). In sport, Messner (1992), has theorized that the generalized expectations of masculine identity have detached men from emotion and created objectified and instrumental views of their bodies. Signifying that behaviours present in sporting contexts are ‘gendered’ and intensely attached to identity (Young, 1993). For example, in sporting culture, masculine identities are associated with the embodied acceptance and conquering of risk and pain (Roderick, 2006; Messner, 1992; Young, 1993). Further, Bridges’ (2009) physical cultural study on bodybuilders emphasized the aesthetic and symbolic significance of bodies in
performing and demonstrating masculinity in sport contexts. Through the application of body and gender capital, Bridges (2009) further highlights how bodies both inscribe and present masculine sporting identities and how the pursuit of specific idealized presentations of the self (i.e. identity) influences human behaviours and thoughts. According to Young, White, and McTeer (1994), male athletes are commonly socialized into believing that ‘real men’ are expected to conceal, ignore, and isolate themselves from pain. Therefore, if male athletes successfully deny, depersonalize, or suppress pain they receive social confirmation (either real or perceived) of a masculine identity (White and Young, 1995; Young, White, McTeer, 1994).

In addition, a growing number of studies examining male bodies have focused on new topics such as *male* body image and *male* body anxieties. The recent upsurge came in response to previous research’s exclusivity towards female bodies and the inaccurate assumption that body experiences were only relevant to females and/or femininity (Cash, 2004; Hargreaves, 2006; Leone, Sedory, Gray, 2005; Williams, 2003). This unbalanced focus on the female population, prevented academics from thoroughly investigating body awareness, anxieties and all body practices as a part of the human condition. Scholars have since identified disorders such as anorexia (“manorexia”), muscle dysmorphia (“megarexia”) and social physique anxiety (SPA) in the male population (Leone, Sedory, & Gray., 2005; Williams, et al., 2002). Further emphasizing the importance of including male embodiment in academic enquiry and recognizing that individuals’ attach gendered meanings to their bodies and the bodies of others through socialization and act in ways that restore, maintain, or resist these meanings (Mauss, 1973; Messner, 1990; Orbach, 2010; Shilling, 2010; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). This research speaks to the idea that male athletes commonly objectify and depersonalize themselves from embodied practices by focusing on the physical components of sport, pain, and/or exercise (White and Young, 1995).
2.5 Athlete/Sporting Identity and Pain

Messner (1990) theorized that athletes create identities and relationships through sets of institutionalized norms, which validate an athlete’s internalized willingness to sacrifice the body. According to Messner (1990), Young, White, and McTeer (1994), if an athlete were to resist these norms, they would jeopardize their established role and identity within a given sport. Therefore, cultural expectations surrounding pain, can influence and/or govern an individual’s behaviours because these assumptions construct identities that are dependent on ‘fitting-in’. In other words, research shows athletes are more likely to risk their physical bodies than risk losing their sense of self or cultural sporting identity. This is also theorized as a ‘sport ethic’ in which all athletes know to be acceptable and appropriate behaviour (Hughes and Coakley, 1991). By following the specific norms, expectations, and unwritten codes of conduct, individuals are able to confirm an ‘athlete’ identity and be accepted by their teams.

As noted by Atkinson (2008) and Putnam (1995), sport-induced pain and an athlete’s capacity to tolerate act as forms of ‘bonding capital’, cultural distinction, and confirms a collective sport identity. In addition, Atkinson (2008) suggests the shared acceptance of pain in a group of triathletes was a part of what Elias (1991) defined as *habitus*. Habitus refers to the internalization of shared structural values, beliefs, and understandings within a group, which are practiced or embodied by group members. Thus, the shared habitus of the triathletes outlined painful experiences as positive and provided “exiting significance”, which subsequently perpetuated further pursuits of pain in sport. Also, Atkinson (2008), argues the triathletes under investigation were anxious, lonely, bored, or frustrated with their current socio-economic lives and associated identities and they used their participation in the ‘pain community’ to reconstructed their identities. The bodies of the triathletes existed within a culture of pain where their shared experiences of pain helped to establish new desired identities and form meaningful
relationships within their community. Further demonstrating the enormous influence identity can have on behaviours, perceptions, and emotions in sport.

Gender studies have also contributed greatly to studies examining pain, injury, and identity in sport. Research has classified sport as one of the few social institutions that still actively and openly participates in sexism without resistance (Bernstein, Perlis, & Bartolozzi, 2000). This has been attributed to the constant production and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and masculine identities (Bryson, 1987; Connell, 1983; Messner 1990; Sabo & Panepinto, 1990; Theberge, 1987; White and Gillett, 1994; Young, 1993). Viewing the body as something that must exude strength, accept risk, dominate other bodies, and withstand pain is not only valued in sport from a performance standpoint, but these traits have also been valued as characteristics of masculinity (Gagnon, 1974; Sabo, 1986). These characteristics have also been suggested to reinforce notions of male superiority and their distinction from women or femininity (Messner, 1990). Thus, subjecting one’s body to pain and other forms of self-violence could be interpreted as an athlete’s strategy to confirm a preferred masculine identity to themselves and others. However, most current sport research examining masculinity, the body, and pain has focused on mainstream, contact-sports sports such as football, basketball, or hockey (Connell, 1992; Dubbert, 1979; Messner, 1990; Morgan, 1992; Theberge, 1987; Atkinson and Young 2008), which has created a narrow understanding of male identities in sport. More recent research has expanded this knowledge by investigating these topics in what are considered “soft” or “alternative” male sports (Young, White, & McTeer, 1994). These studies showed that masculinity and how men demonstrate or represent it can be largely dependent on specific group values, norms, and objectives (Atkinson, 2010; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Hardin and Greer, 2009; Throsby, 2013; Young, 2008). This qualitative exploration of rowing culture will contribute and expand these ideas by investigating how the identities of male rowers are adopted,
manipulated, reproduced, and/or resisted in everyday life and how they relate to previously established notions of athlete-identities. Overall, the objective of this project is to provide an in-depth exploration of how the body and pain come to matter (take-on meaning) in sport culture as a result of extensive social interaction and socialization processes (Barad, 2003).

2.6 Relevant Rowing Research

The sport of rowing has historically been under researched in Canadian contexts compared to more popular sports such as hockey, basketball, and soccer. However, there are still a large number of Westernized studies investigating rowing culture that have motivated and informed this project. For example, Caudwell’s (2011) autoethnography of her time in rowing culture uncovered important discussions of the interrelations between class, gender, and race in sport. Particularly how prevalent classism, sexism, and racism are in the sport of rowing and how these are consequences of the culture’s deep historic origins, as well as the groups tendency to reproduce and protect traditions that are rooted in racism, sexism, and classism. Purdy, Potrac, and Jones (2008) also presented an autoethnography of competitive rowing, which primarily focused on the unique power struggles and acts of resistance within a coach-athlete relationship, while introducing the nuances that help to produce rowing culture. Further, scholars such as Pike and Maguire (2003) have outlined female rower’s unique relationships with pain, injury and risk by using the stories of amateur rowers. Through their findings Pike and Maguire (2003) established a model of factors that contributed to pain and risk. This major factors explaining the specific ways pain and injury are embodied in the sporting context were identity reaffirmation and over-conformity to group norms. These findings illustrated the value of investigating rowing culture as their framework shed light on the specifics of this minority sport and could be
generalized and applied to sport culture as a whole. Further reinforcing a demand for more studies investigating embodiment and pain in Canadian rowing from male perspectives.
Chapter 3
Epistemology and Research Methodology

3.1 Epistemology

The epistemological position of this study was interpretivist. Epistemology presents particular ways researchers attain knowledge, interpret data and view reality (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001; Crotty, 1998). An interpretivist approach assumes reality is socially constructed, contextually dependent, and fluid as opposed to a positivist approach, which assumes reality is static and objective (Carson et al., 2001; Pizam and Mansfeld, 2009). Also, an interpretivist epistemology relies on the assumptions that a researcher will develop knowledge through the input and observations provided by participants. Therefore, the discourses presented by the male participants of this project were essential, as the realities of their social world would have been otherwise inaccessible and untrue (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). From a research perspective, taking an interpretivist approach provided access to the complex and unpredictable qualities of human interaction. In addition, this approach was the most practical perspective to achieve one of the objectives of this project, which was to establish the meanings tied to the everyday behaviours of rowers rather than determine generalized notions of human action (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Neuman, 2000).

Consistent with an interpretivist standpoint, the theoretical concepts developed by Erving Goffman (1959,1963,1983,1990) were integrated with the data to better understand the everyday behaviours of male rowers and make sense of the complex and eccentric cultural processes governing social interaction. Goffman is a Canadian-born scholar, best-known for his influential work *The Presentations of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), which compares social behaviour to theatrical performance. His ground-breaking conceptual framework of *dramaturgy* relates individuals to actors. As actors, individuals are constantly performing a desired character to
others (the audience). Individuals learn their respective characters or roles within a group through social interaction. Through everyday interactions, individuals learn their respective roles and are able to define their situation in terms of what to expect within a context, how others will/should act, and the identity in which they should try to achieve to be accepted by a group (Goffman, 1959).

The dramaturgical framework also advises researchers to adopt the notion that in any social group, actors continually engage in what Goffman (1959) refers to as impression management. A concept that suggests individuals’ performances are consistent with group expectations, norms, or accepted behaviour as individuals wish to present idealistic impressions of themselves to peers. By displaying a desirable impression, individuals can gain access to a group, increase their social status, and attain more power. The augmentation in social status or power is a key motivator feature of impression management and is referred to as social mobility.

In addition, the theory suggests an individual (actor) is said to be front stage when performing acts that are intended to represent a desired identity and back stage when an individual is away from their group or audience and no longer has to put on a front (Goffman, 1959). A successful front is achieved when an individual’s performance of their ‘self’ is perceived by others as they wished it to be perceived. The self, is the internalized notion of ‘who we are’. To Goffman (1959) we are always attempting to display the best version of the self to others through appearances, clothing, facial expressions, gestures, and other means of communication and symbolic interaction referred to as sign vehicles or in his later works, body idiom (Goffman, 1963). Body idiom describes non-verbal forms of communication inscribed on the body and are demonstrated through physical appearance or physical behaviours. From a dramaturgical perspective, the body is responsible for connecting the self-identity to social identities. In other words, an individual’s sense of self (self-identity) and how others perceive
them *(social identity)* are confirmed or denied through the body. Since this project is focused on embodied perceptions and practices, Goffman’s concepts of body idioms will be central to the analyses of data.

Further, Goffman’s essay “Where the Action Is” (1969) in provides important interpretations of how ‘action’ or risky, or dangerous activities are opportunities of chance in which an individual (actor) could augment the public’s (audiences) view of their “self” and a chance for a “real gain of character” (p. 238) if they succeed. However, these moments of ‘action’ also poses a risk to “gamble character” (p. 237) and submit one’s self to character “re-creation” (p. 238). Therefore, moments of chance or fatefulness have both the capacity to build or demolish character. Most importantly, this essay calls academics to recognize that “interestingly enough, we have become alive to action at a time when—compared to other societies—we have sharply curtailed in civilian life the occurrence of fatefulness of the serious, heroic, and dutiful kind” (Goffman, 1969: p. 192-193).

Overall, the framework suggests an individual’s sense of self is largely dependent on the responses of their respective audience. However, it is important to note, that while the framework accepts people as persistently attempting to show their “good” attributes, it also suggests individuals must conceal the “bad”. Therefore, Goffman’s (1959) theories also highlight the influence of shame and embarrassment on human behaviour, as individuals actively avoid actions that could jeopardize their performance.

### 3.2 Methodology

The purpose of ethnography is to allow researchers to describe a culture from the perspective of participants and for theory to inform a ”re-presentation” of that culture, as well as the everyday behaviours of that group (Atkinson, 1994; Emerson 1983; Pearson, 2012 Van
Maanen 1988). This project was employed to gain a better understanding of rowing culture and investigate the embodied experiences of male athletes, thus the most effective methods were those rooted in ethnographic objectives and rationale. Besides the restricted length of this project and the obvious limitations of the researcher’s personal gender identity being different from the male participants under investigation in terms of gaining a true participant perspectives, the methods used were consistent with ethnography (Geertz, 1983; Pearson, 2012). However, in response to the latter limitation, it can also be argued that any researcher has to be reflexive when attempting to gain access to people’s individual and group perspectives because there are always significant differences between participants and researchers such as background, race, class, social status, sexual identity, and other important social factors influencing an individual’s perspective of the world (Geertz, 1973; 1983). Therefore, methodologically ethnography was necessary to uncover the complexities and intricacies of rowing culture as well as highlight the ways in which social interactions and other social influences shaped the embodied experiences of men in this context. In addition, the methodology of this project was performed in an inductive manner, which means Goffman’s theoretical framework of dramaturgy and overall viewpoints about social life were introduced and applied to data during the analysis phase of this project. This approach is consistent with both an interpretivist and ethnographic epistemology as these approaches call for inductive measures, in which theory and data are negotiated concurrently as opposed to establishing a theoretical framework prior to data collection (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001). Most importantly, the epistemology of this project was chosen to ensure the purposed research questions would be addressed in the most effective manner. Overall, ethnographic study is the most effective way to establish scientific descriptions of culture and social norms (Puddephatt, Shaffir, & Klienknecht, 2009).
3.3 Methods

To gain access to the complex sociological components of the competitive male rowing team and understand the experiences and representations that athletes assigned to their bodies, ethnographic methods were employed. An athlete’s body experiences and practices are often normalized in certain sport contexts, which prevents scholars outside the culture from accessing the important nuances and contextual understandings of what it means to be a male rower (Atkinson, 2007; Donnelly, 1993; Drummond, 2010; Puddephatt, Shaffir, & Kleinknecht, 2009). The most effective methodological tool to accurately interpret the contextual perceptions, experiences, and practices of the male rowers under examination was participant observations and qualitative interviews (Puddephatt, Shaffir, & Kleinknecht, 2009). The study observed and analyzed rowing culture and the relationships male athletes had with their bodies and the sport; thus, these methods will also serve as the most valuable tools to address the research questions.

3.3.1 Participants

All competitive rowers over the age of 18 were eligible. There were approximately 40 members at the Toronto rowing club under investigation, consisting of approximately 20 male and 30 female participants. All members had the potential to be included in the field-notes that were recorded throughout the participant observation period, however competitive male athletes were the primary focuses. All 20 males fit the criteria of being a member of a competitive group, as they represented the club at various competitions throughout the season. The competitive group that was chosen consisted of males between the ages of 19 and 25 years of age. Following participant observation 12 males volunteered to participate in one-on-one interviews and these males became the principal source of data supplementing the researcher’s field-notes. Within the 12 principle male participants, 9 identified as Caucasian/White Canadian, 2 as Asian-
Canadian, and 1 as Chinese as they were only living in Ontario for school. In addition, all participants claimed to be part of the upper or middle class and came from families that could afford University tuition (approx. $8000CAD/year) as well as rowing fees (approx. $2000CAD/year) and housing downtown Toronto ($650-$1200CAD/month). Further reinforcing the exclusivity of the sport as those with lower socio-economic statuses were not granted access to this team or the sport in general as it was expensive and typically only offered at private secondary schools or Universities in the area. Most participants were in the process of completing their undergraduate degree however, 3 were studying at the graduate level. Ten of these athletes had participated in additional competitive sports prior to joining the rowing team such as hockey, cross-country, track & field, swimming and cycling. The remaining 2 participants had never participated in organized/competitive sport. To protect the confidentiality of all participants, each of the athletes were given a pseudonym, which will be used for the remainder of this paper. Refer to Table 1 (Appendix E) for each pseudonym as well as the specific ages, rowing levels and years spent on the team of each of the 12 interviewees.

3.3.2 Consent Process

All competitive athletes at the rowing club were given consent forms prior to data collection. A meeting will be held prior to distribution of the forms at the rowing club to provide verbal information about the research process, the nature of the study, confidentiality, privacy, and answer any questions participants may have. This meeting will take place, either before or after a regular scheduled team practice to ensure maximum attendance. For any members unable to attend the information meeting, a separate meeting was scheduled until all members had been informed verbally. Consent forms were given out at information sessions to ensure written consent was obtained (Appendix B: Informed Consent Forms). The researcher was responsible for ensuring all participants are continuously aware of the research project and the nature of their
involvement throughout participant observations. Before an interview, participants were reminded verbally as to what they were consenting to by participating in the interview portion of the study and were given an additional consent form to ensure written consent was obtained.

3.3.3 Recruitment

The form of insertion into the research setting has been outlined in the Methods section above. Daily 3-hour visits to the club occurred throughout the 5-month period. Recruitment for interviews occurred at the rowing club through informal (verbal requests) and formal invitations (hand-outs). Participants were already aware of the research project, thus handouts only included my contact information and a request for male rowers interested in interview sessions (see Appendix C: Recruitment Documentation).

3.3.4 Participant Observation

As a researcher, I joined a competitive rowing team in Ontario and became a rowing athlete myself. Informed consent and confidentiality was communicated prior to commencing the participant observation phase ensuring all participants were aware of my position as a researcher. All participants were made aware of my position, the purpose of the study, as well as the data collecting methods involved (Guest, 2013). This protocol was applied through continuous informal communication to all participants whose interactions in the field were regarded as data. Following introductions and establishment of rapport, I participated in the everyday practices of the group, including, but not limited to, team practices, training sessions, team meals, competitions, team travel, team meetings, fundraising events, and social gatherings. According to Gold (1959), I was considered a complete participant in that I fully participated in the research
setting. The purpose of the participant observation period was to acquire contextual narratives of the experiences and practices related to the identities, and bodies of the participants through direct experience. Participant observation was chosen to obtain empirical knowledge of rowing culture within participants’ natural social environment to truly understand the contextual and cultural relevance of phenomena. A total of 636 hours were spent in the field, which translates into approximately 153 days or 5 months. Refer to Table 2 (Appendix F) for specific examples of field-notes and later analysis.

3.3.5 Interviews

Semi-structured and structured interviews were used in addition to participant observation, to access the inter-subjective realities of each participant that were not revealed through observations alone (Fredrichs and Ludtke, 1975). Interviews were used to discover deep intersubjective realities such as shared feelings, motives, and thoughts within the rowing culture (Husserl, 1964). A total of 12 male participants were recruited for interviews out of the 20 male members of the group. Open-ended questions were used to stimulate deep explanations of past experiences, learned behaviour, influential interactions, and participants’ views of their body, their identities, and the specific culture. An interview schedule was constructed based on themes found during participant observations; a general interview outline is attached in Appendix D: Interview Guideline. Following the initial analysis of field-notes, reoccurring and significant themes were identified as specific topics of discussion for the one-on-one interviews. The duration of each interview session ranged between 45 to 90 minutes and a tape recording device was always used. Data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed manually to make final interpretations. To ensure validity, participants were also invited to evaluate and critique these interpretations and confirm whether they agreed with the overall conclusions of the study.
### 3.3.6 Field-Notes

Field-notes were recorded immediately after each session with the team into a password protected computer document. Field-notes included thick descriptions of the settings, participants, and experiences within the group. Practices occurred six days a week, for two hours followed by intermittent training sessions and regattas. Succeeding each encounter with the team, detailed descriptions of the setting and the interactions that occurred within it were recorded within a 12-hour window. If notes were not immediately transcribed onto a computer document, notes were taken in a portable journal and notes were jotted-down immediately after leaving the research site. As stressed by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), it is vital that field-notes were taken in a meticulous manner. Once the participant observation portion of the study was complete, findings were used to inform appropriate interview themes, questions, and topics. A total of approximately 460 pages of condensed field-notes were taken and used as data following the observation stage.

### 3.3.7 Reflexivity

As a young, white female researcher, I had to acknowledge my own unique cultural position in the field. Prior to conducting research, I questioned my position as a female investigating the lives of men. In terms of truly holding direct experience throughout this study, I must be honest in recognizing the moment I was born, I was identified as female and all my views and understandings of the world have been shaped by the biological, societal, historical, political, gendered, and socio-economic positions. In short, I was always aware of my embodied role I engaged in throughout the research process (Nicholls, 2009). Although my position as a female may have prevented direct experience of what it meant to be a male rower, my distance was advantageous for data collection. First, male scholars have described that taking the ‘least-
masculine’ role has allowed for greater access to more truthful and descriptive accounts of men’s experiences as this role does not threaten power or masculinity (Bridges, 2013). As Horn (1997) has described, being a young ‘non-threatening’ female was useful as it enabled access to richer data. In addition, the men I interacted with may have felt more inclined to explain phenomena that other men would not even question as the former may share assumptions or unspoken ideologies unique to being male in the social environment (Bridges, 2013; Kehler & Atkinson, 2010; Sattel, 1976). To ensure my own social position was realized throughout the project, a reflexivity journal was used to encourage a conscious appreciation for the way my own socialization informed interpretations and analyses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.3.8 Data Analysis

Once recorded, all data were analyzed generally through an open-coding process, in which themes and insights relevant to the research project were grouped and categorized with theory. Specifically, all data relevant to the understandings of embodiment, identity, and sport were linked to theoretical understanding. Data analysis was broken-down into three coding phases: a primary coding phase, a secondary coding phase, and a re-evaluation/validity phase. During the primary coding phase for both observations and interviews, Descriptive Coding was used. Descriptive Coding, also known as Topic Coding, is a research method used in ethnographic studies to uncover the data’s fundamental themes and to help the researcher answer inquiries about the overall happenings within the culture under scrutiny (Saldana, 2016). Major topics and corresponding subtopics of the qualitative data were identified and used for further qualitative inquiry (Saldana, 2016). The topics extracted from observational data were used inform interview themes and the codes from the interview stage were used as a foundation before administering the secondary coding phase. For the secondary coding phase, a version of Domain
or Taxonomic Coding was used to analyze the interview data. This method was used as a tool to classify the participants’ behaviour and interpret their experiences (Saldana, 2016; Spradley 1980). Domain coding consisted of a more in-depth categorization of the data, where major categories were organized in a hierarchical fashion to outline the major categories of meaning expressed by the participants (McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005; Saldana, 2016). The three main themes following the secondary coding phase were: Pain, Efficiency, and Closeness. To prevent the oversimplification of social life, descriptive passages were preserved and grouped into their respective categories and synthesized with theory (Geertz, 1973). In addition, all observational, interview, and reflexive data was reviewed and compared during the re-evaluation/validity phase to ensure validity. Finally, participants were also given an opportunity to evaluate and criticize the interpretations of the researcher at each stage.

3.3.9 Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

All data were treated as confidential. Prior to data collection, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and settings involved in the study. The primarily researcher is the only one aware of these pseudonyms, and all additional identifiable data was altered immediately to ensure confidentiality. In the field, a minimum amount of identifiable data was collected and all additional data was de-identified as quickly as possible. During the interview process, participants were also assigned pseudonyms and any identifiable characteristics were always kept to a minimum. Thus, incidents, quotes, or other data recorded and used in the final written document does not include any identifiable information.

In addition, the research protocol of this study was constructed to manage all risks. If participants felt uncomfortable, embarrassed, or upset during the interview process, they were reminded of the confidential nature of the study and their right to decline to answer any questions.
causing discomfort. Participants were also reminded that all related data could be erased upon request. All interactions with participants were performed in a non-threatening and non-invasive manner.

Upon termination of the study, secure destruction of all confidential information will occur. All written field-notes and interview recordings were transcribed onto a secure University computer within 24 hours of collection. These files were encrypted and stored on a computer accessible only to the primary researcher throughout the duration of the project. All recordings were erased immediately following transcription, and written field-notes were shredded. After the completion of the study, data collected will be retained for 2 years and then erased from the primary researcher’s computer.
Chapter 4
Pain

In the following chapter, all major findings will be outlined and described with assigned value, meaning, and/or theoretical interpretations. The purpose of the findings chapter is to present the organized data in its neutral form before attributing theoretic significance. This section gives the reader an opportunity to view the objective data, evidence, and/or examples that was used to answer the research questions, explain the chosen theoretical framework, and support the concluding statements of this project. The findings have been organized into 3 broad categories that emerged from the data: pain, efficiency, and closeness. Within each of these central categories are 3 subcategories, which serve to highlight the ways in which pain, efficiency, and closeness appear to be the most meaningful aspects in the everyday lives of male rowers and their collective identities. Subcategories are primarily explained through the detailed descriptions of participant-accounts; however, it is important to note that observations informed and validated these accounts and helped to stimulate the discussions that arose during each interview. All findings were selected to inform the research questions directing this project.

4.1 Pain

The most prominent theme that emerged in this study was the experience of pain. Rowers described pain as an embodied phenomenon that was felt within their minds, emotions, and bodies. All athletes frequently expressed in both interviews and observations that rowing was a sport that demanded one to experience pain often. A majority of athletes stated that the pain they were referring to was the pain that occurred during a grueling training session or competition. Since training and competition often overlapped, athletes were almost always suffering from or reflecting on an experience of immense pain throughout this study. Specifically, these athletes spoke about the pain that came from physically exercising oneself to the point of physical, mental, and/or emotional exhaustion/discomfort. The rowers believed that this type of pain was
central in their everyday lives and felt other painful experiences such as injury and post-training muscle soreness were minor occurrences in comparison to the pain they had to endure whilst training or competing. Rowers felt there was a difference between the right kinds of pains, which were the hurtful sensations of exercising and injurious pains, which were identified as musculoskeletal bruises, tears, pulls, or breaks that impeded regular body functions. These descriptions are congruent with Bale’s (2006) explanation of pain that is unrelated to injury. The athletes in this culture did not believe that overcoming the pain of an injury was acceptable as they felt such an act was harmful to their bodies, performance, and wellbeing (Field-Notes, October-December, 2016). Suggesting that the previously established expectations/pressures sport culture is thought to place on athletes to play through injury may be shifting towards more conscious concerns for long-term safety, health, and quality of life instead of the short-term benefits such as increased playing time, appearing tough, and/or displaying an athlete identity (Wellard, 2009; Messner, 1990; Bryson, 1987;). Instead, these rowers felt their greatest daily struggle was overcoming the pains of performing high-intensity physical activity. This pain was so undeniably significant to them that they often referred to the sport of rowing as the pain contest.

4.2 The Pain Contest

All participants identified the sport of rowing as a culture devoted to pain. Athletes, coaches, and trainers often labeled the sport as “the pain train”, “the pain game” or most frequently, “the pain contest” (Field Notes September-December 2015). Each time an athlete entered the rowing context there was an understanding that they would have to embody pain at some point during their time there. Rowers spent 4-6 hours a day training for a race that required them to activate every muscle in their body to repeatedly pull an oar across the water for 2km.
The average time to complete the race took between 6 to 8 minutes and stressed the limits of both aerobic and anaerobic body systems. Since rowing is an activity that requires both endurance and strength, it was very taxing on the body. Frequently causing intense sensations of pain. For example, when Oliver told a novice, “get to a point of ‘ouch’ and maintain it, learn to feel the pain and then empty your tank”, he highlighted the expectations of the pain contest.

Mason communicated this when he stated:

Pain is a large aspect, if not the only aspect [of rowing] that makes this sport what it is…It’s the first thing that you learn to feel and it never gets better. That’s the challenge. A pain contest is exactly what you are signing up for when you decide to row.

Oliver reiterates the centrality of pain, as indicated:

Pain is just part of the sport, there isn’t any way around it, and the people that can’t handle it usually quit... Rowing is hard work, you are building up lactic acid in every muscle in your body- especially your legs, your lungs are burning, and you feel like your heart is going to beat right out of your chest and you feel like your heart is going to beat right out of your chest and you literally physically exhaust yourself to even make it to the end. So yah, pain is essential.

When rowers were asked to define the pain contest in their own words, many athletes described an internal struggle to resist the urge to stop moving. The contest was to be the fastest rower to finish the race or training session even though their bodies were in pain. Mason explained what rowers must overcome while rowing:

The pain contest is when you row and your body is telling you to stop, your mind is telling you to stop, everything you’ve learned about pain signaling a problem or whatever is making you think you need to stop, it’s when everything inside you is screaming stop - like you might die, but you have no more strength, no more energy, well you think you don’t- then somehow you keep going and get through the race or [training] piece…That point where you think you can’t move your body another inch without collapsing, but you do it anyway, that’s the pain contest, that’s when you know you’re becoming a rower.

One male participant also highlighted the objectives of the pain contest in a motivational speech prior to a race:
It’s going to hurt, it’s going to be painful, there is going to be a lot of lactic acid build-up, there will be moments where your body will be telling you to stop and to give-up, but you have to dig deep, hammer down, and push yourselves and your whole body as hard as you can…Your body can always do more than your mind tells you it can- so fight through the pain…You need to be working harder than you ever have before and break through that 1000m wall when you feel the pain set in. You do that and I can promise that you will be the first boat crossing that finish line…Every stroke should be the most powerful, strongest, and painful stroke of your life.

This speech describes some of the many embodied behaviours that rowers were expected to perform as a part of the team’s established ‘sport ethic’ (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). In this regard, pushing through pain was an embodied method to achieve cultural currency and increase one’s social mobility (Goffman, 1959). By ‘fighting’ through pain and accepting the excruciating exhaustion of competition, athletes could increase their social status. by reinforcing athlete and masculine identities (Messner, 1990; Roderick 1998; Young, White, & McTeer, 1994). Most notably, the toughness, perseverance, and conquering of pain outlined in this speech is congruent with typical masculine behaviours in sport (Donnelly, 2004). Rowers were expected to win races by enduring more pain than their competition and as communicated by each athlete, this was a task that required practice. Logan stated:

You’re always asking yourself, can I do more? Can my body handle it? Am I capable of getting through the pain to get that split lower or cross the finish line faster than the other boat? The answer is always yes. It’s just a matter of practice. You are constantly training yourself to endure new levels of pain. You can only get better by learning how to deal with the pain, or at the very least accept it…You just need to get on the pain-train and make yourself better.

Lucas also expressed the same beliefs, as he argued:

Everyone experiences the pain, it happens no matter what level you are at, but that’s the game, or contest, whatever you want to call it. You are constantly working to reach new limits of pain to allow yourself to go faster and be better.

As outlined by many participants, the aim to be the fastest rower or boat in a race could only be achieved if a rower was willing to take themselves to extreme physiological limits. These
findings also reflect what Hughes and Coakley (1991) refer to as overconforming to the sport ethic, as these athletes continued to submit their bodies to unquestioned extremes in order to prove their rowing identities and preserve group acceptance. Exceeding these normalized limits appeared to enhance group bonds, increase individual social status, and confirm their rowing identities. Each time a rower participated in the pain contest, they were invited to not only push through more pain than their competitors, but to also reach new personal limits of pain independently and as a group. Surpassing these previous limitations brought satisfaction to many of these males and validated their status and place as a male rower on the team. Again, this speaks to literature that suggests embodied behaviours produce and reinforce masculine and athlete identities. Group expectations and norms are consistent with the hyper-masculine narratives of sport as well as the deep historical connections to dominance, discipline, toughness, and militarism that have been produced and reinforced through social interaction (Donnelly, 1994). Thus, enduring pain was consistent with what was expected as a rowing character and these males adopted certain attitudes and understandings of pain in order to remain consistent with the group and confirm a male rowing identity. Jason stated there was “nothing better than reaching new limits” and Joseph agreed, as he indicated:

You don’t really know how much pain another person can tolerate, like you can’t really gage that right? All you can do is know that you pushed your own limits and that what keeps me coming back to the pain contest, you can always get better, you’re happy when you break through a new wall, but then you just want to do it again and push further, you know?

It is important to note, when rowers discussed the ‘pain’ of rowing they often were referring to multiple sources of what they considered to be painful. For example, Mason explained the various pain experiences:

There’s lactate pain-where your legs are burning in agony, there’s lung pain-where you can’t breathe, there’s the sitting on the erg for 2hrs without stopping sort of like
emotional and mental pain where you are super aware of how exhausted you are, how bored, fatigued, and hurt you are all at the same time.

Although these experiences were considered undesirable, all athletes agreed pain was addicting, enhanced group cohesion, and defined and/or confirmed their rowing identities. In addition, the rowers’ shared experiences of pain were forms of ‘bonding capital’, cultural distinction, and confirmed a collective sport identity that made their embodied practices unique and meaningful (Atkinson, 2008). Jason and Ryan described these justifications for pain as well, as they stated, respectively:

Like every time I’m on the verge of death, like right before fainting, collapsing, or having a heart attack, but you cross that finish line and know you gave it everything and pushed through the pain, came together as a unit and got better because of overcoming it [the pain].

Rowers can tolerate ridiculous amounts of pain. That’s what makes us special I think and I want to convey that to like people that don’t row, but I come off like an arrogant prick…I want to yell at people “Do you know what rowers have to go through, we work so hard and overcome a lot” My team knows that, I just wish other people knew that’s who we are and what we do.

Jason also reflected on rowers’ ability to endure and accept pain arguing, “if there is ever an apocalypse, I’m glad I’m a rower. We’ve made a game out of taking endless amount of pain and starving ourselves for days. Rowers will be fine.” Interestingly, these statements reflect the rowers’ tendency to self-objectify their bodies. For rowers, rationalizing the body as an instrumental object that they could control and manipulate was an important strategy for athletes to overcome and accept frequent pain as well as feel a sense of agency in their physical pursuits. Also, the affinity to create relationships with the body that detach and depersonalize pain or weakness are characteristic of dominant masculine and athletic identities (Young, White, & McTeer, 1994). Reiterating that the pain contest is a normalized experience, that has become internalized as useful, important and a part of a rower’s identity and sense of self (Goffman,
Thus, the analogy that rowing was a ‘pain contest’ further emphasized how dominant pain experiences were in this community and how central these experiences were to the team’s collective identity or “collective representation” (Goffman 1959, p. 27). Specifically, by labeling rowing as a ‘pain contest’, rowers’ felt it ensured others (rowers and non-rowers) understood the strength, perseverance, and dedication necessary to be a part of what they felt was a ‘special’ and ‘exclusive’ culture. The ‘pain contest’ also appeared to be a strategy for rowers’ to define their social situation for themselves (performer) and their audience (others). These rowers consistently admitted that because success in their sport required longer and more intense bouts of extreme physiological exertion compared to other sports, and was not dependent on many skills or variable components like other sports (i.e. basketball, volleyball, football, etc.) they could claim ‘the pain contest’ as a title unique to their sport (Field Notes, September-December 2015). The notion that pain was to be expected, embraced, and suffered through was a well-known fact to all rowers in this culture. According to Goffman (1959), once a norm becomes a fact among a group, it also becomes a part of a participant’s personality and an aspect of a participant’s self, which they will then have to continue to present in order to maintain their designated role in said group. In this regard, the ‘pain contest’ can be viewed as the team’s “front” in which individual rowers were expected to adopt in order to be seen as ‘true’ or ‘good’ rowers (Goffman, 1959,1983). Thus, in this culture, the ideal rower or rowing team could withstand more pain than any of their competitors and were willing to overcome physiological limits on a daily-basis. Further, pain acts as what Goffman (1959) refers to as a prop because these rowers used their shared experiences of pain as tools to govern social interaction and enhances their performance of a male rower. The application of Goffman’s dramaturgical approach shows how social groups can impact an individual’s embodied behaviour and helps to explain why members of this culture were willing to subject their bodies to pain as this behaviour was connected to both a team
member’s self-identity and social identity. Rowers were constantly pursing an idealized rowing identity and to do so rowers had to act enthusiastic about jumping on the ‘pain train’, even if this was not how they ‘truly’ felt about the experience.

4.3 Preparing for Death; Surviving Through Hell

Although athletes frequently outlined the satisfaction of being able to finish a bout of painful exercise, and appeared eager to participate in the ‘pain contest’, it is important to note that rowers did not truly experience positive feelings prior to, or during the activity of rowing. Athletes expressed they felt large amounts of anxiety and/or stress prior to a competition or heavy training period because of the undesirable sensations that occurred while participating in the sport. A concept that was only accessible to me after a significant amount of time as a participant of this group (Field Notes November-January, 2015-2016). Suggesting these anxieties, were ‘insider’ secrets, or in Goffman’s (1959) terms an aspect of the males’ ‘backstage’ performances, which include more “truthful” feelings (p.112). Athletes admitted that before a strenuous row they often feared the immense pain that came with the exercise. One athlete compared the pain of rowing to death, stating “rowing is like dying, I don’t know how else to explain it in words, the pain is scary. Never goes away.” Logan went on to admit that his body had come to recognize this:

Before every 2k I have a minimum of two poops because I swear my body thinks it’s about to die. You know how animals shit themselves right before they die, I feel like my body does that knowing the pain that is about to come because let’s be serious, it’s like dying- you just never end up being pronounced dead.

Many males reflected on the embodied experiences prior to a painful row and expressed that although the pain was an aspect that defined their culture, it was also an aspect that scared rowers. Oliver admitted to this fear, as he stated:
The pain is scary…I’m always stressed about that pain, because if you can’t overcome that, you’re screwed. I’m usually hiding somewhere before a race because the nerves are uncontrollable and I know what’s coming. I don’t know if it’s possible for me to convince myself and like my body to not be afraid, because the pain is never tolerable. I don’t know if it’s better to deny that it’s going to happen or to be like honest about the pain so, your body is ready for death.

Lucas also explained:

Well, I don’t know how else to say it. Rowing is hell. It’s the best sport ever, and I love it to death (laughing) literally ‘to death’ is a pretty literal part of being a rower. It’s really tough. You’re in a lot of pain and you just keep telling yourself that you will stop after a few minutes, or it’ll be over soon- but you know that’s a lie. You’re feeling it big time, but that’s why we train. So we can prepare to almost die, but not actually die.

Although pain was a frequent and a regular occurrence in the lives of these rowers, they agreed that the fear of pain was only truly difficult to overcome for a designated experience level. In other words, these athletes could only truly identify as a ‘male rower’ once they had developed *habitus*. Jason, the most experienced rower on the team explained:

I almost think Novices are at an advantage, I don’t think you feel the real pain when you’re new, you never get to that level- novices don’t know how. So, as much as it’s exhausting and always hard, the fact that you don’t know how awful it can be means you don’t really get as scared of it. So, those babies that think this gets easier are in for a big surprise, it only gets worse and a lot scarier.

Thus, Jason suggests that experienced rowers (Varsity athletes) could decipher and decide which performances were false and/or mere attempts at embracing the pain contest. For example, novices frequently ‘complained’ ‘moaned’ or ‘yelled’ about how painful or difficult an exercise was to try to show they were deserving members of the team because they endured pain. However, experienced rowers like Jason knew that, “if you can talk or complain during a piece, you aren’t in enough pain and you sure as hell don’t get it yet”. To the Varsity athletes, novices were a prime example of misrepresentation (Goffman, 1959). Even though novices (new ‘rowers’) engaged in the same daily events as Varsities (training, competition, etc.), their performances as rowers were false because they had not spent enough time in the culture to truly
embody or grasp the team’s ‘front’ or ‘backstage’. To this end, novices were considered a part of the ‘audience’ in the rowing community, instead of ‘performers’. Goffman (1959) argues, the audience only has access to the ‘front’ and not the ‘back’ stage. This is true for novices as they often attempted to participate in the ‘pain contest’, but were not granted true access to the ‘backstage’ because they had not put their bodies through enough training, competition, or pain yet. Therefore, novices expected to overcome the pain and potentially get so skilled that they no longer felt the pain, but a ‘real’ rower knew that the better you were as a rower, the more terrifying it became. According to Ethan:

The pain is terrifying because before a race you feel like okay last time I almost died, what if this time I actually do? Like what if I collapse or faint or something before the end because I go too hard. You break barriers you didn’t even know were there.

Henry also agreed how daunting the pain of rowing could be, as he confessed:

Oh my god, the amount of times I’ve puked before a race or 2k test is kind of embarrassing, but it’s a hardcore sport, you really test yourself each time. It’s not like risky in the sense that I’m like fighting a bear or something, but you are pushing yourself until your mind, body and heart fails you and you almost like die. You want to cry and not do it. Especially tests or hard training pieces, I ask myself like why am I doing this to myself.

Henry highlighted that pain created extreme anxieties and unhealthy physical reactions. However, in this culture pain was also justified as a method to get stronger, fitter, or better at rowing. Further emphasizing how their unpleasant experiences were socially rationalized through the normative meanings that the team placed on the embodiment of pain. For these athletes, the physical, emotional, and psychological pain induced through competitive rowing was a means to desired ends. By surviving pain, these males could earn the right to call themselves better rowers, achieve a higher social status among their peers, and diminish the gap between the ‘idealized’ self (how they wished to be seen based on established norms) and the
‘real’ self (how others saw them) (Goffman, 1959). Ryan also made note of how rowers made sense of painful experiences in the following statement:

I’m always excited to perform, compete, race, test myself. It’s really amazing to better yourself each time and just figure out what you are capable of, but I can’t deny it scares me every time. It’s really not natural to put our bodies through something so crazy every day and since we keep pushing the limits of yesterday it never stops being painful. No pain, no gain, right? Weird price to be fit

As Ryan suggested, engaging in the ‘pain contest’ was worth it because it was an opportunity to establish and confirm self-identity as a rower and social identity as a rowing team member (Goffman, 1959).

In addition to comparing pain to death, athletes would also describe the completion of a painful rowing activity as “surviving hell” or “escaping death” (Field Notes September-November 2015). Connecting well with Le Breton’s (2000) argument suggesting peak experiences were a type of symbolic death, in which athletes were reborn following complete physical exhaustion. Ryan compared rowing to hell and made an important clarification saying, “Well, like none of us have really been to hell right, but what is the worst thing you can think of? Hell, death, torture? It’s kind of just something we say to describe the indescribable.” Most athletes had negative feelings towards the pain and provided many descriptions of what got them through such unpleasant sensations. A novice named Joseph gave an interesting comment when asked about what it takes to be a rower declaring, “all I’ve learned is you have to be someone that is okay with hurting.” Alluding well to what more experienced athletes disclosed when asked about dealing with their frequent pain. Jason suggested self-improvement and winning were factors that helped him get through the pain saying, “it’s all worth it when you win or if you PB [personal best]. You are chasing that feeling and you know that you just have to push to get it.” Mason also rationalized the pain this way as he stated:
Pain makes you stronger and you have to know that it is good. You don’t have to like it, but you might as well acknowledge that good is coming from it. It’s like a signal that you are doing it right, getting better and nothing worth doing is painless…Honestly, if you rowed the race right, you should be crying at the end. Either internally or for real.

Oliver supported using outcome goals and self-improvement as motivation to endure the pain as well, when he expressed:

Surviving that near death, is like incredible. You need discipline for controlling yourself like that. You can do the impossible by facing what feels like death, like your whole body might shut down if you take one more stroke, but it doesn’t… I know I want to feel that sense of accomplishment.

Oliver’s quote also supports the theories outlining peak experience and deep flow, as he described that he felt pride in overcoming what he initially thought was going to kill him (Atkinson & Young, 2008; Le Breton, 2000; Maslow, 1970). However, it is important to point out that these feelings of satisfaction were not considered pleasurable. No rowing athlete believed that they felt physical pleasure during challenging rows. Instead, athletes all agreed that in moments of intense pain –even when they had overcome more than they expected- these males felt very negative feelings toward their beloved sport. For example, Mason acknowledged, “you will want to quit, I constantly have to reason with myself that it’ll be worth it when I succeed, but it sucks, I hate rowing when the pain sets in. I think I regret my life every time.” In a rowing race, or training session there was never a moment of “euphoria” or the equivalent of a what is commonly referred to as a “runner’s high” (Sachs, 1980; Whitehead, 2016; Boecker, Sprenger, Spilker, Henriksen, Koppenhoefer, Wagner, Velet, Berthele, & Tolle, 2008). It would be expected based on research exploring runners that following the 1000m-1500m mark of race, referred to as the worst point of the race (the ‘wall’), the race would become “pleasurable” after overcoming the moment. However, the satisfaction, pride, or reward was not felt until after the activity had ended. Rowers still hated the entire remainder of the race, most of them describing
feelings of numbness, blackout, or disorientation. Ethan, Ryan, and Logan narrated these moments well when they said:

After that wall, I think of some pretty dumb shit, like ‘man I want to quit, I so want to quit, oh god this is awful’ but I know if I quit I’m going to have to row back anyways and if I quit I’ll look like an idiot so, it’s better to suffer through it.

During a race, around the 1000m I’ll usually ask myself ‘why did I do this again, ugh, Christ.’ I hate it. I hate it so much, and I think I hate it right up until the end, I don’t really remember anything though, just like pulling as hard as I can.

When I feel the pain- like the intermediate pain where I’m still coherent. That’s when I talk to myself and think about going faster, technique, timing, stroke rate, but when I reach the incoherent phase where I’m about to blackout, I don’t have energy to think so I just close my eyes and try to conserve as much energy as possible to finish strong …my whole body kind of goes numb and I just row.

As noted, despite their complex love-hate relationship with pain, the athletes displayed masculine conceptualizations of pain as they viewed it as a challenge, not a danger. Further reinforcing rowers’ strategy to objectify their bodies and create a relationship, in which they attempt to detach their ‘mind’, ‘emotion’ and ‘self’ during training or competition to rationalize the absurdity of their action and establish some control over the experience that they believed augmented their credibility and success as a male rower. Partially explaining why, a group of individuals would continue to engage in behaviours that they dreaded and compared to hell. The shared ideology of the group was that pain was inevitable, necessary, and that by enduring temporary self-inflicted torture they could work on improving their self and achieve social mobility (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) argues in all social establishments; members are constantly striving to move from a low social stata to a higher one. For rowers to do so, members had to maintain the desired “front” and execute their roles. When Henry said, “I won’t stop when I feel dead or when I’m in pain, I stop when the practice or race is over. You just have to dig in and hold on” and Oliver said, “You get through the pain because you have to. Failure is not an option and giving up can’t happen. You don’t want to be that guy.” They both demonstrated that
a requirement of a rower’s role or *performative expectation* was to push through pain and to resist yielding to pain until a pre-assigned time or distance had been completed (Goffman, 1959). Lucas claimed that the best strategy to manage pain was to, “live in it. You just sort of like stew in it. It’s part of your job as a rower to feel pain, it makes you better. You just have to live in it. Live in the pain.” Thus, even though the pain was as frightening as death and rowers believed that the pain made them faster, stronger, more successful, and better rowers. From a dramaturgical perspective, these athletes were committed to performing their designated role in the ‘pain contest’ and rationalized pain in order to maintain or achieve the impression that they were ‘male rowers’ (Goffman, 1959). In this context, pain was a form of sacrifice to achieve larger rewards such as desirable self-confirmation, group acceptance, fitness, glory, and success. The horrible sensations of pain were only discussed or shared while an athlete was ‘backstage’, which meant while participating in a practice or race, a rower was not to be show or communicate pain. If an athlete wanted to be considered as a ‘rower’ and be entitled to participate in the pursuit of fitness, glory, and success (as defined by their culture) they were expected to be performing the rowing team’s *front*.

**4.4 Concealing the Pain**

One of the most interesting characteristics that the rowers possessed was their ability to conceal their pain from others. As an observer, it was incredibly difficult to visually see the amount of pain these athletes would later describe in the rowing context. During a bout of intense exercise, all athletes appeared controlled, stoic, calm, and relaxed, which was a huge contrast to the narratives of pain given by the rowers. The immense pain that was felt by rowers did not reflect on the athletes’ bodies. When I inquired about this observation, athletes suggested that showing pain was not only inefficient, but for a culture devoted to pain, strength, and
discipline, it was unacceptable. Thus, concealing pain was another performance expectation of a rower and a part of the team’s “front” (Goffman, 1959). Lucas explained:

Yah so, you really need to live right in it, but you cannot show it. Not only is that inefficient, but it shows you don’t really know the sport. You aren’t experienced and you haven’t mastered your body. You need to be in control and like never show weakness, you need to always be focused and determined. Any distraction will screw you over and you won’t be able to push yourself or conserve energy.

Outlining the strength these athletes must embody to perform painful rowing activities. Henry explains this aspect of the sport further saying,

Only rowers understand that even when they look cool, collected, calm and totally fine, they aren’t – they are dying. You respect rowers that make it look easy, because rowing isn’t easy. Controlling that pain is a huge challenge, but it’s what separates the good and the bad. Novices don’t really get that- they think it’s impressive to show their pain like to prove they are working hard, but that only proves to people they aren’t really rowers.

Logan also provided insight into the expectations of rowers in the following statement:

Oh god yah, never let the pain show, like if you’re hunched over, screaming, making weird faces, you’re wasting energy and you want every last bit of energy to go into moving that boat faster. I think its also kind of helpful as an athlete, like when you put on your game face and be in the zone like that, the pain is easier to deal with in a way because you feel in control of your body and you don’t let the pain impact your efficiency or technique.

A common philosophy for these rowers then, was that proper technique and movement patterns created successful rowers. Since each athlete on the team wanted to be proficient rowers, making the work look effortless was believed to be an effective strategy so, all athletes behaved in a manner that disguised their pain. These pain discourses are consistent with Young, White, and McTeen’s (1994) patterns of masculine and athletic identities, which are to deny pain, have a passive attitude towards pain, conceal pain from significant others, and depersonalize pain. In this regard, the concealment of pain not only reinforced the athletes’ cultural rowing identities, but this form of embodied practice also strengthens broader athletic and masculine identities. Thus, interpretative frames existed and socialized athletes into believing that the role of an ideal rower was to hide all obvious symptoms of pain. Masking pain was a way for athletes to ‘save
face’ because any signs of pain exposed an inconsistency in their performance and destroyed their credibility of a rowing character (Goffman, 1959). In the rowing setting, the most common gesture that ‘broke’ a rower’s character, was what the rowing team referred to as “pain face” (Field Notes, October-November 2015). Though all rowers were working towards a complete masking of pain, it was incredibly rare for an athlete to pull-off a flawless performance. During training and competition, even the most experienced athletes had difficulty controlling their faces enough to disguise their agony. Paradoxically, the more a rower committed to surpassing new limits of pain, the more difficult it was to conceal said pain. However, a good rower was still expected to do both, and all athletes idealized the idea of a rower that could “turn-off” the pain and beat their competition (Field Notes September-December 2015). Interestingly, the rule of masking emotion, pain, exhaustion, or any other feelings that showed inexperience, weakness, and/or inefficiency was only in place during the activity. Jason made this clear when he said:

We all want to make it look easy, I think that’s key. As soon as your technique is gone, or you start to ‘look’ tired or look like you are in pain, is the moment you look inexperienced. Plus, you’re going to lose speed…You have to focus on controlling the pain, staying light and loose when your muscles are screaming. As soon as the race is over though, go for it: collapse, cry, scream, whatever, you can let out it then, but never during.

The rowers spoke about the pain as something that only insiders truly understood because there were no signs from the body that communicated to others, specifically spectators, that rowing was such a grueling sport. Ethan voiced this gap when he stated:

Yah, people always talk about like ‘oh rowing is so beautiful’ like that opening scene of the notebook, the guy is rowing peacefully down the lake and if you row, you’re just thinking that guy is probably dying, its intense, even when it looks relaxed or like ‘ooo look at that sunset you guys see every morning.’ That’s not a beautiful sunset that represents blood, sweat, and tears, man.

Oliver also made this clarification:

I’m always dying after a 2k and I’m lying in a corner hurled over in agony. During though, I keep my composure and I keep my focus- try to make it look easy and to
Largely, the athletes believed that the best way to deal with pain was to “suck it up and shut up”, a statement that was overheard upwards of thirty times while in the field (Field Notes September-December 2015). Athletes also made comments such as “fight through it”, “keep your composure”, “pretend you have fresh legs”, and “stay focused” to remind or help their teammates to row through pain. Logan believed this normalized relationship with pain was unique enough to get rowers through extraordinary crises when he declared:

If there is ever a zombie apocalypse, rowers will outlive every one. We can endure copious amounts of pain without showing it because our pain tolerance is outrageous. We can get through just about anything, rowers are special and have no trouble with adversity, we know how to get through difficult circumstances. We are a powerful, unstoppable, and unbelievably tough group of people.

Overall, pain was pivotal in the daily lives of rowers and their embodied behaviours, perceptions and emotions towards pain were culturally unique. By attempting to conceal pain, athletes were conforming to established social classifications of body performance. A concept Goffman termed body idioms (Goffman, 1983). The concepts of body idioms are important as they can be used as a theoretical tool to characterize the way rowers chose to present their bodies while in pain, and constrained their ability to express true feelings of pain. Rowers undoubtedly experienced socialization within the rowing setting and had learned to mark those managing pain expressions as skilled, experienced, and proficient rowers. Whereas, any body idioms that expressed feelings of pain such as the “pain face” were viewed as nonverbal emotional cues proving an athlete had “fallen short of what he really ought to be” (Goffman, 1990 [1963] p. 17-18). Suggesting athletes are working hard to embody an individual who is not in pain, to meet the team’s designated norms and uphold an idealized performance, which in turn satisfied their need for a favourable identity. Thus, Goffman’s framework is an important contribution to explaining this culture’s
desire to engage in painful activities because it provides an adequate explanation of the human condition where bio-physical perspectives do not. As bio-physical studies suggest a human’s innate inclination is to follow the pain principle; which argues that when confronted with pain, we as a species, will avoid it (Carlson, 2007; Richards, 1991; Snyder, 2007). These rower’s narratives demonstrated humans may consciously choose to subject their bodies to pain when social factors are powerful enough to justify or rationalize these actions. Further emphasizing the need for sociological theory in the study of sport, exercise, and human behaviour.
Chapter 5
Efficiency

In addition to enduring pain, male rowers felt efficiency was also a significant component needed to embody a rowing identity. When athletes discussed their desires, objectives, and the specific factors that made a good rower, efficiency was a constant priority. Logan made this concept clear as he explained,

“[It’s] one of those sports where the harder you try and the harder you work, the more committed you are, then you will be good. It’s not really a sport dependent on raw talent, or a certain physiological make-up – at least at this level. It all comes down to how hard you train and your fitness. Efficiency is key.”

Efficiency for these athletes meant creating a physical body that could perform exceptional endurance, strength, and power movements, all while maintaining proper rowing technique. Adding another set of body idioms that influenced the ways in which this culture embodied rowing identities (Goffman, 1963). Primarily, proper rowing technique required a large amount of lower-body and core strength. Contrary to popular assumptions, rowing did not require excessive amounts of upper body strength. As the participants acknowledged, “It’s all about the legs” (Field Notes September 2015). Recognizably, the activity did require overall body strength, endurance, and fitness, however rowers achieved a biomechanical advantage by utilizing their lower-bodies most. These technical requirements informed the specific embodied-efficiency that males strived to achieve and it was suggested that these ambitions were culturally exclusive. For example, the desire for efficient bodies dictated the type of physical appearance rowers preferred, contributed to major anxieties, and impacted the athletes’ perceptions and behaviours. The following section will expand on these examples to further demonstrate the complex mechanisms that were present in the rowing culture and the many ways Goffman’s theoretical assumptions of the body, social establishments, and the human condition help to explain their functions.
5.1 Size Does Not Matter

Interestingly, male athletes did not value *large* muscular physique as much as they desired *efficient* and *useful* musculature. When discussing topics such as body image, body ideals, and body awareness, males were quick to express their unique interpretations of how they wanted their bodies to look, which bodies they appreciated, and what certain bodies represented. As an observer, it was clear that the male rowers in this culture did not meet the stereotypical/dominant bulky or buff musculature that male athletes have been known to desire (White, Young, Gillet, 2013; White & Gillet 1994). Instead, rowers had lean, toned, and sculpted physiques (Field Notes, September 2016). The athletes were still incredibly fit and strong, with low percentages of body fat and a high percentage of muscle (Field Notes, September-November 2016). However, compared to conventional perspectives, these athletes were small and thin. No rower disputed this, and it was a form of embodiment they were proud of because as Jason discussed:

Our bodies are a product of the demands of this sport. What we build is all to better our ability to compete and I don’t think much of comparing myself to other guys. I just know that a shredded body that comes from putting in the hours and the work is something to be proud of and sure we aren’t big body-builders, but we do shit. We do crazy hard shit and put our bodies through crazy long training sessions and it shows, so that’s something I’m good with having.

The male rowers in this cohort felt that in terms of physical appearance what was ideal, valuable, and desired was largely dependent on what was needed to successfully complete rowing tasks. Demonstrating once again, these athletes demonstrated an inclination towards self-objectification as they admitted to viewing their bodies as useful and mechanical tools for sport. However, in terms of typical aesthetic characteristics of masculine bodies such as large muscles, these rowers awarded more value and meaning towards what their bodies could do than how they looked. For example, Oliver’s opinion on certain physical features was justified based on the requirements of
the sport when he stated, “when I see a guy with big arms, I know I don’t want that. That’s not efficient in the boat.” Mason also showed agreement disclosing how much efficiency takes presence when he said, “If a guy has really big arms in rowing, I always think like that’s just inefficient, I know you don’t need big arms to row. You’ll slow down the boat. Not what anybody wants—well, not what a rower wants.” Thus, size was not a major desire for these males, despite dominant masculine norms that suggest the ‘ideal’ male bodies is large and muscular (Gillet and White, 1992). Instead, they strived to embody lean, thin musculatures, which often defied assumptions that suggested smaller bodies were not as strong. Oliver expanded this notion and stated:

We are thin, like we are careful about what we eat, we have to cut and make very strict dietary decisions. People say rowing is anorexia-101. We joke about it, because we are all pretty skinny, but we are strong, like we aren’t twigs, we just aren’t trees either…Our bodies do the trick.

From an efficiency standpoint, remaining lean was praised and contrary to common understandings of fitness, bigger was not always better. Lucas explained:

Like I think its pretty cool if I can stay at the weight I am like 153lbs, which is even close to most gym rat guy, but I still continue to get faster. All I think is like efficiency, efficiency, efficiency. My body needs to be efficient. It’s like okay, yea piling on muscle that looks kind of cool, but is any of that muscle really functional? Can it be used? Can it do things?

These perceptions on body appearances and uses appeared to be shaped by the expectations of rowing culture, and the daily practices their bodies needed to perform, which is consistent with Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical theory. Ethan recognized why he took pride in embodying rowing standards and what he felt represented valuable physiques when he told me:

I know those guys that spend hours in the gym to get huge like steroid-injected, pre-workout-protein-crazed guys. They think it looks good I get that, but what do you do with that. It is useless muscle in my mind. I bet they could run for 6 seconds that’s it, how is that at all helpful in the real world… rowing is transferable, its so dependent on fitness,
we can go forever and I think that’s awesome health-wise and I guess I wasn’t a very big guy to begin with, but now I’m actually strong and I am ripped. It’s awesome.

When delving deeper into what these athletes felt their physical appearance represented and how they experienced living in their bodies, all expressed it was a way to prove their worth not only as a rower, but also to visually confirm amongst the team that they were following the expected norms, and social codes of being on the team (Goffman, 1959). The following athletes gave rich descriptions of how their physical appearances connected strongly to their self-identities, group-identities, and their embodied sense of self (Goffman, 1959, 1963, 1983):

We totally want that [lean/tones/muscular/fit/thin bodies]. It’s nice when my teammates compliment my muscles, like if I’m becoming more defined (muscularly) or getting fitter and getting more and more in-shape the more I train, we are a good looking team, we have to maintain that standard (laughing)…it [our physique] sets us apart and I really feel attached to the way my body looks and not because I’m vain or superficial, I think it’s like a of way proving what I do…if someone looked at me they would know I could row well because I look fit, or that I am dedicated to hard work and train a lot because I’m lean and muscular. I know the team respects that big time. If you’re fit and dedicated to fitness, you’re in. You can sit with us.

Our bodies represent hard-work, our dedication to keeping ourselves insanely healthy and fit and like who can say they can produce that much strength and force for that amount of time? Our bodies are the perfect combination of endurance and strength. I don’t know, I’m sure everybody has their own ideas of what looks good, but I’m pretty much only friends with rowers and we appreciate a fit, shredded, fit person. Like efficiency is the most important thing right.

As Ryan and Jason reiterated, the types of physical bodies these rowers embodied and the types of bodies the males desired were interrelated with the cultural expectations of how rowers on the team should look, think, and behave (Goffman, 1959). As discussed in Chapter 4, Goffman (1959) refers to these ideals as interpretative frames, which are negotiated through social interaction and act to inform the rowers of the appropriate front others would like them to present. Assessing physical appearance was a strategy for these athletes to not only gage how well they were training, but also interpret the habits of other teammates without concrete fitness
tests. A concept described by Goffman (1959) as an individual’s ways of defining their situation and judging who a person was based on their behaviours and appearances. Remarkably, the meanings of certain appearances or behaviours are socially organized based on the designated interaction order of a group (Goffman, 1959). For this rowing team, lean, muscular, and fit-looking physiques were praised, awarded, and appreciated among this rowing culture. The male rowers were seen commending other males on their “gains”, by making statements such as, “you look strong”, “looking ripped”, “ahh, this guy’s jacked, how do you get muscles like that?” and “check-out that ass, if that’s not goals, I don’t know what is”. When asked about these observations, Henry, Ryan and Logan concluded:

I think you can definitely tell who’s training, there’s obviously always anomalies, but more often than not you can tell who looks fit and we always congratulate people when they make gains...like ‘nice arms, look at that definition’, ‘look at that beautiful specimen of a man’ I don’t know its just something we do, we aren’t shy around one another and its nice when your hard work shows.

It's more than looking fit, like who doesn’t want to look good? But like we need to be able to row fast, that’s it. It’s not like I do this to look good, I just happen to get the body of a rower and that’s a fit looking person, ya know? We will praise athletic looking bodies because we know that they’ve worked for them and that it will help them perform.

I guess we compare amongst each other who’s got muscle bulges where and who’s more shredded, but like it’s all just love and appreciation for working hard and being like, efficient. You’ll get nice arms, legs, abs, etc. You will just be I don’t know, lean? Sleek? Jacked? (laughing) What’s the best way to put it?

Thus, the interaction order or body idiom within this specific culture assumed lean bodies were representative of a proficient and admirable rower. Specifically, a rower that was committed to pain and heavy physical training. When an athlete presented a thin and muscular body they were commended and given a higher social position within the group because their embodied representations corresponded with idealized practices. Engaging in practices also provided rowers with a sense of human agency. Athletes controlled and monitored their corporeal performances in order to present their “best selves”, which were ultimately dependent on what
others dictated as desirable (Goffman 1959, 1963). Therefore, athletes felt in control of their embodied representations as they were choosing to participate in rowing performances. Agency was valued because it allowed athletes to credit their accomplishments as a rower to their character as opposed to an innate predisposition. As Jason noted:

Like that’s one thing about rowing. Its not entirely based on talent, actually I don’t think its based on talent at all. Sure you can have good height/mechanics and shit but like to be good you have to train everyday, no days off, and just work on making sure you’re fitness and technique are unbelievable. There are tons of races where you see a boat with a bunch of shorter guys against taller ones and the shorter guys win because they are efficient. Basically, bigger was not better and it was truly about taking control of one’s fitness and working on an efficient body through specified behaviours that entailed painful exercise. Hunter learned this rather early in the season as he admitted:

You just want to be a well-oiled machine, like clean-cut and no part of your body can be a waste, so yah looking ripped is like the ideal. You also want to be aerodynamic, right? Extra-weight slows the boat down. So, you want to be as strong as possible without adding any useless weight to the boat. That goes for heavyweights and lightweights. I just want to be like so efficient that every part of me is working and I’m utilizing every muscle so I don’t fatigue as quickly

Lucas confirmed the novice’s (Hunter’s) understandings and said:

We are totally obsessed with fitness, it’s what rowing depends on. We kind of have weird bodies if you really think about it, like lightweight men are super small and fit but like heavy weight men are tall and lean you know. There are definitely differences, but generally we are all super fit. We want to be efficient and to do that we need to train a lot, put in the meters, and like you want to be light but also as strong as humanly possible so our bodies are super chiseled.

Eli, another novice, showed how quickly his priorities and embodied desires shifted once he became part of the rowing community. He said:

Honestly, I initially got into rowing because I wanted to get super fit and I saw the rowers and thought wow, they have the whole package. They were just pure fitness. Super fit and like ugh, goals. Now I don’t really think about it. I like want to see gains that will improve my scores and help the team win.
In summary, these males wished to embody efficiency, fitness, and power to perform well in their sport and they were very proud when they felt they had built their bodies to reflect these principles. In addition, males were still able to reinforce and maintain their masculine identities through their embodied practices and attitudes towards pain, training, and competition. Efficiency was equivalent to fitness in the opinions of these rowers and fitness was only achievable through extensive and consistent training regimens. Training was a daily duty for these athletes and they were proud to have their physical appearance reflect the behaviours expected of a rowing athlete. Ultimately, providing a concrete example of how Goffman (1959) has deconstructed human interaction in the past. Rowers’ unique conceptualizations of physical characteristics (body idioms) existed as a result of cultural norms and goals endorsed by the team. In addition, these conceptualizations were attached to rowing identities and by presenting thin, muscular bodies they could communicate to others that they had been appropriately participating in the ‘pain contest’ and other desirable rowing behaviours. Further enhancing an athlete’s performances of the self and confirming their sense of self as consistent with group objectives (Goffman, 1959). Body idioms also acted as tools for individuals to judge the performances of others and interpret whether or not an athlete deserved their respect (Goffman, 1959). Thus, the rowers’ constant preoccupation with improving their performances as rowers were informed by specific body idioms, which advocated for distinct bodies. Specifically, bodies that had undergone tremendous amounts of physiological stress and anguish.

5.2 The Stress of a 2k

According to participants, efficiency was one of the most important features allowing rowers to maintain desirable rowing identities. Therefore, when faced with an opportunity to demonstrate efficiency by performing a timed 2000m row on an ergometer, athletes felt a great
deal of anxiety, stress, and pressure. Although winning a 2km race on water, in an actual rowing vessel, was the most important goal for these rowers, their distinct, individual fitness could rarely be determined through those means. Most races that these athletes were a part of during the season consisted of boats with two or more teammates. Thus, it was difficult to single-out which male rowers were putting in the most work, which were more fit, and/or which were propelling the boat faster through the water. In addition, if an athlete was in a single boat (racing alone) it was suggested by rowers that race times were not as reflective of fitness as an ergometer test due to the variable and uncontrollable conditions of an outdoor race (Field Notes, October 2016). On a rowing machine (ergometer), athletes felt they had full control of their performance and among the group, the 2k tests were the principal method to test efficiency. According to Oliver, “the 2k test is like the worst thing ever, but it’s totally necessary. It’s like the only way coaches know your fitness level. It defines how good of a rower you are and will be.” 2k tests were administered off the water on ergometers to evaluate an athlete’s capability. Coaches decided boat assignments and predicted success of an athlete by comparing scores to previous tests and to regional and national standards. Every athlete agreed that the outcome of a 2km race or a 2km test was one of the most meaningful aspects of being a rower. Athletes were always working towards improving their 2k scores. From a dramaturgical standpoint, the 2k was a pivotal moment in a rower’s performance because it could make or break the role they had worked so hard to exemplify. If a rower did not complete a 2k to the team’s standards, their entire performance and identity as a rower collapsed (Goffman, 1959). To these male rowers, the 2k was an opportunity to present their individual selves to others. When Logan was asked about the 2k test he expressed:

So like at practice, especially testing and erg workouts- you kind of know where you are in terms of like performance level on the team based on your 2k score. You are ALWAYS working to be at the top- obviously at competitions you want to win, but even like on the team you want to be your best and get to the top.
Frequently, while in the field, athletes would ask other athletes, “what’s your 2k?” in an effort to find out where they ranked in comparison to rest of the group and to learn valuable information about the rowers’ dedication to the group (Goffman, 1959). Asking others their 2k score was a key part of the everyday interaction rituals in this social group (Goffman, 1967). If a rower admitted to having a undesirable or unimpressive 2k score, then they would be embarrassed and automatically judged as not upholding their expected role on the team (i.e. “not really a rower”). However, if a rower answered with an average 2k score, they were able to maintain their rowing identity. The most desirable response to this face-to-face interaction was to declare an impressive or outstanding score as this validated their success as a rower and increase social mobility. To rowers, someone’s 2k time represented fitness, efficiency, and how often and how well an athlete had practiced. Ryan confirmed this notion:

Any rower will tell you there is nothing worse than a 2k test. Nothing. It is the most grueling workout you’ll ever put yourself through, it’s mentally terrifying, your body freaks out. You know that score will decide who you are, what boat you are in, where you fit compared to the team, it will show you how hard you’ve worked, it basically becomes like your status on the team. Everybody asks like what’s your 2k score, or like looks it up. So much of your rowing career depends on that score and it tells you a lot about if you are working hard enough and like if your training is paying off and how successful you’re going to be as a team

Further, athletes expressed that a 2k score was often a way to gain status and respect within the team. All the male rowers expressed that the importance was so great that they would act in whichever way possible to better their previous score or to beat someone else’s. The 2k was the most prominent way for athletes to raise or depress their individual social mobility (Goffman, 1959). Oliver described how meaningful a 2k score was from a social perspective in the following account:

Oh ya, I’m still absolutely terrified of 2ks, like pain is big, it shocks me every god damn time, but I think it’s the pressure, the like this is it. This is how I prove I worked hard, this
is how I prove what I’m capable of, this is how I kind of stand out amongst the team and if I fail, if I don’t do better than I did last time, what does that say about me? I did something wrong, I wasn’t committed enough, I couldn’t get my act together and make it happen. That’s what we train for, so as much as it’s not a race and different stuff can always happen in a boat, when we do 2k tests, it’s like on you. The team can’t help you and you can’t hide from the numbers. Everybody can see how hard you are working and how fit you are compared to everyone else or how fit you were last test.

Logan continued to share how important it was amongst the team to have the best 2k score not only to avoid shame, but also to gain respect and status (Goffman, 1959). He said:

Shit ya there’s a hierarchy. Isn’t that true of any team? The better you are, the more respect and I don’t know ya, status? Privilege? Authority? I’m not sure exactly how to put it, but the better your 2k score is, you’ll get praise and its better than the opposite right. If you do worse than your last score or not as well as the rest of the team, its embarrassing. It’s the wrong kind of attention because you’ve let down the team. You haven’t done your job. You haven’t trained your body to be efficient. You aren’t in control. You don’t want to be seen or looked at in that light ever

Thus, due to the extreme physiological demands of a 2k erg, the expectations of how athletes thought they could perform were not easily attained. When these standards were not reached, an athlete lost their social strata, experienced a gap between their desired identity and the one they had just shown others, and felt great shame (Goffman, 1959, 1990). The outcome of a 2k test held a lot of weight among the rowing community. The test was physically exhausting and all athletes agreed it was one of the worst things they had ever done. However, athletes willingly performed the test to prove themselves to others (Goffman, 1959). It was an important moment to receive credibility in the community, because to rowers, the 2k was a way to expose the ‘real’ rowers, from the ‘fake’ ones. Mason disclosed this fact when he proclaimed:

2k tests are the worst part of rowing. You aren’t even on the water. You are on an erg, you are racing the clock, there are zero distractions, you aren’t even moving so that’s a mental mind game in itself. You are staring at a screen that is either telling you if you are worth it. You can’t hide, everyone can see if you are working hard or not, its right there on the screen, you can’t pretend to be fit … it’s a chance to be the best boat and like prove yourself to the team. A lot rides of a 2k score. If you didn’t train properly, everyone will know.
The 2k test was a way for rowers to establish who had successfully created efficient bodies and the meanings attached to the 2k went well beyond being labeled as an efficient rower. The score of a 2k was deeply tied to who they felt they were, who they felt other perceived them to be, and their sense of self (Goffman 1959). Athletes cared greatly about their impressions and were constantly stressed that their scores could potentially impose negative reactions from others (Goffman, 1990). Jason explained,

2ks are scary because they could expose you if you have slacked at all. As a rower we are never comfortable, you have to always be getting better and I think we are goal oriented, competitive, success-drive people so I don’t think you are ever satisfied, plus you have the expectations of the team, your own personal bests to beat, and I think I’m constantly scared of being at the bottom, like the rest of the team beating my score and me just looking like an idiot

The stress of a 2k came from athletes feeling they were judged based on this score. It also resulted from the rationalization that the 2k could potentially define their individual rowing identity, and instill a negative sense of self if they did not perform to their expectations. Proving once again, that as much as sport can be physically and psychologically demanding, because members need to engage face-to-face interaction there are often large social components influencing human behaviour and perceptions. The 2k test was an opportunity to gain respect and status among their peers. The social significance of the 2k race was a significant motivating factor when athletes reflected on their willingness to put their bodies through such a painful activity. Athletes felt deep distress, as the opposite of increased social mobility was also possible. According to Scheff (2003) shame is the ‘master emotion’ of everyday life that arises when a social bond is threatened. In this case, athletes felt pressure to perform their 2k tests exceptionally well because if they failed, they could lose their social position and weaken the bonds they had with other rowers. This also paralleled with Goffman (1990), who argued humans were controlled by shame in that they were constantly striving to engage in embodied
practices that prevented feelings of shame. Thus, not only was the 2k test a huge opportunity for these athletes to move upwards in their social hierarchy, but it was also a performance ritual that could result in severe feelings of shame if executed poorly. The intense pain and psychological demands made it very easy for an athlete to fail or underperform if they had not learned to mastered their bodies properly. In rowing settings, an adverse 2k score transpired into an unfavourable reputation or status. Thus, rowers were incredibly willing to fight through pain, overcome physiological limits, and risk the potential to black-out, collapse, or faint -- “hopefully after completion of the test” (Field Notes, October 2016). All to portray themselves as credible rowers, avoid shame, and achieve glory.

**5.3 Will It Make the Boat Go Faster?**

Although participants were often preoccupied with becoming efficient, they felt no one quite understood just how committed a rower had to be in order to obtain “efficiency-status”. The task was so difficult that athletes stated their entire lives had to revolve around becoming efficient, or in rowing terms: “making the boat go faster”. According to Logan, “At the end of the day, the only thing that matters is making the boat go faster. If I can say I worked hard and got better, then it’s a good day”. Speed, power, and endurance, were the key components that athletes needed to be efficient and rowers spent their daily lives attempting to behave in ways that they believed would improve the efficiency of their bodies. Though these ideologies suggest further body objectification, more detailed accounts outlined the how the pursuit of achieving a body that performs well is consumes all aspects these rowers’ lives. Thus, rowers are actively attempting to embody a life that represents complete dedication to the rowing culture through mental, emotional, social, and biological practices. As Jason and Ryan illustrated:

> Everything I do, like our training, how we eat, when we sleep, who we hangout with, when I study, my day honestly revolves around rowing. I am only friends with rowers
and so my whole day is kind of structured to make sure I am always focused on getting faster. Whatever it takes to make the boat go faster I’m doing. Again, I’m like committed to being efficient that way too, like I won’t waste energy on school or social stuff if I don’t have to, rowing comes first and its hard enough trying to be efficient in that. You’re always tired, so like I’m always making my choices based on whether or not it will better the team and make me better.

My life is rowing. I’m always thinking about rowing, always trying to get better, I eat based on my training load, I sleep to ensure I have a good practice. If a race is coming up, like I’m focused on that. Making weight- not that hard to do, but like my eating habits will change that week, maybe less water, less salt, etc. but like I don’t want to say this but obviously rowing comes first. I’ll stop studying if I know I need to get to bed. I feel like I obsess over my mistakes, I am always thinking like, I just need to sit-up straighter in the boat, so I’ll like practice that in lecture- my posture I mean, I don’t like do a rowing stroke in class. I just like feel like since I started rowing, all I do and all I think of is rowing

A basic unwritten rule of the team was to channel all physical, mental, social, emotion, and embodied energies towards rowing. The rationalization behind this belief was that these actions would guarantee individual and team success in the context of these males’ rowing culture.

Athletes expressed feelings of shame, anxiety, stress, embarrassment, or sadness when they felt their efforts were not improving individual or team outcomes. This rationalization helps to make sense of why athletes so willingly submitted themselves to pain and such an all-consuming lifestyle. To the athlete, if they were not meeting performance standards then it meant they were not working hard enough at their craft and/or they were not committing themselves enough to the sport. In other words, they were not worthy rowers. Athletes appeared to work very hard to avoid feeling inadequate or seeming as if they did not follow the correct cultural protocol envisioned to improve their rowing capabilities. For example, as Mason explained:

I feel very much like a failure if I don’t get better, it’s like shameful. Clearly I’m not working hard enough if I haven’t gotten better, and nobody wants to be in a boat with someone that isn’t making the boat go faster. If I’m not, I’m really upset and I start to re-arrange my life and habits to see where I went wrong. I don’t want the team to see me falling down the ranks, you know? It’s humiliating.
As Mason summarized, striving to make the boat go faster consumed athletes’ life choices and if they were not contributing to this mutual goal males felt shame and humiliation. A rower’s primary purpose in life was to make their boat go faster whether it be a single or a boat consisting of multiple teammates. No statement better defined the principal role of a rower than “make the boat go faster”. All behaviours, perceptions, and beliefs stemmed from this objective and their social establishment was dependent on individuals co-operating in the necessary performances or “fronts” to achieve this goal (Goffman, 1959). While in the field, male athletes constantly disclosed the importance of improvement, success, and improving efficiency. “If it makes the boat go faster” was a consistent expression heard amongst the male rowers to justify any activity or behaviour that related to rowing. Most frequently however, this statement was used to justify pain and grueling training sessions, as they firmly believed in the popular sporting phrase ‘no pain, no gain’. Henry had a similar experience reflecting on the type of person rowers wanted to exude while in the presence of other rowers:

You never want to be that guy. You know the one that isn’t working towards the goals of the team. You have to kind of give up your life to rowing and I know my like identity is connected to success, dedication, and we do whatever it takes to make our goals become reality. If you don’t prove that by putting in the work and getting better each day, you will lose respect and nobody is going to like you

In terms of rationalizing physical exertion with a ‘no pain, no gain’ or ‘all-or-nothing’ mentality, one rower recounted a situation in which he pushed himself to the point of fainting during an indoor competition. Ethan said:

I passed out. I couldn’t see, I didn’t know my score yet. I didn’t know yet if it was worth it to black out, come to before the end, then keep rowing, then black out again at the end and get carried off unable to walk. But it totally was. Once I saw my score I knew I’d be talking about it years later and look I still am. I reached my goal, I crushed my previous score and I won. I’ll be talking about it until I’m 40. Everybody was impressed. You get mad respect for that.
These stories were not uncommon in the rowing community. For example, at one competition throughout the observation period a total of 8 athletes fainted during their individual races. Ethan suggested this behaviour was normalized because it not only granted social respect, but also was a way for athletes to show that they had truly “give[n] it everything they had” while completing a bout of physical training/competition (Field Notes, January 2016). This unique relationship with risk is congruent with sport literature that has recognized risk as a defining feature of sport and a primarily characteristic of masculine and athletic identity. For athlete’s to voluntarily accept risk and not question the potential danger to overall their overall health reflects the power of rowing norms can have on behaviour. These rowers had learned to rationalize complete exhaustion to the point of fainting as a sign of hard-work and bravery. Both significant characteristics of masculine identity as well (Bryson, 1987; Donnelly, 1994; Messner, 1990; Giller & White, 1992). The power of rationalization becomes more clear when the perceptions of fainting and extreme exhaustion in contexts outside of sport are considered because generally, these effects are understood as unhealthy.

Another common expression that reflected these athletes’ commitment and dedication to efficient bodies was “two workouts a day sends the bow ball away”. To clarify, the bow-ball was the round ball on the front of each rowboat. The first bow ball to cross the finish line dictated the winner of the race. The statement showed that rowers believed they needed to train at least twice a day to be in a winning boat. In sum, rowers understanding of efficiency was that the more they focused on the sport, the better their performance would become. As a result, the daily lives of rowers were flooded with rowing related activities and athletes were expected to refrain from distracting their focus on rowing with other activities that may impede their rowing careers. As Oliver said:

I totally think it’s an expectation to have commit yourself to the sport. Like you can’t just come into rowing thinking you can have a life full of other stuff. It takes a lot of
commitment and dedication. If you aren’t going to commit 100% to the sport, then you shouldn’t be at the competitive level. It’s about sacrificing a lot to win. I had to quit a lot of clubs, and study groups and stuff because it was just like rowing took over and I love it and that’s just what it takes. Rowing is life.

Thus, as Oliver put it bluntly, “rowing was life” in their culture and it was a motto heard repeatedly while in the field (Field Notes, September-December 2015). Each rower was extremely devoted to the sport and comparing it to life truly showed how predominant both the activity of rowing and rowing culture were in their everyday lives. Supporting other theorists’ analysis of sport, which claims sport should be considered a total institution (Birrell & Donnelly, 2008; Goffman 1963; Hughes & Coackley, 1991). Although they were not in the physical confines of a social organization, these athletes did live their lives in isolation of the wider society as their objectives were very much connected to isolated cultural beliefs. Their daily lives were dependent on each other and there was rarely a time when rowers were not in the presence of other rowers, coaches, or trainers. Therefore, the social system within their rowing community had a great deal of control over their lives. Enhancing the social influence and pressure these athletes felt to conform to rowing norms and constantly be performing their rowing roles (Goffman, 1963). All rowers recognized this notion and praised those who successfully embodied the motto “rowing is life”. Mason shared that failure to uphold these cultural expectations resulted in a loss of respect and was shameful to not fully commit oneself the sport they love. All other participants agreed with his statement that read:

Oh you totally lose my respect if you don’t miss practice, or your score is low, [or] if you aren’t committed to the sport, you aren’t a rower in my eyes then. If you aren’t putting in the work each day…leave. It is a grind, and I feel like that is something that frustrates me so much, when you see a guy with so much potential -or girl whatever- and they show up like once or twice a week to training and you’re just like, get out of here you’re wasting everyone’s time. You can’t get better that way, it takes hard, hard work. It’s not just all fun and games.
Thus, embodying efficiency in the context of rowing was also a very meaningful element contributing to both group and individual rowing identities. Any opportunity to demonstrate efficiency and/or fitness to others was of incredible importance to these males because it was a source of acceptance, status, respect, and ultimately allowed them to avoid negative feelings such as shame, humiliation, and/or alienation from the group. Athletes rationalized their acceptance of pain and risk to preserve their desired athletic/masculine identities and uphold a particular sport ethic. Athletes could prove their bodies were efficient by maintaining a lean physique, performing well during physical tests such as the 2k, and ensuring majority-if not all behaviours they engaged in were identified as actions that would improve their speed, fitness, and/or skill as a rower. Therefore, rowers had learned appropriate behaviour and rationalized their ways of thinking through what Goffman (1967) refers to as *interaction rituals*. Athletes could decipher acceptable and unacceptable behaviour based on the reactions of their peers and since their team paralleled Goffman’s descriptions of a total institution, the opinions of others and cultural expectations were extremely meaningful to them. Overall, it appeared the participants accepted pain and risk in order to performed desired athletic and masculine identities in order to ensure group acceptance and present a desirable ‘front’ to others.
Chapter 6
Male Bonding and Athletic Identity

The activities and events in the daily lives of these male rowers were primarily performed with one another. There were rarely any instances where the group was not together. Rowers practiced twice a day together, attended the same school, travelled to competitions together, had meals together, attended majority of social events together, and even lived in student housing together. Recognizably, the amount of time these males spent together appeared to influence their level of closeness/bonding. However, each athlete acknowledged the attachment they felt to their teammates could be attributed to specific elements of their culture beyond the simple measure of time they spent with one another. These males felt their unique cultural norms and understandings as rowers were the reasons they often felt so close. The shared understandings of ‘the pain contest’ were forms of what Atkinson (2008) terms ‘bonding capital’. Everybody agreed with what Mason disclosed during a training session when he said:

I don’t think the sport forces us to spend all this time together, we actually want to. Nobody understands rowers, but we get each other. I’ve never had best friends like the ones I have on this team. We are closer than close. We are family.

In the minds of the rowers, the intense closeness that they all felt was created through deep understandings and mutual respect for who they were, what they did and why the sport of rowing was so meaningful to their existence. Specifically, their struggles through pain. It was apparent that the male rowers felt the “outside” world did not understand who they were as ‘outsiders’ did not understand the distinct norms and values that existed in their social establishment. Ryan expressed that, “you don’t have to explain yourself. What we do is crazy and to have a bunch of people that support you and get it, is why I keep doing it.” In accordance, what Mason said: “not many people understand what we do, or would even do it themselves. Hard to explain to a non-rower, so basically all my friends are rowers.” Being a part of this culture (team) exposed each of
the rowers to unique situations that athletes recognized were very different from their non-rowing friends and family. For example, when I asked one athlete some of the most difficult or negative aspects of participating in rowing, he stated:

People don’t understand why we devote so much of ourselves to the sport or why we love it so much. I think the hardest part is fighting with my family, I spend a lot of time rowing or like structuring my life around it, and my parents and family don’t get it. They don’t understand how I can like destroy my body and like restrict myself so much like physically and socially. They want me to quit.

Throughout the observation period, both rowers and non-rowers (early novices) labeled rowing as an “obsession” (Field Notes September-October, 2015). However, what frustrated a rower was that outsiders did not view their obsession in a positive light. Rowers admitted that without the group, they were “misunderstood” and did not know how to explain the sport to others unless they had experienced it themselves. As Ryan put it, “people think we are crazy, and we are, but like they will never get it until they do it. They don’t get the pain, the addiction, or what we go through”. Rowers consistently defined their team as a ‘crew’, ‘cult’, ‘squad’, ‘gang’, ‘clan’, ‘clique’, and/or ‘community’ illustrating the inseparable nature of their social group. Beyond pages of field-notes suggesting that the group was distinct and isolated from all other surrounding social groups, athletes themselves recognized and appreciated their exclusivity. The exclusivity of the group, although intimidating, was rarely meant to be unfriendly or unwelcoming to those outside the group. It was a strategy for these athletes to simplify the task of defining their situations and having to constantly explain or demonstrate the “self” to others (Goffman, 1959). As one athlete said:

It’s not like we don’t like people that don’t row, we just really, really like rowers. It’s like our gang- nothing against anybody else, but we are the greatest friends and we just really get each other. Kind of like our ride or die is, row or die (laughing). I feel at home and protected in the company of my rowers.
Overall, the following chapter will explore the immense closeness expressed between each of the male rowers and the ways in which this closeness was strengthened, threatened, and valued.

6.1 Pain and Bonding Capital

Throughout the observations and semi-structured interviews, all athletes appeared to believe the reason their team was exceptionally close was because of their shared experiences with pain. Every single rower on the team suggested pain as the major factor responsible for creating such intimate relationships with other rowers. As a whole, the group felt their experiences of pain were ‘indescribable’ through language and had to be understood through embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Basically, athletes felt the reason they had such close ties to one another was because the pain connected them in some way. This notion is consistent with the work of Roy (2006), that found suffering and friendship are increasingly intertwined. Individuals who experience similar pain feel connected to one another on an embodied level. Many athletes attempted to describe how this manifested in their own words, but failed. Instead most resorted to using the analogy of how traumatic events or war often brought people together. For example, Jason admitted:

You know when you see on the news like, these people were in a plane crash together and survived and they have this ‘thing’ that unites them? That traumatic event connects them in some way? That’s how I feel happens in rowing, you can like look at rower and you just know what they’ve been through. It is a lot of pain and you get pretty beat up through training and reach some really low points. Like I said it’s hell and when you go through hell with people, you either hate them after or love them. I love them [teammates].

Mason and Jason used this analogy as well when they said:

We always talk about it like, we are soldiers or like going into battle and about to destroy our bodies, minds and souls for real so like that pain actually connects us on a level that can’t be explained, you just have to experience it.
Think of the worst thing you’ve ever been through. Think of how close you got with the people that went through it with you, its like something special and I think that has a lot to do with why these people are the best friends I’ve ever had. I’ll never forget my first 2k test, how weak and beaten up you feel, but at the same time so thankful you’re not alone.

Thus, the rowing community formed loving bonds through their shared embodied experiences of pain. The strong social bonds were incredibly meaningful to these males and they admitted their inclusion and connection to the crew was linked to their sense of self, belonging, and self-worth. Athletes felt their pain was exclusive to the group and that only those participating in the culture understood the complex ways this pain was embodied in their daily lives. Athletes made arguments similar to Ryan’s when he said, “the pain has made me who I am, it’s shown me who I am, and to not have to explain that to anyone when I’m with rowers, is like the best. They really get me and we get each other” and also agreed with Henry when he stated “I never have to answer the question ‘why do you do this’ with them [rowers]. They just know.” As long as the athletes were participating in the ‘pain contest’, all athletes felt they were understood, accepted, and fulfilled. Mason made an interesting connection to his identity:

Rowing means pain, and choosing that makes us special. Not many people could do what we do everyday…I think we are the people you can guarantee will go far in life, because we know what it means to push through unpleasant situations and keep grinding…I feel pride saying I’m a rower because of what it means I do and I think the only people that really, truly appreciate that are other rowers.

It became abundantly clear throughout observations and in-depth discussions, that rowing provided them with a purpose, provided a strong sense of accomplishment and positively altered their sense of self. However, confirmation of a ‘desirable’ self was strongest when it came from another rower, specifically, rowers on their team. As Jason said:

Hearing good feedback from a teammate means more than somebody who’s never rowed. They don’t know shit. Plus when you’re so connected to a group of people, you really respect their opinions, you want to do right by them, and you want to make them proud.
You fight for that last minute and get through the pain for them, because you know that’s what they would do for you.

The shared experiences of pain defined the culture and the culture itself became a part of their own identity, which then translated into shared understandings of the world and their purpose within it. Mason said:

I think our struggles and the things that define us, like pain, blisters, early mornings, two a day practices, dedication, commitment, strength, endurance, and just like the same like stresses keep us close. Who better to talk to or be around than people that understand what drives you?

In addition, Ryan acknowledged, “within the [our] crew we will not just support you through the pain, but we have or will go through it with you”. Thus, those willing to adopt the belief that rowing meant training through pain had also created an opportunity to have a group of individuals willing to fully support their efforts. Fundamentally, support and understanding from other athletes were key components responsible for creating and maintaining secure meaningful connections between the rowers. The pain also appeared to provide rowers with a mutual sense of purpose and increased trust, which supports other scholars findings analyzing sport-induced physical pain (Bale, 2004; Le Breton 2000; Callois 1967; Young & Atkinson, 2008). Males often spoke of the importance of closeness proceeding or following a daily encounter with pain. Predominantly the male athletes would make statements such as, “I could not do this alone” or “I can’t let my team down” or “we do this together or not at all”. These statements confirmed that closeness was more than just the desire to be a part of something and/or accepted into a group. Athletes needed their teammates to help them rationalize and accept intense daily occurrences of pain and confirm their personal identity. Even novices who had only recently been exposed to this culture connected with this notion. Eli said:
How has my life changed since rowing? Mmm.. honestly before rowing I never really thought I needed anyone- now I appreciate you can go a lot further if you have people in your corner and I really value my friendships with these guys

What then emerged from the data were complex interrelations between pain, group norms, and the self. First, social interactions during painful experiences had created unique understandings of pain (mainly that pain was necessary in the sport of rowing) and athletes’ shared experiences of pain had created a strong sense of closeness between athletes. Support and understanding from peers confirmed to these athletes’ that they could consider the label of ‘rower’ and all they’ve been taught said label represents as part of their identity (Goffman, 1959). From a theoretical perspective, these athletes needed their crew, because without them, athletes did not feel as much social pressure to perform the desired “fronts”. Having strong social influences that believed in an athlete’s performance created an urgency to live-up to others’ expectations and to avoid dissembling their identity or experiencing shame. It also instilled a deeper belief in the athlete themselves and diminished the gap between desired self and true self as they had an entire system of people telling them “you can do it”. Thus, when in the presence of their close teammates, the males were more likely to embody the desired front, which ultimately enhanced their rowing abilities because they put more mental, physical, and social effort into training and competition. Further solidifying an athlete’s sense of purpose in the world and preventing existential crises.

The love and support also provided confirmation that they were successfully fulfilling their respective roles while performing in the rowing setting (Goffman, 1959). As Ryan put it, “Once you’re in (accepted), there’s no leaving. The people are what keep me coming back. I’ve considered quitting, but I would miss the sense of community, camaraderie, and like ‘kay, this is where I belong’ feeling.” Thus, the threat of losing support and love from others was as significant the desire to earn it. Males constantly worked towards performing behaviours that
would maintain or further strengthen positive relationships with their peers. Unsurprisingly, the most effective way to do so was by engaging in painful rowing exercises, concealing pain, supporting others in their pain, and discussing pain. Further demonstrating the centrality of pain in this group of male rowers and the complex ways that pain became socially relevant. Fundamentally athletes believed they used pain as a measure of physical exertion, which in turn allowed them to deceiver whether they were working their bodies ‘hard enough’ to improve their stamina, test scores, or race times. However, aspects such as success, winning, acceptance, and status were what gave the athletes’ numeric measures of fitness and/or rowing skills more complex meanings. For example, Zach suggested it was the perceptions of others that motivated his goals to endure more pain and improve as a rower. He said:

"Our 2ks and races only matter because we make ‘em matter. Your 2k score literally defines who you are, and it’s kinda like your status on the team. It’s like basically how you are judged and how you earn respect. You want it [2k score] to be good, and ideally better than theirs...it is obvious you have their respect when they start paying attention to you, like going out of their way to show support."

Zach’s statement helps to show how concerned rowers were with how other rowers saw them. His statement also highlighted how those who had low social stratas were not worthy of support or praise unless their performances were up to par with the expectations of the team. This speaks to Goffman’s (1959, 1967) theories of social interaction and interaction rituals as individuals are constantly attempting to manage their impressions on others. A strategy the group employed to ensure members were following socially constructed rules of the team. An athlete’s behaviour granted them access to a supportive community that enhanced their ego and help to confirm and improve their desired self (Goffman,1959). By performing ideal behaviours and providing support from others when presenting a self that the individual desired (ideal self), an athlete would feel as though their ‘front’, was no longer an act, but a true representation of who they were (Goffman, 1959). Thus, though athletes had agency and were not technically forced to
partake in painful practices, they continued to participate in the ‘pain contest’ because of the meaningful social pressures acting on them while in the rowing setting. Further, the more they participated in the culture, the more pain they experienced more pain, which ultimately allowed for better embodied understandings of each other and perpetuated more closeness and bonding. Throughout the observation phase, there were countless demonstrations of support ranging from motivational language, to incredible acts of kindness. At one point during the season a rower crashed his private boat and was not able to afford the repairs. Knowing this, the entire team came together and each contributed their own money to give to Jason for the repairs. This act demonstrated the strong community and support system that was available to athletes accepted into the group. The rower that crashed his boat was a strong, well-respected rower, and upheld group expectations and norms, which ensured that he was “entitled” to that level of support. Ryan said:

> We support each other, but it’s like anything. You have to earn it, just because you row doesn’t mean you’re in, you have to be competitive, success-driven, and train every day. Get on that pain train and just accept everything that is rowing

Ryan’s quote further demonstrated that love and support had to be earned and only by adopting specific behaviours, perceptions, and attitudes were rowers granted the privilege to receive said love and support. Lucas also explained:

> I think its just a natural thing that happens, if you put in the work, you work hard, you do what you’re supposed to do, people tell you and support you and you get the attention you deserve, if you don’t you don’t get love.

Simply, rowers needed to put in the physical, mental, and emotional work to be valuable in their social group and ‘putting in work’ frequently translated into the embodiment of pain. Once these males embodied pain to an appropriate degree, their peers used love and support to validate their actions to be congruent with the group’s perception of a ‘true’ rower and contributed to said athlete’s identity and sense of self (Goffman, 1959). As Joseph put it, “the one thing we really
have in common—like no question—what defines us as rowers, is our ability to overcome pain, and the fact that we have to confront pain together every day.” Joseph’s statement is another example of the ways pain increased bonding capital between the male athletes on this rowing team. Ultimately, painful experiences were difficult to manage alone and without the support of others, their individual feats, struggles, and efforts were meaningless. Logan expressed:

You’re like so dead after a workout and you look over at a teammate and it’s like ‘we did it, we made it’ and I don’t think it would feel nearly as satisfying without my teammates. Probably wouldn’t even matter.

Thus, athlete’s valued closeness because it meant they had a support system that understood and validated their behaviours, perceptions and every day embodied experiences of pain. Demonstrating the complex nature of the human experience and further emphasizing that the rowers’ lived bodies were subject to social discourses which offered guidelines for how their bodies should act, look, and feel (Bordo 1993; Bourdieu, 1986; Butler, 1993; Cregan 2012; Frank, 1991; Goffman, 1990; Lennon, 2014; Noland, 2009; Shilling 2004; Turner, 1984; Woodworth, 2009). Further, these accounts provide evidence that the social, bio-physical, and psychological components of human life are constantly acting on individuals in conjunction with one another. As scholars, failing to acknowledge societies from somatic perspectives or to include the body is analyses of the world, prevents access to many embodied factors facilitating or constraining human behaviour (Turner, 1992). Thus, the team’s closeness was a result of their shared understandings of reality, which were often impossible to describe or explain to others without first-hand, lived experience. As discussed, the objectives and norms of the group were a part of the males’ identities. And since humans are constantly attempting to prove their worth and present who they are to others, having these shared understandings made the task of figuring out one’s purpose and role in an ever-changing world less complicated (Goffman, 1959). These males knew their role and had a surrounding support system (audience/team) that accepted or
denied their attempts to fulfil their roles as men, athletes, and more specifically masculine rowers (Goffman, 1959).

6.2 Embodiment of Social Status and Identity

The males of this rowing culture were always striving to achieve a sense of closeness among the group as closeness positively impacted their daily lives. However, there were many opportunities for the opposite effect to occur, in which athletes felt closeness was lost or suspended due to their behaviours. In these situations, athletes expressed undesirable feelings of shame, embarrassment, humiliation, and/or alienation. Descriptions and observations of these moments captured the severity of these experiences and proved the avoidance of shame to be a major factor governing the behaviours of these athletes (Goffman, 1990). Thus, shame was considered a social tool that ensured athletes followed the written and unwritten rules of their culture and more specifically shame urged athletes to commit themselves to pain. The pain they committed themselves to was the result of intense physical exertion, not injury. It should be noted that these athletes believed they could separate painful sensations of exhaustion from those of acute injuries (Field Notes/Interviews, September 2015-January 2016). However, the welcoming of pain did include the potential of losing consciousness, severe weakening of muscles, vomiting, hyperventilation, losing muscular control of the body, and/or sustaining a new musculoskeletal injury (Field Notes, September-December 2015). These consequences were considered a ‘norm’ within the culture, and athletes often believed that if they did not experience these physiological reactions they had failed to master the embodiment of pain because they were too afraid. At the very least, athletes were expected to experience severe weakening of the muscles – to the extent of not being able to walk after a training bout, test or race (Field Notes, September 2015-January 2016). Otherwise, as Jason said “you aren’t doing it right”. In the
rowing community, being afraid of ‘the pain’ or not being able to exert one’s body to a new physiological limit was deemed shameful, embarrassing and depending on the circumstances athletes like Ryan expressed they felt “completely humiliating”. This moment came following a 2k test, when Ryan stopped rowing halfway through. Athletes watching the test were quick to react to the situation expressing their shock making statements such as, “you don’t’ do that, oh my god I cannot believe he stopped. What happened?”, “what the f***? He never gives up, he’s like one of the best rowers we have”, and “do you think he got injured? Like there’s no excuse for that”. Although these statements had been made without Ryan’s knowledge he was fully aware that what he had done was socially offensive to the group. When approached, Ryan initially stated, “ugh, I’m horrible. I don’t deserve to live”, illustrating how strong the expectation was to complete a predetermined distance, despite intense pain. Though, he did not literally intend to end his life, his language reflects the seriousness of ‘breaking character’ or failing to conform to specific group expectations (Goffman, 1959). In this situation, Ryan was unable to maintain a desirable front and he felt that he had not only disappointed his teammates, but also lost their respect. By losing respect and admiration of his teammates he lost social status and threatened his identity and sense of self. As a result, Ryan expressed he felt extremely ashamed. Interestingly, rowers did not appear to conceal their shame. Instead, individuals would attempt to show through verbal or physical signs that they knew they had done something wrong and intended to compensate for their error in judgment. By doing this, rowers could regain the support and social status they had lost by failing to perform their designated roles. Later, Ryan explained:

I don’t know what went wrong. I failed. I should have pushed through the pain, I’ve faced it before, but it was different I don’t know I just couldn’t do it, I went out too quickly. I let everyone down. That’s not who I am, I’m better than that. Now, everyone is looking down on me until I prove myself again. It’s a really awful feeling I keep replaying it in my mind, like how could I have prevented that? Where did I go wrong?…I
feel completely humiliated. Ashamed. Disgusted in myself. I knew right away I’d lose my ranking and respect. So frustrating.

Thus, despite all previous efforts to establish a role, identity, and status within the group, Ryan felt his efforts were immediately lost because he had opposed an established social ideology. An ideology that Mason explained when he said:

Unless you are physically depleted of all your energy—mental, physical, emotional, whatever—focus counts as exertion, you aren’t upholding what it means to be a rower. We train hard, and we give 100%. If that’s not you, we don’t want you here. Sorry.

Although Ryan stopping mid-workout was an extreme case, it does provide a clear example of how shame or guilt can encourage or discourage athletes from acting in certain ways. This situation was also a prime example of an athlete’s reaction when they felt they had broken character and exposed the gap between their desired self and the self that others observed (Goffman, 1959). When speaking with these athletes, it was apparent that their intense closeness made the threat of shame or negative judgment more significant. Athlete’s identities were especially dependent on the rowing team, as a result of their extensive investment in the community and its ideologies. Therefore, without the group’s approval, athletes often experienced an existential crisis. Oliver shared:

When you don’t put everything out there, it makes you question yourself and everyone is like thinking you suck, because if you aren’t like pulling your weight, you don’t really belong or have the right to be there. People ignore you or treat you different. It’s embarrassing to be considered a shit-rower, which basically means you aren’t a rower and like what am if I’m not a rower?

For Oliver and the rest of his crew, the identity of a ‘successful’ or ‘true’ rower was the most desirable identity in which one could be associated with and/or known for in their community. Any behaviour that prevented this ideal identity from being realized or detached a desirable
identity from their presentations of the self, created feelings of shame and a loss of closeness 
(Goffman, 1959, 1990). Explained by Jason:

It’s pretty straight forward, there is a hierarchy. You are judged based on how good of a rower you are and if you like start to slip [fall in the training rankings, place poorly in a race, go against team norms], people get mad at you, yell, call you out whatever and even if they don’t do it to your face, you hear their disapproval in your head. It sticks with you until you do better.

The hierarchy Jason described was purely based on rowing performance and was only truly accessible to those who were embodying the rowing culture. Rowers gained merit through the use of their bodies, meaning their bodies were always socially significant while in the rowing environment. The social statuses of these rowers were dependent on their actions. More specifically on their ability to control their bodies to match with group norms (i.e. body idioms). If other athletes recognized a rower was not properly presenting himself, the group responded with neglect or verbal confrontation. Henry said:

Novices really need to learn what the sport is all about, they just don’t get what they need to do yet and its annoying because we take pride in the fact that we row and when we wear the rowing gear it represents all our hard work and basically who we are, so when novices come in and try to be like oh I row now, its like no, no you don’t. I usually just ignore the novices or like call them out so they know.

As a novice myself, I frequently felt embarrassed or ‘unworthy’ as I was attempting to figure out the “do’s” and “don’ts” of the rowing world. The first rule I learned was that rowers took their title (front) very seriously. It took a great deal of dedication and investment to earn the right to call oneself a ‘rower’. With the input of the male participants and the use of in-depth field notes, a list of ten unwritten “rules” or expectations in the rowing community was created. All male athletes agreed on the following defining features of their sport ethic and pro-typical masculine fonts (Hughes & Coackley, 1991) to be as follows:

1. Rowers don’t wear gloves (a.k.a “bitch mittens”). Rowers have blisters or calluses
2. The crew is a rower’s family and they always come first
3. Rowing is not a sport it is a lifestyle. You must live and breathe rowing
4. Novices are not rowers – don’t claim to be a rower if you are a novice
5. First place, gold, top rankings are a rower’s goal. Medals represent success.
6. Rowers do what they must do to manage the pain, but never avoid it
7. Rowers do not show pain while rowing – they conserve energy and stay focused
8. 2k scores and race rankings become your status on the team. Train to be the best
9. Always finish your workout, piece, test, or race. Never give-up.
10. Don’t miss practice, never skip a workout and always give 100% effort

After careful analysis, these features also appear to coincide with pro-typical masculine fronts, as these males declared they prioritized success, competition, toughness, and risk (Goffman, 1959; Young, White, & McTeer, 1994). Since these commandments were not physically written or publicly disclosed to athletes, they had to learn these commandments through social interaction. The guilt and embarrassment that occurred when one of these commandments was broken, was one way for athletes to become aware of the fact that their role as a team member was not being fulfilled (Goffman, 1959). Thus, athletes spoke of the constant pressure they often felt to uphold these demands. Males admitted they were determined to prove to others that they were rowers and by doing so, they felt they had built character, augmented their sense of self, and shown success. All of which, protected them from feelings of embarrassment, unworthiness, isolation, or shame (Goffman, 1963, 1990). In addition, avoidance of shame translated into a more positive and confident sense of self because the team reacted with support and approval (Goffman, 1959). The team had created an ideal definition of a rower and those who embodied this definition received status, power, and social acceptance (Goffman, 1959). In addition, the connection these males felt from participating in the performance of the ‘pain contest’ and sport of rowing fostered further expressions of love and support in the form of affection towards their teammates.
6.3 Emotions and Affection

In North American culture, males are typically characterized as individuals who withhold or suppress feelings of love and affection. In the past, desirable male traits have not involved love or affection because they were considered “feminine”. Social definitions of ‘maleness’ have been known to instill unhealthy perceptions and marked as major factors contributing to the rise in male suicide, depression, and many unhealthy practices (Dorais & Lajeunesse, 2004; Fischgrund, Halkitis, & Carroll, 2012). Entering the rowing community, I expected to witness males refraining from acts of affection to remain consistent with generalized social definitions of masculinity. However, this specific group revealed that their definitions of masculinity and ‘being men’ included expressions of love and physical displays of affection. As rowers, bonding was essential for success in the sport. In a boat, rowers had to synchronize each movement perfectly to be effective (Field Notes, September 2015). Athletes needed to be very close, have great trust in their teammates, and feed off each other’s energies to propel the boat effectively and perform well. Jason explained this unique aspect of the sport stating, “Once you are in the boat, you are all one unit. Every guy in that boat has to work together or you won’t move. All it takes is one person to off-set the boat, so you really have to be connected. Especially when the pain hits.” Once again, an embodied connection was shown to be very important. An effective way for athletes to feel bonded, connected, and/or trusted was by receiving and performing various acts of love and affection. Oliver suggested:

Oh yah, we love each other. We are just super supportive and there is like an intimacy that comes with the pain, the spandex, the sweat, the crew mentality. It’s just like I’m not romantically in love with these people but I appreciate the hell out of them and like am not afraid to be like ‘yo I love Mason, he’s hot as fuck’, or like after a race you just like fall all over each other in the boat and like embrace each other
A typical day at the rowing club or in the gym consisted of multiple expressions of love, praise, affection, or admiration (Field Notes, September-November 2016). Despite athlete’s aggressive focus on their specific rowing performance and training goals, the deep closeness that had fostered from their shared experiences revealed complex relationships of competitiveness without hostility. It was socially unacceptable to act cold because a rower was performing better than yourself. Instead, rowers had adopted the perspective that the only time where demonstrations of love, affection, respect, or praise could be suppressed was when a fellow rower was underperforming (i.e. underconforming to cultural ideals). There was also no optimal performance between underconforming or overconforming to rowing expectations. The more an athlete abided by the ten rules listed in the previous section, the more praise and affection was given. Rowers idolized each other. As opposed to becoming envious of another rower’s success, a rower would view their success as motivation or inspiration. In addition, rowers admitted that because of their team’s closeness, and mutual love for each other, if another rower embodied idealized characteristics they felt they had as well. Emphasizing the strength of the team’s shared group identity (Goffman, 1959). Henry explained:

If someone succeeds it’s like we all succeed. You feel it too. We are like a family, you feel pride and responsibility for their success, because we are all very aware this lifestyle cannot be sustained alone. Everything gets done as a team.

Since love was often an indescribable experience, these males frequently described a connection’ to explain the devotion they had to their fellow rowers. Jason attempted to describe the sensation:

I don’t know how to explain this in words, you know what I mean though when I say I feel connected to them like in my soul. My body, mind, I don’t know, is like fused with all my crews and you just kind of get close and it’s not pussy shit, its like we battle every day together and I just love them for everything they do

Ultimately, athletes were an extremely tight-knit group, and their shared identities translated into feelings of love and an indescribably close connection. Males were not ashamed of this fact and
those who were veterans of the culture were consistently using words and gestures to show their appreciation for their rowing family. As Jason stated, rowers agreed it was not “pussy shit” or considered “weak”, “emasculating”, or “gay”. Instead, they were proud that they were a part of a culture that accepted openness, honesty, and social support. Ethan made a compelling statement when the term “masculinity” when males frequent expressions of love were questioned in the interview process. Ethan said:

It’s not fair to say we aren’t manly don’t show loving emotions. Those guys that get big muscles, act tough, put their friends down are either faking it, have shitty friends, or are just flat-out insecure. I just think people would be better off if they learned real-life appreciation and like closeness is okay. I know I’m better, happier, more confident and sure of myself because we know how to be humans instead of fake robots- you can be both tough-strong and like caring.

The males rejected the notion that a male could not be both loving and tough. They also believed that it was unfair to label loving as “feminine” and tough as “masculine”. These binaries were not real in their community. Instead, when asked about the difference in behavior between the women’s team and the men’s teams, rarely were there any significant differences that they felt distinguished their behaviours or attitudes from the females on the team. Logan shared:

No, I think as rowers we are all like acting accordingly to the same standards- we all want to win, embody pain, and train hard. I think the only difference between the men’s and women’s team is that women hold grudges. Like the girls will talk about an issue that happened a month ago like it’s still relevant, but like showing support it’s not a girly thing- it’s like uhh… human thing? Rowing thing?

Thus, these males indicated that their sense of self was more attached to a rowing identity than a masculine one. There were evidently structures in place such as National Rowing rules and regulations that separated men and women in competition settings as well as the obvious biological make-up. However, from a social standpoint focused on norms, behaviours, and identities, the gender identities of these males were not significant priorities or concerns while
they were in the rowing environment. Lucas expressed his interpretation of rowing identity and masculinity when he said:

I don’t think I’m really ever concerned about like being a man. I’m just me and I like what I do and I like who I do it with…I guess I’ve never really been much for labels, that’s what is so great about rowing- you don’t have the be super manly, super big, have an amazing job, be crazy smart even though I think most of us are.- you just have to be good at rowing and have an incredible work ethic. I am a man, but I don’t feel the need to prove that in anyway-it is pretty obvious.

These narratives helped to uncover reasons why these males might have been more accepting and welcoming of supportive, compassionate, and loving gestures. Without restrictive gender norms, these athletes were free to behave as “rowers” as opposed to stereotypical “men” or “women”. It appeared that this cultivated a social environment where individuals could show their appreciated for one another overtly through specific gestures and verbal feedback. For example, one day at the rowing club, we were all standing waiting to launch our boats when one male ran over to another male getting ready for practice and said “what’s up buddy, awesome race last weekend, you are killing it.” And, before the second male had a chance to respond he stood up on the picnic table put both hands on the other male’s shoulders and announced “I love this man!!!” Following this announcement, a third male yelled “I love you too, you’re my hero”. Saying the words “I love you, love ya, or love you” were frequently used in various rowing settings. Specifically, this expression was often used to express gratitude and appreciation for something an athlete had done for them, the team, or themselves. Further, athletes admitted expressions of love either given or received were a helpful strategy to deal with the harmful sensation of pain they had to endure on a daily basis. Henry said, “love is what makes the painful stuff easier.” And Jason admitted, “sounds dumb and I don’t love them in that way obviously but like [the] support and friendships you gain from this sport kind of evens out all the pain. Keeps you going.” Highlighting how their closeness was an important feature justifying the risk and
pain they surrendered their bodies to each day. Ryan summed up the outlooks of all the rowers in this study stating that he felt he had “never been supported by people so much and that makes it all worth it.” Finally, Jason, a rower in his final year of eligibility concluded:

Yah, I think that’s why we do it, the people are amazing and when do you get to feel a connection like that every day? Like you can’t replace these people. I’m really going to miss them, I won’t be able to find this in the real-world.

Jason’s comment about not being able to find the types of relations or connections with others in the “real-world” that he had within the rowing team, not only confirmed the groups’ isolation from the larger society, but also alluded to the idea that their culture may be using their social space to resist dominant macro-level notions of masculinity and neoliberalism. Specifically, ideologies that discourage males from seeking support or love from other males and those that encourage individualism as opposed to social co-operation and trust (Bruce, 2000; Bennet, 2007; Englar-Carlson & Shepard, 2005; Esposito, 2003; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Recognizing that these males constructed their own realities through social interaction and appeared to demonstrate a human desire for support and appreciation from others as these characteristics had a positive impact on the males’ sense of purpose, self-image, and overall well-being.
Chapter 7
Conclusion

The findings of this study have provided valuable insights into the unique pain culture of rowing. The extensive narratives given by the male athletes highlighted the value of investigating pain from a social perspective and outlined the strong effects cultural ideologies can have on human behaviour and the human experience. These rowers negotiated and rationalized the experience of pain as useful, necessary, and a defining feature of their social group and corresponding identities. Despite the immense pain, emotional stress, and risks associated with ‘the pain contest’, these males continued to participate because the meanings connected to their experiences gave them access to desirable roles, statuses, and identities. Ideally, all athletes were striving to embody the role of a ‘pain contest participant’, with the status of ‘the best/top’ member, to present the identity of a true ‘rower’. To do so, these males engaged in various behaviours that were specific to their sport and dependent the opinions of their peers. Specifically peers who had already established desirable identities or statuses. Acts of strength, efficiency, and/or closeness were used to confirm or deny a male’s rowing identity.

Predominantly, rowers attempted to push their pain thresholds to gain access, status, and acceptance into the group. Thus, demonstrating the power of social interaction and the instability of painful experiences as findings suggest pain to be complexly connected to social processes and cultural norms.

Through mutual experiences of pain males felt connected to each other, special, successful, and in-control of their embodied impressions. When presented to and accepted by others, the rowing identity fostered a sense of belonging, purpose, and the opportunity to receive and express support, love, and praise. Interestingly, these features were most meaningful to the males because they were not available outside of the rowing context. Suggesting this aspect of the pain contest resisted stereotypical masculine norms that discourage displays of emotion and
expressions of love, support or dependence. Since competitiveness has been identified as a key component of sport culture and masculinity, it was interesting to discover that support and closeness could operate in conjunction with competitive behaviours, as they are usually considered opposing characteristics. Rowers shared that support and connectivity were major cornerstones of their pain contest because they were consequences of immense pain, needed to endure pain, and provided a sense of purpose and belonging that all athletes valued. The shared experiences of pain between these male rowers were examples of ‘bonding capital’ as it brought them closer together in meaningful ways. Rowers also communicated that the support and closeness they received outside of the culture or prior to joining were deficient, which appeared to be another attraction to the ‘pain contest’.

In addition, the findings of this study demonstrated that these males were more concerned with the avoidance of shame than the avoidance of pain. Biologically, humans are believed to act in ways that stop or decrease pain, however for these rowers the threat of shame from their peers had greater influence on their behaviour than the infliction of pain itself. Rowers routinely accepted pain despite their intense discomfort, because enduring pain was a key component of embodying an honourable rowing performance. Declining to submit oneself to the indescribable pain of an intense rowing workout or race was a shameful act and communicated to rowers that they were not fulfilling their expected role and that they were not deserving of a rowing identity. Without a rowing identity, athletes could experience isolation, exclusion, shame, embarrassment, and an identity crisis. Athletes would rather endure temporary/acute pain than lose their identity, status, or acceptance into the group. Further demonstrating that athletes were able to manage their impressions through embodied practices and that scholars should never devalue the notion that bodies are constantly inscribed with meaning. Nor should scholars underestimate the power of cultural norms and their significance in explaining human behaviour. Instead, scholars
interpreting the behaviour and/or attitudes of athletes must consider the attachment athletes have to sport-specific and embodied identities.

Overall, the findings of this study provide valuable contributions to pain research. Exploration of non-injury related pain in a sport context provided innovative insights into the everyday lives of male rowers and answered pressing questions about male-athlete embodiment and identities. Key findings demonstrated that the tendency of males to self-objectify their bodies, welcome risk, and endure pain created unique relationships with their bodies, the bodies of others, and were principal methods to perform identity. The application of Goffman’s dramaturgy framework was essential to uncovering the cultural significance of body discourses in sport research and explaining why these rowers willingly risked their bodies, suffered through extreme physical exhaustion, and participated in a ‘pain contest’ daily. These males made significant embodied sacrifices to defend, express, and enhance their masculine rowing identities. Many of these characteristics also paralleled with generalized notions of sport ethic and athlete identities (Hughes & Coakleys, 1991). Demonstrating the value of embodied perspectives and the cultural significance of bodies in sport. In addition, key findings showed that experiences of pain strengthened social bonds between the male rowers as well as heightened their attachment to the group. This close attachment to teammates reinforced their desire to impress their peers and feel included in the group, which further rationalized the notion that risky and painful embodied practices were necessary and normal. Ultimately advocating for further academic investigation of social body in sport literature and the continued advancement of pain research through a physical cultural lens.

7.1 Limitations

Though the findings of this study provided valuable and contextual insights into the lives of rowers, there are limitations that must be addressed. Firstly, the study primarily focused on the
perspectives of male athletes to investigate the body and pain. In addition to a small sample population, the perspectives and potential influences of coaches, trainers, parents, team managers, and female athletes were not investigated thoroughly. Thus, the findings were only partially representative of the human experience. The lack of female perspectives was the most significant constraint to this project as it could have provided a broader view of pain as it pertains to athletes in general and could have uncovered significant differences and/or similarities between sexes, and/or various gender identities. However, due to limited time, the scope of this project was restricted to male narratives.

In addition, Goffman’s theoretical framework does not consider deep historic perspectives or macro-level structures that influence various phenomena (Kuzmuics, 1991). Because Goffman’s theories are categorized between phenomenological and structuralist approaches, this study lacks both in-depth investigations of participants’ backgrounds and analyses of larger social structures. For example, this study lacked comprehensive scrutinizing of historic, socio-economic, and/or political systems acting on larger social groups and communities as well as the individual circumstances that may have influenced these athlete’s decision to join rowing and to conform or resist certain norms.

Lastly, verbal/written language is a limitation to the descriptions of embodied experiences. Many nuances and somatic sensations demonstrated through bodies are not translatable through language and can only be understood kinaesthetically. However, methods such as photography or videography could have provided visual representations of circumstances athletes pronounced indescribable.

7.2 Future Directions

The findings of this study have advanced understandings of sport, identity, and pain, through detailed narratives from a single male rowing team. Evidently calling for further
academic investigations of pain from the perspectives of female rowers, other rowing teams, and other athletes involved in different sports. With more research focused on the embodiment of pain and specific cultural norms impacting the everyday behaviour and attitudes of athletes, scholars will be able to create interventions and policies to minimize risk and ensure the safety of all athletes. For example, this study highlighted the strong connection athletes have with their sport-specific identity and the incredible lengths in which they will go to maintain a desirable character. Though these athletes were against pushing through injury to win, the underlying motivations to sacrifice health for the sake of identity and winning are dangerous and need further intervention. For example, the exclusive and severe attachment these athletes revealed to have with their rowing identities could help to inform retirement research. Previous research has identified that athletes experience depression and identity crises after leaving a sport. This study helps to highlight the pivotal influence sport culture and related identities have on athletes as their entire lives appear to be governed by group norms, expectations, and goals. From this perspective, it is no surprise that athletes have a difficult time adjusting to life without a given “character” or “role” to live by, once they leave sport. Further highlighting how powerful and important identity conformation and having a sense of purpose are for the human condition.

Also, the expansion of this project to include different gender identities, and a larger macro-level analysis of the culture would further enhance the findings of this study. An analysis of the bodies missing and excluded from rowing spaces would enhance understandings of racism, sexism, and classism in a culture that were clearly established and maintained by the deep historical traditions of this culture, but were not the focus of this study and need further exploration. For example, the athletes, coaches, and trainers within the generalized rowing culture were predominately white, upper class males.
Furthermore, this study has illustrated how difficult it is to communicate embodied experiences through language. Thus, future studies should strive to utilize methodologies such as photo-voices, video-ethnographies, and other creative methods to provide visual representations of the happenings of this culture. These methods would be helpful in terms of advancing embodied narratives of sport by connecting the social, psychological and physical elements of an athlete's everyday life in a more accessible visual representation of reality. Videos and pictures would help to illustrate a more effective representation, as well as improve our understanding of human life. Since sport is a microcosm of society, these advancements in sport research will further enhance perpetual projects aiming to understand the human condition.
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Appendix A

Ethics Approval

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 31912

September 8, 2015

Dr. Michael Atkinson
FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Ms. Stephanie Hutt-Taylor
FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Dear Dr. Atkinson and Ms. Stephanie Hutt-Taylor,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, “Exploring male body experiences in competitive rowing”

ETHICS APPROVAL

| Original Approval Date: September 8, 2015 |
| Expiry Date: September 7, 2016 |
| Continuing Review Level: 1 |

We are writing to advise you that the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB's delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,


Elizabeth Peter, Ph.D.
REB Chair

Daniel Gyewu
REB Manager
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

You have been invited to participate in a research study about your experiences as a competitive rower and/or experiences supervising competitive rowers. Please read the information below, and feel free to ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding to consent.

Research Project Title: Exploring Male Body Perceptions and Practices in Competitive Rowing

Investigator: Stephanie Hutt-Taylor, MSc. Student

Research Objectives: This study will investigate what it means to be a competitive male rower and communicate the lived experiences of athletes to contribute to research on health, wellbeing, and the body. This study will focus on the complex sociological elements of a male rowing team to investigate male body perceptions and practices to gain a better understanding of the ways males embody health and masculinities. The interview process will specifically question what rowing means to individuals and how it is experienced in everyday life.

Procedures/Description of the Research Methods: Semi-structured and structured interviews will be used in addition to participant observations to access the inter-subjective realities of each participant that would not be adequately revealed through observations alone. The main goal of the interview process is to explore participants’ unique experiences, thoughts and practices as members of rowing culture. A tape recorder will be used during the duration of the interview and transcribed within 24 hours of the discussion. To ensure validity, participants will also be invited to evaluate and critique these interpretations and confirm whether or not they agree with the overall conclusions of the study.

Participation: The duration of each interview/discussion session will be between 45 to 90 minutes. I am interested in both your knowledge and opinions of rowing culture and the common practices you engage in. I am also interested in how rowing has connected with your health, body, and overall wellbeing. Your own experiences will be of very valuable to this study as well as your broad understanding of the physical culture. You may be contacted at a later date to arrange further discussion/interview, however this is completely voluntary and not compulsory.

Potential Harms, Injuries, Discomforts or Inconveniences: The research protocol of this study has been constructed to manage all potential physical, psychological, social and legal risks. If you feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or upset at any time during the interview process, it is your right to decline answering any question. There will be no penalty for exercising this right. Your involvement is completely voluntary, therefore you are can stop the interview at any time and any data related to your answers will be erased immediately upon request.

Privacy and Confidentiality: All data will be treated as confidential. Prior to data collection, pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants and settings involved in the study. The researcher will be the only one aware of these pseudonyms and all additional identifiable data will be altered immediately to ensure confidentiality. During the interview process, a minimum amount of identifiable data will be collected and this data will be de-identified as soon as possible. Thus, incidents, quotes or other data recorded and used in the final written document will not include
any identifiable information. Upon termination of the study, secure destruction of all confidential information will occur.

The study will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Michael Atkinson, a Professor in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education. If you have any question or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to contact Stephanie Hutt-Taylor at stephanie.hutt.taylor@mail.utoronto.ca. More specifically, if, at any time, you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics & Review Board at the University of Toronto at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273.

Please provide your consent to participate in the study and return the form to the researcher either in person or via email. Also, please keep a separate copy for your records, in case you wish to review this form at a later date.

By signing this form, I agree that:

- The purpose and objectives of this study have been clearly explained to me.
- Any questions that I asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
- The possible harms and discomforts have been explained to me.
- I understand my right to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.
- I am free now, and in the future, to ask any questions about the study by contacting the investigator, or the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board.
- I have been assured that records will be kept confidential and that no identifying information will be released or printed in the future without my permission.
- All data (e.g. audio, electronic and paper copies) will be kept until full analyses have been performed and research has been completed.

I have read and understand the information above and have had the opportunity to ask any questions. I voluntarily consent to participation in this study.

...............................................……….
Participant’s Name (please print)

...............................................……….
Participant’s Signature

...............................................……….
Date
Appendix C

Recruitment Letter

Attention Members,

You are invited to participate in a research project exploring the experiences of competitive rower and/or experience supervising competitive rowers. The research project is seeking competitive male rowers and coaches who are currently active members of this club. Please read the following information below and decide if this project interests you:

Title of Research Project: Exploring Male Body Perceptions and Practices In Competitive Rowing

Confidentiality: All data will be treated as confidential. During the interview process, a minimum amount of identifiable data will be collected and this data will be de-identified as soon as possible. Thus, incidents, quotes or other data recorded and used in the final written document will not include any identifiable information. Upon termination of the study, secure destruction of all confidential information will occur.

Your Involvement: The duration of each interview/discussion session will be between 45 to 90 minutes. I am interested in both your knowledge and opinions of rowing culture and the common practices you engage in. I am also interested in how rowing has connected with your health, body, and overall wellbeing. Your own experiences will be of very valuable to this study as well as your broad understanding of the physical culture. You may be contacted at a later date to arrange further discussion/interview, however this is completely voluntary and not compulsory.

If you are interested or wish to inquire more information about the project please contact the lead researcher Stephanie Hutt-Taylor, MSc Student at the University of Toronto at stephanie.hutt.taylor@mail.utoronto
Appendix D

Interview Guideline

Background

1. What initially got you into rowing?
2. When and how did you start rowing?
3. How long have you been a member of this team?
4. What were your sport experiences before rowing?

Rowing Culture/Lifestyle

5. How would you describe rowing to those others?
   a. What makes rowing unique compared to other sports?
6. What are the biggest changes you have had to make in your life since you joined the team?
7. (To Varsity): What are your biggest pet-peevves when it comes to the behaviours of your teammates?
   a. What types of behaviour are taboo on this team?
8. What would you say makes a good or ‘true’ rower?
   a. i.e. what characteristics do rowers need to possess/what behaviours are you expected to perform)?
9. What are your greatest challenges as a rower?
10. What do you enjoy most about the sport
    a. what types of things keep you involved?
11. Rowers appear to be a very close knit group, do you agree
    a. What aspects of rowing make that happen do you think?

Pain

12. Over the course of my research, I’ve noticed most rowers refer to the sport of rowing as “the pain contest”, could you describe what this means to you?
   a. What is the pain contest? What is your relationship with pain?
13. What types of strategies do you use to deal with pain?
14. What types of pain do you experience on a daily basis?
15. How would you describe the pain of rowing to others?
16. How do you differentiate between ‘the pain’ described in the pain context and injury?

Rowing Identity

17. What does it take to be a rower?
18. Aesthetically, what types of bodies make good/desirable male rowers?
19. Would you describe yourself to others as a ‘rower”? Can you remember what you have to do to feel you had achieved this title?
20. (To Varsity): When do novices become accepted as ‘varsity’ or ‘rowers”? What do they have to do to gain your respect? What do any members have to do?
### Appendix E

### Table 1.

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<th>Name</th>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
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<td>Varsity: lightweight</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Varsity: lightweight</td>
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<td>Logan</td>
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Appendix F

Field Notes Sample

**Saturday September 4:**
Rower 1 (C)
Cloudy partially sunny Day: 6:45am - Main Rowing Club, row boats stacked in two aircraft-hanger looking buildings that rowers referred to as the "boat houses" --> all males were in left boat house, facing water and all females were in right, however rowers hung-out in front of the "female" boathouse as there were picnic tables and an area to put backpacks. Majority of rowers biked and left their bikes beside the "female" boathouse as well. All varsity athletes wore tight athletic clothing that highlighted the name of their team somewhere. Nobody talked to me except one rower who the coach had previously introduced me to before gaining access to the team (identified as the best/most experienced rower on the team). Athletes put their bags down and immediately went to the boat house to take out oars and got into groups to carry our boats in singles, groups of 4 and groups of 8. Coaches were starting motor boats beside the dock. Athletes put oars on the centre of the talk. Systematically made calls to drop boat in the water. Very militaristic. Disciplined. In sync. One person gave all commands. E.g. "Roll in two. One, Two" and the athletes would roll boat place in the water from over their heads. Carried boats on their shoulders. Once boat was in the water the person giving commands held the boat they attached their oars. Got in the boat. took off their shoes and left them on the dock. Pushed off with their hands. Coxie sat facing forwards and the rest were backwards to the direction the boat was moving. Coxie had speaker and head piece to talk to rowers. It was dark. Not much light from the sun, all boats had lights. Athletes knew where to go. they just went off.

C: "How you doing? I'll introduce you to everyone after practice. It is very important they get their boats ready and out on the water right away so we can maximize practice time."
M: "okay, no worries, thanks."
C: "was it hard to wake up, this is a late practice bc regular season hasn't technically started and right now this is very nice, beautiful day and much like the cottage, but a lot of rowing-especially fall season, is pretty miserable"
M: "Ya, it wasn't bad I managed, just want to get to know the sport and maybe be as good as you"
C: "Pain is a large aspect, how its experienced, how its dealt with and negotiated is a big part of being a good rower."
M: "(laugh) Yes, I'm looking forward to experiencing that"
C: "You will probably feel like right after that you never want to do it again, but later it is like wow I feel awesome, that was a great workout. So, keep that in mind when you talk to people after-the fact, because its totally done after you walk-away from a hard workout vs. when you are really feeling it during a piece"

"Its really great though, its a great sport, it really is. You're up before the city, you make really close friends, you will find rather quickly how tight knit the community is. The rowing community is very small!"
C: "Yea, there will be a lot for sure, this will be really good for the community, we definitely want you to be successful, so anything you need from me or even any of the rowers, we will be here to help. Also, enjoy yourself of course."
M: " well I'm actually planning to stick around next year if I can, so if I make the team I plan to stick around for a while"
C: "That's good, that's good, I'm sure you will be just fine. Its all about fitness and being tough. So, as long at this point if you are physically fit and can get through the tests, you should come out on top, even if you aren't on the very top, it will be top 16 and then top 10 so you should have an opportunity. It's just a ranking system, among other things, your scores should reflect your fitness and also how quick you learn the proper technique is important"
C: "Yea, its good though. This is real good. I'm excited, fully support the plan. I guess off the top of my head, know that 2ks are equivalent to death, layer to stay warm, and find motivation to get through the bad days"

Table 2. Data Analysis Sample

<table>
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<th>Phase</th>
<th>Coding Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<td>Descriptive/Topic</td>
<td>Establish themes and overall culture of group</td>
<td>Major Topic: Pain Contest</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Subtopics: Pain, Training, 2k Test, Racing, Fainting</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Domain/Taxonomic</td>
<td>Reoccurring themes organized hierarchy</td>
<td>Top 3: Pain, Efficiency, Identity/Bonding chosen</td>
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<td>Review/Compare</td>
<td>Ensure validity</td>
<td>Confirming interpretation of pain contest with participants</td>
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