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**‘Body Work – regulation of a swimmer body’: an
autoethnography from an Australian elite swimmer**

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‘BODY WORK – REGULATION OF A SWIMMER BODY’: AN AUTOETHOGRAPHY FROM AN AUSTRALIAN ELITE SWIMMER

Abstract

By focusing on my bodily experiences as an Australian elite swimmer using an autoethnographic framework, this paper contributes to work on sociology and the body. It specifically focuses on the relationship between the regulatory practices of others on my body and my development of self-regulatory practices. I named these regulatory practices as ‘ethnophysiological’ as they were triggered in the specific social context of Australian swimming and were legitimated through “values packaged in a scientific wrapping” (Vertinsky, 1985, p. 73). Autoethnography, an “autobiographical genre of writing” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739) has been utilized as it enables the reader to vicariously share my athletic experiences in particular my bodily experiences, bestowing a voice of authority to my body to reveal personal experiences, voices and feelings. Within this paper, I will re-tell my stories of being an elite swimmer. I will detail stories of enaction, coach and peer regulation and self-regulation occurring within the elite culture persisting my career over a nine-year period. I use Sparkes’s (2004, p. 159) question in regard to embodiment to reflexively shape my analysis; “*what do my memories reveal about the socialisation of my body*” and draw on literature relevant to sociology and the body.

Keywords: Regulation; Body; Autoethnography; Swimming, Ethnophysiology

Introduction

“*If you put on weight, you won’t swim well.*” For the purpose of this paper, I have drawn on my own stories of experience to reveal evidence of regulatory practices occurring from four different domains within the Australian elite swimming culture – the coach, the mother, the peers and the *self*. Pillow (1997) argues, “our bodies bear the marks of our culture, practices and policies” (p. 360). My body was a “social space” (Howe, 2004, p. 55) where regulatory practices within the varying social contexts of the swimming culture were embodied affecting my swimmer *self*. The regulators and I enacted and engaged in performance enhancement and weight management adopting ethnophysiological ideas and practices with the desire to emulate and approximate the look of the ideal swimmer body. Consequently, I learnt ways of evaluating my body through discourse norms, seduced by the

rhetoric of performance, which in turn affected the decisions that I made in regard to my *self*-regulatory practices.

In the first part of this paper, I will outline why “autoethnography” was my chosen methodology and how I ensured that the re-telling of my stories were told as they actually occurred. I will then present my stories and in doing so, have adapted Sparkes’ (2004) personal and academic voice framework for analysis by titling sections ‘writing with self’ and ‘writing with academic voice (s)’ to demonstrate my stepping in and out of the experience and reflecting on what can be learnt. As there is no research from the perspective of lived experiences within the Australian swimming culture and the deeper connections between the personal and cultural, I will draw on literature relevant to sociology and the body. In the sharing of my stories, I will pay particular attention to the sequencing of my stories, ordering them as they actually occurred, starting with my initial exposure to regulation of my body.

Autoethnography – The chosen methodology

As an elite swimmer looking to research my own experiences, I wanted to be able to connect my personal experiences with the social and sporting sub-cultures through sociological self-exploration. I have employed my own stories, voice, body’s voice and experiences as the data. With this in mind, I found autoethnography to be the optimal research methodology to allow me to recollect and excavate my experiences as a five-time Australian Swimming representative and a Commonwealth Games gold and silver medallist. In doing so, I drew upon Fetters (1978), who wrote:

If man [sic] is to live as a creative ‘enterprise’ [s]he must begin to communicate with himself, to enter into open dialogue with himself. He must trust his own experience and what his experience is revealing to him. He must face the realisation that social reality is a human construction and that the myths, the pervasive stories, images and symbols of his culture have structured much of his experience. He must have the courage to confront the deep sense of abandonment that comes with momentarily suspending and questioning those cultural myths, so that he might be responsively open to alternate ways of being in the world (Fetters, 1978; also cited in Bain, 1995, p. 249).

If I translate this gendered language into a form that includes myself as she/herself, then Fetter’s argument is salient to my research. The titles, ‘writing with self’ explains the

importance of *my-self*, *my-voice/s* and the *voice* of others in the writing of this paper. My stories are written in first person and include dialogue, emotion and sub-conscious thoughts.

Validating my stories

My *self* as the author/storyteller is a crucial and valid authority. Autoethnography is not simply subjective autobiography or mere stories of my experiences. It includes autobiographical accounts where my voice is the authoritative voice of self. It also includes rigorous critical reflection and review through an ethnographic lens, and, importantly, an analysis of cultural practices.

In re-writing the events as they actually happened, I made use of an “emotional recall” strategy proposed by Ellis and Bochner (1999, p. 752). I visualised my presence back in the scene physically and emotionally. I became that 16-year-old world-class swimmer again. Ellis and Bochner (1999) state, “if you can revisit the scene emotionally, then you remember other details” (p. 752). There was a significant period between the events and my *re-telling* of them. I was able to reproduce my stories with the benefit of distance and greater experience of life.

Autoethnographers aim to produce stories that have verisimilitude and are evocative and enlightening (Ellis, 1999). I endeavoured to ensure that my stories were powerful by using Ellis’s (1995) notion of ‘evocation’ for validity and authenticity. This paper is only one of a number of possible representations of experience. I tested the validity of my stories through partial writes of experience, conferring with swimmers, coaches and physiologists of the same era of Australian elite swimming. They confirmed a verisimilitude and resonance of my stories with their own reports of the experience. This is the “reliability check” referred to by Ellis and Bochner (1999, p. 751) which also provided me with new insights.

Writing with self – Peer Regulation

A story from January 1990

My muscles are weary as I walk from the pool to the food hall for dinner. Have swum 14 kilometres today. It's my first Australian Swimming team so I am still getting used to training with such intensity. As I open the door to the food hall, the smell of apple crumble and custard surrounds me. My stomach starts to grumble in anticipation.

I am so hungry!

I fill my plate with lasagne and salad. My eyes scan around the room in search of some familiar faces.

Have to sit with my friends.

Thank goodness I find some. As I sit down, I notice some of the swimmers at my table are just about finished their dinner.

*Wish I was a sprint swimmer; they're always out of the pool early!
I begin eating and a few get up and head back to their rooms. One female swimmer and one male swimmer stay with me while I finish. They are senior swimmers who have spent extensive time training and living at the Australian Institute of Sport and have been selected in many representative teams. I remember watching them compete on television in awe when I was much younger. Now, I am sitting here with them as a teammate.*

I eat everything on my plate.

I am still hungry! I might get a jam sandwich to take back to my room.

"Jenny, a sandwich is 300 calories, do you think you really need them?"

I have no idea what he is talking about so I just smile. My curiosity gets the better of me.

"What are calories?"

"Are you kidding? Calories are the energy value of the food that you eat. Your body only burns a certain amount of calories each day. If you eat more than you burn, then you will put on weight. If you put on weight you won't swim fast."

Heck, I ate a doughnut and drank a milkshake while I was at the shops today.

I wonder how many calories I have eaten?

Eating guilt is introduced to my consciousness for the first time. Suddenly, I am not so hungry. I head back to my room without the jam sandwich.

Writing with academic voice/s

At 15, I was an Australian Swimming representative. I was introduced to the concept of ‘calories’ and ‘watching what you eat’ by a senior male swimmer for the first time. This swimmer was a proven competitive performer. I took my body for granted and saw what I ate as inconsequential to the way I swam. The interaction with the male swimmer exemplified a social practice, reproduced by one athlete to another, to self-regulate food intake and ‘slim to win’. Howe’s (2004) research shows, “that social networks inside sporting cultures, for which he coins the term ‘sportsnets’ are the main influence in messages that are received by the participant in relation to the culture” (p. 116). In my experiences, the ‘sportsnets’ of elite swimming culture was how a self-regulatory practice in the form of self-monitoring was learnt and became normalised. The story demonstrates suppression of my appetite in the form of regulation from the fellow swimmer. Featherstone (1991) comments on suppression of appetite stating, “a person’s appetat [appetite] setting is determined not only by the underlying hunger drive, but also by often rather complex psychological processes in which social pressure can play a considerable part” (p. 128). In Foucauldian language, the power of self-regulation in regard to my food intake became apparent in the *formation of knowledge* and the *power of normalisation* (Foucault, 1980).

I adopted new self-monitoring/self-regulatory practices in regard to my body when I began to count all the food that I had consumed that day. Stevenson’s (2002) study on the creation of athletic bodies illuminates the crucial role of significant others in the socialization process. An athlete is concerned to develop a “role identity [sic] that s/he perceives to be desirable and valued” (p. 239). I desired approval and acceptance from this male swimmer and took up an approved swimmer identity. Hall’s (1996) position is that “identity is created by discursive practices and honed by the relationship between the individual and the discourse” (p. 12). This particular interaction was powerful, because as an adolescent girl, and a neophyte elite swimmer, I desired acceptance within the elite culture through my performance. As Giddens (1991) argues, “the body actively participates in the construction of self” (p. 102). So, my body and its subjectification to self-regulatory practices contributed to the construction of my swimmer *self*. Hence, being slim was part of swimming culture and so

it was that I learned about the *shape* of the swimmer body and the strong connection between slimness, performance and social acceptance within the elite culture. Bordo (1993, p. 91) has pointed out that, “through the regulation of time, space and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed” with the stamp of culture.

Writing with Self – The Coach/The Physiologist

A story from July 1991

We arrive at the pool. As we climb out of the bus, flags from countries all over the world are scattered along the entrance way. We bypass the entrance and walk towards a tunnel. It has been purposely built for the meet. My team-mates’ voices are echoing as I walk through the tunnel. As I approach the end, the familiar smell of chlorine and sounds of splashes from kicking and diving surround me. The scene is uncannily similar to that of World Championships. Although this time, I am not in my home country but am in Rome for a World Cup meet.

We complete our stretching and dry land rituals as a team, and then disperse to our own coaches to complete our warm-up in the pool. My coach has been selected as part of the team as well so I will be warming up with him. As I strip off my tracksuit, I notice him gazing at my body. His look is intent as his facial expression is serious. I walk towards him, ready to carry out his warm-up instructions.

“Jenny, you look like you have put on weight. Your bum is big. How do you expect to swim well here and at the Olympic trials next year with a bum like that?”

I know there is a great food here but I have been really careful with what I have been eating. I don’t feel like I have put on weight.

“I know you don’t feel like you have put on weight but I can see it.”

I feel really uncomfortable talking to him about my weight and body. A sense of shame overwhelms me, as I feel exposed in my scanty swimwear.

A story from July 1999

It is 5.35am. I walk into the pool and my coach is already there. He calls me over.

“Jenny, we have the physiologist from Queensland Academy of Sport coming in this morning to take your weight and skin fold measurements. He will be coming in once a

fortnight until Olympic trials measuring those who will be trialling. It is important that we monitor your weight and your body so you are in right shape for trials.”

My spirits immediately plummet. My mind becomes frantic.

I am going to be the heaviest girl.

What if I weigh more than the guys?

Everyone is going to hear my fat numbers.

I can't believe I am 25 years of age and still worrying about this shit.

The physiologist from Queensland Academy of Sport arrives wearing a maroon uniform and greets my coach like a long lost football buddy. He then readies his equipment. He opens a black rectangular box and pulls out a pair of steel callipers with a gauge attached. My heart beats uncontrollably as I prepare myself to be exposed. I distract myself by beginning my stretching routine, a pre-session ritual. I arch my back like a cat stretching after a long morning nap. I don't want to be the first one tested so I take my time with stretching. I notice the other swimmers that are being weighed, pinched and prodded all have gleaming smiles on their faces.

Their fat numbers must be good.

I am going to be the only one with bad fat numbers.

I am such a loser.

I should have been doing more running and skipping dinner.

“3” the physiologist calls.

“Wow, you are less than us on our biceps,” says one of the boys.

I then see the physiologist adding up her scores.

“61 overall, great work.”

None of my measurements are ever under a reading of ten. I can't believe she just got 61 overall. I am going to get into so much trouble from my coach if I am more than 70.

“Jenny, you are up.”

It is my turn. I slip my tracksuit pants off and lift my shirt up over my head and drop it on top of my bag. I feel naked in my togs and try and cover my body with my arms inconspicuously. I walk over to the scales and step on. My weight is recorded. I sneakily glance out of the corner of my eye to see if anyone is listening. I step off the scales and the physiologist picks up the steel callipers in readiness. He creates a black mark on my bicep. He then grabs the skin on bicep in a pinch like action and he places the jaws of the steel callipers onto my pinch of skin.

The needle in the gauge moves I try to not move, as I am worried any slight movement will move the needle in the gauge in the wrong direction.

“14” calls the physiologist.

I am such a failure.

Writing with academic voice/s

It is important that we monitor your weight and your body so you are in the right shape for trials.” The ‘*right shape*’, an ideology that has been socially constructed by swimming coaches, where a lean swimmer body is a fast swimmer body. This ideology according to Pyne (2007) is based on no supporting research. He states:

there are a few studies in different sports that associate better performance with lower skin folds. Actually there’s not much data around on swimming, which is surprising given the emphasis on weight and shape by almost every coach (personal communication, January 19, 2007).

It was the ideology that a lean swimmer body is a fast swimmer body that I had to contend with and in brought into. As a swimmer, I was seen by others and perceived myself as undedicated if my body did not ‘*classify*’ within the constructed parameters, a skin fold reading of under 70 on seven sites and a fatless bum.

My coach’s ‘*regulating*’ and ‘*surveilling*’ of my body through the organisation of weigh ins and skinfold tests, his gaze over the shape of my body is representative of Foucault’s earlier work where power is not largely located in structures, rather as specific sites where particular practices of power become concentrated and are brought to bear on individuals in organized ways. My swimming coach created a disciplinary site, through his organisation, his pedagogical practice and the creation of our training environment, which in turn was one disciplinary site within the elite swimming culture where I learned about the ideology of ‘slim to win’. In another instance, Kowalski (2006) revealed his experience of a ‘disciplinary site’ recalling the technocentric coaching practices of an Australian Institute of Sport swimming coach who used to weigh him daily. Bain (1990, p. 29) describes technocracy “where people are viewed as human resources” in order to increase productivity and efficiency. These practices, I have named ‘ethnophysiological’ as they became ‘*normalised*’ physiological practices within the Australian elite swimming culture legitimated by “values packaged in a scientific wrapping” (Vertinsky, 1985, p. 73). My coach and the physiologist saw my swimmer body as a valuable commodity, “viewed it as an instrument and object for manipulation” (Bain, 1990, p. 29). The ethnophysiological practices that I was subjected to in

my training environment beared Foucault's ideals of power through 'normalising', 'regulating' 'classifying' and 'surveillance'. Furthermore, Foucault (1980) states: "power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered but exercised – it exists only in action" (p. 89).

Writing with self -The Swimming Mum

A story from October 1991

The scales read 72.6 kilograms. I hop off the scales and gaze into my Mother's face. Her face is expressionless but I can see her gritting her teeth. I shift my gaze to my dietician who is sitting opposite me. She is smiling. It is not her usual smile. It is as though she is straining. The room is silent for a moment. My dietician breaks the silence.

"Jenny, don't be disheartened. I know you are desperately trying to lose weight. There are reasons why this may not be happening. Do you have your periods?"

No

I sit motionless as she goes through my food diary.

"You have done really well with your eating this week."

No circles! She usually circles any food that I have eaten that is not allowed. I see her move her focus to my eating plan. This is a plan that she has devised that informs me what I can eat and when. My body stiffens. I am already struggling with the little food that I am allowed. I hold my breath as she lifts her pen and moves it towards the plan. She moves it towards the dinner section on the bottom of the page.

"Let's cut out all carbohydrates in the evening for the next week and we will see how that goes. I will see you at the same time next week."

My body slumps into the chair.

I climb into the car and fasten my seatbelt. I am sitting in the front passenger seat and my Mother is driving. The car is silent. A silence that makes my entire body stiffen with anxiety. She yells.

"You have been sneaking!"

Mum, I haven't. I really stuck to what she said.

"What are you eating when I am not around?"

My eyes fill with tears. My body is tense.

I hate that I can't do this.

Thoughts run through my head. I wonder why I am having so much trouble losing weight. I feel powerless.

Mum drops me back at school. I feel relieved. No more talking about my weight.

I arrive home from training that evening and my mother announces that we are going to Pizza Hut for dinner. We arrive at the restaurant and as we sit down, the waitress moves towards our table. She has a notebook and pencil.

“What would you like to order tonight?”

My mother orders for my brother, my father and myself. I sit there motionless as my order is decided for me.

“3 all you can eat pizza and salad bars and one all you can eat salad, please.”

I did not have to guess which one I was having! As my mother, father and brother enjoy tasty hot pizza, I walk over to the salad bar. My eyes scan over the choices. There is not much to choose from. I fill my plate with lettuce, tomato, pineapple, cheese and carrot.

I wish there was some meat to go with the salad.

I am so hungry as I have swum 12 kilometres today. As I walked back to the table from the salad bar, my mother’s gaze fixates to my plate. Her face starts to twist.

“You are a cheat, you cannot have that cheese.”

Her voice is too loud and I am worried that someone might hear. She grabs her fork and scrapes the cheese from my plate onto hers. I do not reply. A knot appears in my stomach as I eat my salad. My mother’s eyes are watching over my every mouthful. Each mouthful that I eat, the guiltier I become. The salad is tasteless. I find it hard to swallow, it is like something is stuck in my throat. I feel sick, a sickness that I have become all too familiar with at meal times, so I stop eating after only a few mouthfuls.

Writing with academic voice/s

My mother and her regulation over my body only began once I had become a participant in the elite swimming culture. Her concern in regard to my swimmer body correlates with Donnelly and Young’s (1988) research where “through a variety of means, the most significant of which is modelling, new members of cultures begin to deliberately adopt mannerisms and attitudes, speech and behaviour that they perceive to be characteristic of established members of the culture” (p. 224). Thus, my mother adopted behaviour and attitudes in regard to a swimmer body like the coaches, peers, administrators and

physiologists who were already established participants of the elite swimming culture. She imposed the newly learned ideas and attitudes in regard to my swimmer body through acts of regulation and power. In one respect, we were both in it together, but, as my stories reveal, her regulatory practices created great tension between us especially at mealtimes and weigh ins. She believed that my competitive performance would suffer if my body did not conform and in trying to do what she thought would benefit my competitive performance, she became a manager of my body,” externally regulating” it (Bordo, 1993, p. 91). In doing this, she denied me self-determination over my body and the choices that I could make. This was extremely stressful, so much so that I limited my eating around her at mealtimes. Similar to the Australian swimming managers and coaches’ gaze, my mother’s surveillance was an example of ‘disciplinary power’ as she would cast her gaze over my plate at mealtimes. Without her realising, the regulatory practices of my mother left me feeling powerless, without self-determination, labelled and alienated from my body. I believed that I was losing control over elements in my life, particularly in regard to what I could eat and losing weight. These concerns in turn impacted on my sense of identity and my social behaviour.

Writing with Academic Voice/s - Self-Regulatory Practice

My body concerns impacted significantly on my identity, social behaviour and involvement in the sport and I internalised a “form of self-surveillance” (Garrett, 2004, p. 147). This led me to self-regulate my body in an act of regaining power and control over it. In Foucauldian terms, I became the subject of my own body surveillance. The development of my monological focus in regard to my body and it’s shape was not surprising given the many regulators (coaches, other swimmers, mother, physiologists) who carried out regulatory practices and marginalised swimmers’ bodies that failed to conform. When reflecting on this time, my behaviour and the practices that I undertook, the words of Cixous (1994) are representative of *myself* during this time.

She had the two courages: that of going to the sources, to the foreign parts of the self. That of torturing, to herself, almost without self, without denying the going. She slipped out of the self, she had the severity, that violent patience, she went out by laying bare the senses, it requires unclothing sight all the way down to the naked sight (Cixous, 1994, p. 91).

Writing with self - SELF-REGULATION

A story from September, 1999

Olympics are only 12 months away. 15 months have passed since I have been back in the water and I still want to swim faster. My grip on Sydney Olympics is loosening. Even though I am looking fitter than I have done in years, I am still being constantly reminded by my coach and others that I can lose a few more kilograms. Those few kilograms are my nemesis. It is still the one thing stopping me from achieving my lifetime goal of Olympics representation. No matter how hard I work, they are still there, torturing me in such an unkind way, constantly in my thoughts and making regular visits at meal times. I visualise being on the medal dais. I am receiving my Commonwealth Games silver medal. The Australian flag is being raised.

I want that feeling again.

Need to fix my body!

Swimming fast now but if I lose weight, I will swim faster!

Am desperate!

Willing to do anything to lose weight. Eating healthy has not worked. Dietician did not work. Thyroxine from the sports' medicine doctor to make my thyroid overactive did not work. I feel low. I am such a failure. My body keeps letting me down this way.

Need to find another answer.

Need to fix my body!

A friend of mine told me that she uses this drug called duromine to lose weight but you need a doctor's prescription to get it. She said that she lost seven kilograms in two months. Have booked in to the 24-hour medical centre this evening after I finish training to get it.

I arrive at the doctor's surgery. An uncomfortable familiarity overcomes me. I sit in the waiting room and my body is rigid. I can't help but notice the other four people who are waiting are either coughing or blowing their noses. The waiting room is such a contrast to my life where everybody is fit and healthy. The doctor calls my name and I go in and sit on a chair that is beside his table.

"What can I do for you this evening?"

I would like to get a script for duromine please.

"Duromine is an appetite suppressant and is usually only prescribed for obese patients trying to lose weight. It has very harsh side effects. You don't need to lose any weight."

But I do need to lose weight. I am a swimmer training for the Olympics. My coach is constantly on my back to lose weight. If I don't lose weight, I won't make the Olympics. I have been going to a dietician for ages and I am not losing enough weight. I am desperate. Olympics are only 12 months away.

"I am reluctant to do this but I can see that you are desperate. You take one tablet in the morning. I will also prescribe you some sleeping tablets, which you may need as the appetite suppressants can keep you awake. You just take one tablet half an hour prior to going to bed and it will help you go to sleep."

I leave the doctors surgery relieved and happy.

I have found an answer. Everything will be ok now.

A story from October 1999

It is 4.20am. I wake to the alarm ringing. I climb out of bed and wander half asleep to the bathroom. I climb onto the scales. I am another kilogram lighter. Duromine is working so well, I can't believe it. I have been taking it for a month and I have now lost six kilograms.

Have to lose more.

I grab my toothbrush and look into the mirror. I turn away; I cannot look at myself. I am ashamed of what I look like and I am ashamed that I have not yet achieved a swimmer body that will bring me Olympic success.

I drive to the pool. I am not excited like I used to be. I now see training as a necessity, a necessity to burn calories. It is Wednesday morning so we have a heart rate. Heart rate sets are intense and hurt a lot. I finish the warm up and feel as though I have swum nine kilometres. I am exhausted already. I commence the heart rate set with the rest of the squad. I have to do 20 x 100's of freestyle on the two minutes. I touch the wall after the first one. My coach yells;

"1.07."

I grab the heart rate monitor and put it onto my chest.

"186."

It is going to be a long morning. I have only swum 1 x 100 and my heart rate is already at its maximum. I am just not swimming the times that I was four months ago.

At least my weight loss is going well.

I swim seven kilometres. Time for the gym. I have a long shower before hopping into my gym clothes. I feel shaky as I put on my joggers. I walk to the gym after training as it is just up the road from the pool. It is 9am. I hop onto the exercise bike first. I adjust the settings and put on my walkman. My keenness in the cardio studio has grown. It has surpassed my enthusiasm for training in the pool. Love riding and running as it burns more calories than swimming.

Have to burn 1000 calories!

I ride the bike for an hour but only burnt 350 calories.

That is not enough!

I get off the bike and get onto the treadmill. I start running. I adjust the setting so that I am running at 12 kilometres an hour. I burn 650 calories during the next hour. I get to the 12-kilometre mark and I decide it is not enough. I increase my goal; I want to burn 1500 calories. I run for another 45 minutes.

I look down at the monitor. Sweat is dripping off me. I have burnt 1500 calories and have run 20 kilometres.

Lucky this afternoon is a recovery swim session!

Writing with academic voice/s

My attempt to conform my body to the ideal swimmer body became an obsession when I sought help from outsiders of the elite culture (general practitioner and sports medicine doctor) and began taking medication, which in turn affected my functioning in life and training. Dissatisfaction with my body was clearly evidenced in my self-talk and self-regulatory practices. *I cannot look at myself. I am ashamed of what I look like and I am ashamed that I have not yet achieved a swimmer body that will bring me Olympic success.*

Over-use of prescription drugs caused risk to *my-self*. Thus, I engaged with a 'risk culture' (Howe, 2004) and the 'cult of the body' (Tinning, 2004), as I became my body modifier. Howe (2004) describes a risk culture as "an elite sporting culture that may be seen as a dome that entraps health and positive encounters with the body" (p. 183). I engaged with the risk culture at a time when Olympic representation was highly desired and sought after by attempting to conform to the ideal swimmer shape, which I thought, would improve my athletic performance. Consequently, my health became compromised with the engagement of diet drugs, an act of regaining regulation over my *self*. Peterson and Lupton (1996) describe

the ‘cult of the body’ as, “emphasis placed on physical appearance and where the body has become a crucial means by which the individual can express publicly such virtues of self-control, self-discipline and will power” (p. 25). I took control over my body by fighting its natural shape. Self-regulatory practices were an act of conformation, and perhaps also “an ethic and aesthetic of self-mastery and self-transcendence, expertise, and power over others through the example of superior control” (Bordo 1989, p. 23). The descent of my weight on the scales gave me comfort and proof that I could exert control. I discovered admiration from my shrinking swimmer body, not as an aesthetic object but for the strength of my will and self-control in attaining conformity. I was seduced by the rhetoric of high performance and “acquired resources” (Evans et al., 2004, p. 136) such as over-exercising, abuse of diet medication and self-starvation to help me regulate my size. At the time, these acquired resources, signified success and a regain of self-control. *I have found an answer. Everything will be ok now.*

Subsequently, I became trapped in a vicious cycle where conforming to the accepted shape and size became tied to my self-worth. Responsibility for my body was placed on *my-self* by others (Featherstone, 1991) as I was seen as undedicated if my body was not conforming. I adopted extreme self-regulatory practices in the belief that I had control over what sort of body shape I could acquire. Bartky (1988) on female bodily shame states, “a sense of female shame is related to the extent to which they have internalised standards of bodily acceptability” (p. 68). My stories are evidence of how I believed I did not measure up within the elite swimming culture and did not possess a body representative of Olympic success. In turn, my engagement became defined by pathogenic weight control measures. Drug usage was complicit with destructive self-regulatory behaviour. Australian Institute of Sport physiologist, David Pyne has stated performance issues can be related to body issues in Australian swimming culture.

My research has been more on the analysis and performance issues, but all that can go out the window if the swimmer/athlete is distracted with body, image issues, anxiety and/or an overbearing coach. It is unfortunately a scenario that we have dealt with on occasions in the past.

Personal communication, January 23, 2007

Ironically, it was the distraction with obtaining the ideal swimmer body and ‘slim to win’ that led to my athletic demise.

Consumption of diuretics, laxatives, thyroxine and self-subjection to over exercising and severe calorie restriction were indicative of how much I had conceded. For me, the pendulum had swung too far and having a fit and slim swimmer body that was representative of Olympic success became more than just a desirable goal. It became an uncontrollable and potentially dangerous obsession where I sought control and conformation to a monological body form. I analyse this now as a desperate act of assimilation into the elite Australian swimming culture, trying to achieve a 'slim to win' body representative of my dedication and Olympic success.

Conclusion

Regulation of swimmers' bodies have become normalised through ethnophysiological practices and are emblematic of the Australian elite swimming culture. The ethnophysiological practices described in these stories could be considered as 'psychopathological' crystallisation of culture as my body was constrained and trained in docility and obedience (Bordo, 1993). In the context of the regulatory practices, the regulators strived to enhance my body's utility, productivity and performance through regulation, which "increased its manipulability" (Featherstone, 1991, p. 250). My body was made "pliable and amenable" (Featherstone 1991, p. 250) to regulatory norms that operated to increase my swimmer performance. However, my body was not simply a technocentric object in the elite culture that could be manipulated for performance, but "a sentient being whose primary relation to the culture should be understood in terms of this meaningful sentience" (Crossley, 1996, p. 47). In response to the regulation and lack of self-determination in regard to my body, I became a monomaniac and engaged with health risked self-regulatory behaviour in an act of conformation and regaining of bodily control. Howe (2004) states: "such risk is a product distinctive of that particular sporting culture where cultural capital is accrued by those who are willing to risk their health and well-being for a better performance" (p. 125). My behaviour could be seen as my response, "acquired through a social process of becoming" (Monaghan, 1997, p. 284) within the elite swimming culture. Regulatory practices were exerted through power and disciplinary practices (coach, mother and self). Foucault (1980) states: "power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered but exercised – it exists only in action" (p. 89). Thus, regulation of my body was incurred through action and my bodily behaviour, a result of my immersion in the elite swimming culture and my desire for high performance and for social acceptance. More research is needed into the socialisation of the

swimmer body within the Australian swimming culture and the effects that action; structures of power and control occurring through regulation have on it.

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