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Becoming Rower: Male Embodiment and Intimacy in an Inner West Rowing Club

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Abstract

While sociological analyses of masculine sporting cultures have provided us with adept explorations of discursive practices in the field, I suggest that there are deeper modalities of communication in which athlete's intentions are expressed and understood through inter-corporeal and non-cognitive processes. This transdisciplinary thesis supplements sociological analysis with a participant observational approach to explore both verbal and corporeal communication between men within the sport of rowing. I conduct ethnographic fieldwork at Kensington, a rowing club located within Sydney's inner suburbs that was first established in 1879. Following its reincarnation after a fire in the late 1990's, the club developed a new membership demographic that now reflects that of inner Sydney more broadly. Close to half of the club's members are gay-identifying with varying degrees of sexual openness relating to the various and overlapping social and sporting circuits operating within the club. Over four months I was embedded within the elite competitive men's rowing squad across which time I observed that the combination of open and ambiguous sexual orientations resulted in tacit but strict protocols on and off the water. In line with Latour's argument that the social researcher should 'follow' (2005: 69) the interplay between human and non-human actants, I attended to the various machines engaged in the different zones of training both on and off the water. Using a combination of auto-ethnographic reflection and new materialist studies I explore how the material actants engaged in the sport of rowing engender varying inter-corporeal collaborations between men. As a result, I argue that masculine intimacy, discomfort and power must be understood on a corporeal level as well as the discursive level, with which we normally associate gender politics.

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Becoming Rower

My first experience rowing was when I was twelve. It is a moment I can recollect but find difficult to retell. I am walking from my father's car feeling cold, my bare legs numb. It is a winter morning. The sky is grey and thick clouds hang low over the rowing club. Shivering, I walk behind my father to meet the man who will teach me how to row. My father is enrolling me in rowing in an attempt to make me better at rugby. He has told me that rowing, a sport I hadn't heard of before, will strengthen my legs and help me run faster. Despite my father's encouragement, I know I am a disappointment to him as a rugby player. I don't like rugby. My tall skinny frame doesn't provide much protection from the tackles of opposing players. I find that every time I get the ball I get hurt and I don't much like tackling others.

What followed was a miserable and embarrassing hour. I spent fifteen minutes on an indoor rowing machine, a piece of cross-training equipment that mimics the movement of rowing. This involved me moving in ways that were foreign and uncomfortable while looking forward at the machine's digital read-out screen. While I struggled to coordinate my movements the old man gave sharp, angry orders. I was told to keep doing *that* and don't do *this* but I had no idea what I was doing on the machine. I was then taken to the pontoon and told to get into a single scull. The boat was completely unstable. Unbeknownst to me the scull relied on the oars to sit on the water and act as stabilisers. Helplessly trying to understand the instructor, I was pushed off the pontoon and immediately fell into the dark water. It was freezing. I remember pulling myself onto the upturned boat while the old man told me I wasn't following his instruction. After three more attempts, and three more

fallings in, the old rower gave up in frustration. With my father standing behind him, I was told that I was too uncoordinated to row. My inability to sit in a single scull felt like a terrible personal failing. My lack of coordination was an incompetence that could not be reconciled to the hopes of my father. That day the rowing club felt like a hard, unkind place that I had no wish to return to.

Three years later I went back to the same club, to the same pontoon, and began to fall in love with rowing. The coaches that taught me at the age of fifteen were patient and kind. They saw potential in my skinny, lanky frame at a time when I found it difficult to see any positive aspects in my appearance. For a self-conscious fifteen-year-old, the experience of feeling my body take to rowing—pushing with my legs, bracing with my torso and hanging onto the oars with my arms balanced in one synchronised movement executed on water—became a daily reminder of my agency and potential. During that time, an Olympic rower became the new men’s coach and I was swept away with visions of athletic prowess. I saw him as an ideal masculine figure, one that I would try to impress and emulate in every way.

During this period, the photographs of past champions on the wall of the club took on new significance. The athleticism and power of these men were etched into the history of the club. Instead of looking unimportant and dark, as they had to my younger self, these images came to represent the pinnacle of success. Four athletes from the club competed at the Beijing Olympics and, when they returned, a two metre wide landscape portrait of them and their coach was hung in our new gym. These athletes—one of whom became my coach—literally embodied rowing success. Their tall, tanned and strong bodies were the pinnacle of what could be achieved by training hard. The photographs of these athletes

were an ever-present reminder that we novice rowers could become like them and be afforded the same respect and recognition. As a teenager who demonstrated a talent for rowing, I was suddenly surrounded and coached by giants of the sport and I would do anything to earn and hold onto their respect.

On reflection I can now see that my teenage experience of rowing was a mixture of positive and negative elements. I trained alongside rowers with far greater skill and athleticism. My abilities were judged on how long I could keep up with or stay in front of other young men who were trying to catch me. Every day I failed. As part of this group I was told that I should be 'fucked after every erg'. I should be delirious with exhaustion but importantly not cry out in pain. I was immersed in a competitive masculine arena in which I was constantly asked to push myself to my physical limit. If I wanted to become a successful rower, if I wanted to get faster, I had to become 'hard' like our coach.

I was a part of this rowing squad for two years but at the age of eighteen I left. We were approaching racing season and my coach told me that I wouldn't do well in racing. As a result of taking time off to complete my final high school exams, he said I didn't have the necessary base fitness to maintain high anaerobic work. This comment broke me. Looking back on it now, I can see that I spent years trying to impress my coach. I wanted to prove that I had what it takes to go fast and be respected in the sport. My coach's doubt in my abilities made me feel that all of my work, all of the mornings when I pushed myself to the extreme but never complained of physical pain, were for nothing.

Away from the sport, I found that there were aspects of rowing that I deeply missed, particularly the feeling of power and smoothness that is felt when a single scull glides across the water. A few years later, I became an active member of a far less competitive rowing

club. In many ways this dissertation is an attempt to address my ongoing ambivalence about rowing, an athletic practice I love that sits inside a masculinist training culture I often experience as difficult.

Foregrounding Inter-Corporeal Experience in Sport

There is an embodied pleasure in rowing that is difficult to communicate to those who have not experienced it and even to those that have. In Jane Caudwell's ficto-ethnographic analysis of her rowing experiences she acknowledges that she has a 'reluctance to merge an academic scrutiny with a sport I participate in for physical pleasure' (Caudwell 2011: 127). In part, it is the corporeal experience of rowing that I wish to explore in this thesis, the bodily feelings and non-verbal forms of communication that occur among men who row together. I use the form of auto-ethnography in order to merge the personal with the conceptual in a way that stays mindful of corporeal responses. Rowing is a unique sport in that it requires a deft inter-corporeal collaboration that is mediated by the materiality of the rowing boat. Gareth Owen (2006) describes crew rowing as 'disciplining the body to move in perfect synchrony' (126) with others. While I agree with Owen's description, I argue that learning to move with and intuit others is a far more complex process that involves an ongoing corporeal collaboration between individual athletes and the boat. A shuddering boat makes corporeal intentions reverberate in a way that is felt by other crew members who adapt their movements in response.

Caudwell's 'multi-textual' (2011: 118) account of her rowing career touches on the embodied experience of rowing. She acknowledges, however, the difficulty of communicating the value and significance of rowing to a potentially disinterested academic audience with no physical knowledge of the sport:

I stopped just under a bridge. From above, the city's street lights reflected on the water, surrounding my boat. I sat, out of breath but enjoying the exertion. I turned

and started the scull back to the club house – one in a line of six clubs. For the last stretch, I took the rate up and put a squeeze into my leg drive. It was a short trip, but it provided me with familiar embodied pleasures. (Caudwell 2011: 124)

It is the embodied experience of rowing that I wish to explore in this thesis; in particular, the bodily feelings and non-verbal forms of communication that occur among men who row together. Through an analysis of the rower's relationship with the boat, we can begin to understand that there is an element of rowing that might be missed by an exclusively sociological analysis of the sport. For the sake of simplicity, I begin by describing the mechanics of a single scull for those readers who have no experience of the sport.



Pisarenko, Natacha, (2012) *Kim Crow*. Associated Press. Accessed 20.4.15

A single scull is a one-person rowing boat made of carbon fibre and kevlar. These boats are generally eight metres in length but only forty centimetres in width, a narrow allowance that contributes to the ideal body shape of a competitive rower who should be broad in the shoulders but narrow through the hips. To move the boat forward, the

backwards-facing rower places their oars in the water and pulls the handles toward their ribs. The rowing stroke is similar to picking an object off the floor but the action is performed on a horizontal plane while sitting on water in an unstable boat, susceptible to wind and current. The rowing stroke begins with the oar handles as far forward as possible. Seated on a sliding seat the rower bends their legs and pulls their body up the length of the boat while placing their blades in the water. The compressed force of legs, body and arms transferred to the oars levers the boat backwards.

The single scull is an incredibly sensitive boat. If a rower's hips tilt off balance, the boat will tilt. If the rower's oars are not held at the same height during the stroke, the boat will be pulled down to one side. At every moment the boat reacts to the rower's movements and provides immediate feedback. In the single scull, as pictured above, the feedback loop between water/scull/rower is relatively uncomplicated but in a crew boat the feedback loop is less clear since it relies on different rowers synchronising their individual movements with each other.

Rowing, when it is done well, feels like gliding backwards as the water runs underneath you. In crew boats the feeling of speed is amplified because of the combined power of the rowers. At the same time, however, the experience is open to distortion since in crew boats you can feel the movement of others. Adept rowers not only feel whether their own movements are smooth or jerky but through the mediating mechanism of the boat they feel the intricacies of how another person's body unfolds and applies pressure. Team rowers are absorbed in an intimate physical collaboration that involves bodies and boat. Coaches will often instruct us to 'feel the boat'. This involves feeling others' intentions as they are mediated through the mechanism of the boat and the motion of

rowing. As a result, the collaborative movement of rowing engenders non-cognitive forms of embodied understanding that work beneath the level of discourse. These non-cognitive processes become the predominant pathway of communication between rowers.

Including the Sweat

In general, team sport pedagogies promote the development of coordination between individuals. That is, team sports train us to make controlled movements that are intelligible to our teammates and express specific intentions. Such expressive movements often occur on an everyday basis but are given specific attention in sport. One example that comes to mind is a scrum half in rugby who motions with the direction of his body to his teammates that he will pass the ball right. Inter-corporeal athletic collaborations of this kind are processed on a non-cognitive level, yet the analysis of sport does not often reflect this emphasis. Over the past thirty years, analyses of sporting cultures have gravitated towards using either Gramscian or Foucauldian conceptual tools. While highly attentive to the gendered dynamics that are generated in the vicinity of team sports, I suggest that these tools are less sensitive to the bodily experience of athletic activities themselves. It remains unclear whether these canonised uses of Gramscian and Foucauldian concepts have the necessary explanatory power to understand inter-corporeal communication within sporting activity. Throughout this thesis I consider other combined methods to examine inter-corporeal experience in sport.

In her seminal work *Masculinities* (1995) Raewyn Connell argues that 'social theory for the most part still operates in the universe created by Descartes [that makes] bodies the objects of symbolic practice and power, but not the participants' (2005: 59-60). Connell's

theory of hegemonic masculinity was developed in part through the sociological analysis of sporting cultures (1987, 1990, 2005). In her work she appropriates Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which 'refers to a cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life' (Connell 2005: 77). Hegemonic performances of masculinity, Connell argues, operate under the same relational power structure. A masculine performance that 'embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy' (77) therefore wields power within a hierarchical structure of gender performances.

A decade after Connell first theorised hegemonic masculinity, Messner (1992), Sabo and Messner (1990, 1994) and Sabo, McKay and Messner (2000) went on to provide in depth analyses of how sporting institutions not only develop hegemonic masculine performances of gender but play a larger societal role in creating regional 'templates' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 830) for acceptable, gendered behaviour. Messner's (1992) work on the development of men's bodies into violent weapons of aggression within NFL sporting teams argued that institutionalised pedagogies develop traits of power, strength and discipline, which in turn inform a hegemonic masculine performance. It is important to note that Messner's analysis of hegemonic traits provides a static conception of gender that locates power as situated within an unrealistic understanding of gender performance and identity. Writing in the early nineties, Messner characterised football player's bodies as 'machines that ignore or deaden pain' (1992: 151 in Pringle 2005: 264). This Cartesian metaphor likens football men's bodies to automata that feign consciousness and produce programmed responses to the mental state of pain. Such an account demonstrates the level of disidentification and instrumentalisation involved in the ways

Messner understood his research participants. Ideological explanations of this kind require a level of abstraction that violently imposes a pre-determined reading onto research participants. Pringle has similarly critiqued Messner's work and that of other Gramscian influenced masculinity theorists, such as McKay, Messner and Sabo (2000), for exaggerating the 'extent to which sport is a conservative institution that largely reproduces existing inequalities' (Pringle 2005: 264). These critiques suggest that many early feminist analyses of sport relied a priori on gender models and symbolic hierarchies.

Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) later theoretical work mitigates this problem by considering the temporal and situational context of gender performance through which the heterogeneous intentions of embodied practice lead to gendered identities that often contradict a strict understanding of the gender order. Connell and Messerschmidt concede that almost no one embodies hegemonic performances of masculinity. Rather, they argue, masculine performances often incorporate a range of different supporting, complicit and marginalised masculine practices in a fluctuating process of appropriation in which hegemonic and other gendered performances respond to each other (2005: 846). Importantly, Connell and Messerschmidt situate the performance of masculinity as occurring between bodies rather than being situated within a specific hegemonic figure (839).

Owen's (2006) use of hegemonic masculinity theory in his auto-ethnographic case study of a gay men's rowing club shows how he and his research participants internalise and struggle against gendered expectations in the pursuit of sporting success (136). Owen's ethnography is valuable because it demonstrates that hegemonic conceptions of masculinity have material consequences. However, while Owen provides a deft consideration of different intentions in rowing, he does not prioritise the analysis of these

men's shared corporeal experiences. Although he isolates the different visceral intentions and gendered expectations that influence rowers he does so by focusing on the individual. He does not focus on the inter-corporeal negotiations that occur in crew rowing. Owen's use of hegemonic masculinity would seem to lend itself to understanding material consequences of gendered expectations, however, it remains unclear whether it can describe the complex interplay between corporeal and discursive modes of communication engaged by rowing. Furthermore, its ideological framework risks continuing to project ideological explanations onto complex intentions that work at the corporeal level.

Despite the risks involved in using hegemonic masculinity theory, Connell's work remains well suited to explaining the hierarchical realities of sporting contexts. Sport and competition often require assessments of successful athletic performance. Competitive sports by definition hierarchically value and differentiate one athlete's bodily comportment from another. These assessments of bodily comportment are often gendered:

I didn't want to throw a ball in front of my Dad because I knew it wouldn't look right, it wouldn't be like the way a good strong boy should throw it. And once, I remember, I was brave enough to throw it. And he made fun of me and said I threw it like a girl.

(Connell 2005: 62)

Connell's example demonstrates how from a young age boys' movements are judged along gendered lines. In sport men's athletic performances continue to be judged with regard to masculine competency. While acknowledging that there are hierarchical structures within sport that celebrate superior physical abilities, there is often a sub-text of embodied experience that works beneath such gendered assessments of movement. Missing from the above description is an account of embodied experience. While Connell acknowledges that

there is an interplay between different planes of thinking in which the agency of the body leads to new intentions and realities, she concludes that these intentions remain 'beyond the formulae of current social theory' (2005: 62). Although Connell's concept of masculine competency is useful in analysing the realities of current sporting cultures, we must beware of reducing heterogeneous, corporeal intentions to an ideological framework of gender relations. There is interplay between different levels of thinking within the body, through which notions of masculine competency are active but not all powerful. Different levels of emotional, corporeal and cognitive intentions often contradict and work against each other, rendering the intent of our actions heterogeneous. To put it simply, our embodied intentions are not wholly reducible to ideological theories of gender. A consideration of embodied experience must recognise the gendered and hierarchical elements of sporting cultures.

Post-structuralist, Foucauldian-influenced analyses have formed the second surge of academic work on sporting cultures. Such analyses often provide a refreshing account of sporting practices that consider how power is not located within conventional positions of authority but is rather wielded by all in discourse. Markula and Pringle (2006), Chapman (1997) and Manley, Palmer and Roderick (2012) explore how strict surveillance within sporting cultures are internalised within athletes' practices, but also demonstrate the productive power of discourse through which athletes influence the authority of coaches. Foucault's understanding of power as omnipresent has engendered progressive analyses of sporting cultures that demonstrate the influence of those who would otherwise be cast as wholly disenfranchised. Free from an ideological understanding of power, these researchers place emphasis on discursive interactions and the heterogeneous nature of social practise.

However, Foucauldian approaches raise questions as to whether they can explain forms of communication that go unsaid. Pringle interestingly argues that Foucault's discursive understanding of power as omnipresent is focused on the body (2005: 261). Foucault argues that knowledge and, in turn, discourse work on the body to 'invest it, mark it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs' (Foucault, 1977: 25 in Pringle 2005: 261). Foucault's arguments, however, tend to miss the ongoing agency of our bodies especially as it is secured via non-cognitive processes. While highly attuned to the discursive practices that shape and influence bodies, discursive analyses may not account for the immediacy of bodily experience.

Gramscian and Foucauldian concepts, while highly attentive to the gendered dynamics that are generated in the vicinity of team sports, are less sensitive to the bodily experience of athletic activities themselves. That is, they tend to focus on sport culture rather than sporting activity. While these dominant modes of analysis are helpful in analysing discursive practices and the interpersonal politics of sport culture, I argue that other modes of observation and analysis can provide a vital complement to understanding the parallel sub-text of meaning, intention and communication that is made intelligible in the flesh.

We must, as Connell argues, develop conceptual and methodological frameworks to understand the 'irreducible bodily dimension in experience and practice; the sweat must not be excluded' (1995: 51). The first step, I contend, involves using methods that utilise the researcher's embodied self to become attuned to communication in the flesh. Embedded observation as a methodology can participate in and record the non-cognitive forms of communication that develop within localised sub-cultures. As Nightingale (2008) and Sofaer

(2007) argue, communication is a material process, 'it is through our embodied selves that we articulate meaning and thus it is the frame through which people communicate identities' (Sofaer, 2007: 1 in Nightingale, 2008: 105). These experiences allow us to move beyond restrictive conceptual frameworks which, while helpful, are less sensitive to the embodied realities of social practice. There is, as Nightingale argues, a complexity of 'exchange' (105) between researcher and research participants, which often contradicts pre-formed assumptions. These disorganising experiences can become the basis of a more 'systematic re-think' (Johnson, Chambers et al. 2004: 96). This shift in framework is doubly imperative since sporting cultures privilege unspoken elements of communication to begin with. By utilising ethnographic frameworks suited to the analysis of inter-corporeal experience we can develop knowledge that is not only born out of the immediacy of experience but remains sensitive to the situated realities of social practice.

An embodied ethnography concerned with the experience of inter-corporeal practice is further complemented with concepts taken from Merleau-Pontian existential phenomenology. Existential phenomenology is concerned with how we, as embodied subjects, experience phenomena in the world and holds that, as 'flesh-of-the-world' (Merleau-Ponty, 1963: 77 in Allen-Collinson 2009: 283), our perceptions, intentions and consciousness are grounded in the body in space. As Iris Marian Young puts it, Merleau-Ponty 'gives to the lived body the ontological status that Sartre, as well as 'intellectualist' thinkers before him, attribute to consciousness alone' (Young 1980: 35). This ontological understanding of the lived body provides a useful conceptual framework in that it helps us understand that our embodied intentions work through space as a part of our being in the world. This understanding is particularly useful for the analysis of sporting activity, which

privileges unspoken forms of inter-corporeal practice. Jacqueline Allen-Collinson (2009) also notes the usefulness of phenomenology in the analysis of sporting contexts in that it is sensitive to the immediacy of experience between embodied subjects in space (284). Experience, as Weiss argues, is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and non-human bodies' (1999: 5 in Allen-Collinson, 2009: 283) and, I would add, objects, such as boats and oars and rowing machines.

Speaking for others at Kenswick Rowing Club

The development of conceptual and methodological frameworks begins with my participant observation in an Inner Sydney rowing club- called Kenswick. I provide an ethnographic analysis of the corporeal and discursive social practices that occurred within the club. I use my embodied self as a situated participant embedded within the elite competitive men's squad. Over a four month period of moving with these men in the boat and in the gym I develop a framework that is sensitive to the inter-corporeal forms of communication that rowing privileges. Using embodied reflection I go on to develop situated methods of embodied understanding that are more sensitive to the materiality of social practice.

In the development of an ethnographic study at Kenswick rowing club, in which the body (my body) is used to understand unspoken intentions, we must recognise the problematic history of ethnography. Linda Alcoff in her brilliant work titled 'The Problem of Speaking for Others' addresses the 'growing unease' (1991: 97) in which the history of ethnography strikes amongst the academy. Smith (1999) separately details the deep pain that anthropological research has caused in the past. Her work attunes us to a 'colonising' (2)

impulse in ethnographic work in which the 'pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices' (2). An ethnography concerned with forms of embodied understanding is particularly prone to the risk of projecting inferences onto the nature of research participant's unspoken intentions. We must, then, attempt to dredge up complex disciplinary power imbalances at both the discursive and corporeal levels, developing as Smith argues ethical frameworks that consider the ethicacy, motivations and implications of our research in an ongoing process of reflection (1999: 10).

We must recognise that there is a locus of power transferred onto the researcher whose perspective is not omnipresent and will privilege the analysis of certain practices. In recognising the limitations of ethnography, Haraway's (1988) theory of feminist objectivity demonstrates that research which foregrounds its situated position can develop ethically conscious representations. Past ethnographies that do not consider power imbalances between researcher and subject are 'discursively dangerous' (Alcoff 1991: 99) and often perpetuate or increase 'the oppression of the group spoken for' (99). Speaking from a position that does not recognise their partiality, these researchers assume an all-knowing position of transcendence. They ignore how their position distorts the production of knowledge. Haraway (1988) argues that 'only partial perspective promises objective vision' (582). She argues that we must understand that our ways of seeing and being in the world emerge from our limited position. It is a part of 'understanding how these visual systems work' (584) in the development of our arguments that we can provide an accountable representation of others. We render ourselves responsible for the implications and accuracy of our ethnographic work, by foregrounding our privileged position. This is not simply acknowledging static characteristics regarding our sexuality, race, gender and class, but

providing a continued discussion that grapples with the privileged position of myself as a researcher (Haraway 1988: 585). There are a number of methods that can foreground our position. Doucet's (2008) reflective ethnography, which interviews primary caregiving fathers is an example. Doucet explores her personal motivations, dating back to childhood, which she argues are unavoidable (77). I use auto-ethnography in a similar vein to Doucet's work. I foreground my 'self' in the act of telling. This affects the language of my writing. I rely on descriptive and expressive language that is conscious of my embodied feelings as I negotiate Kenswick rowing club.¹

¹ Ellis and Bochner (2000) argue that embodied ethnographers 'ideally use all their senses, their body's movement, feeling and their whole being- they use the 'self' to learn about the other' (741).

Kenswick Case Study

Kenswick Rowing Club has a unique history. Although the majority of rowers in Australia enter the sport at wealthy private schools, Kenswick is one of a handful of Sydney inner harbour rowing clubs historically associated with working class culture of the early and mid-twentieth century. This past association, and the pride these clubs continue to take in it, is well documented in numerous club histories and the ongoing competitiveness among these clubs and their North Sydney rivals. After a financial collapse and fire in the 1990s, the club was reduced to one competing member, who rowed for Kenswick while training at a nearby club. The clubhouse was rebuilt in 2001 when Kenswick 'old-boys' raised the money for a new rowing club. Over the past fifteen years the club has grown from one member to over one hundred. This rapid growth has occurred across a period when other Sydney clubs are at membership capacity or only seeking to recruit competitive rather than social rowers. In contrast Kenswick has actively recruited new members at all ages and levels of capability, including those with no prior experience of rowing through learn-to-row initiatives. Though other clubs often run learn-to-row programs these are primarily regarded as revenue generating exercises, not recruitment mechanisms. Relatively un-inhibited by a pre-established membership, Kenswick has been relatively free to grow in any direction. Its proximity to Sydney's CBD, and the early recruitment of several gay-identified individuals, meant that the club's demographic eventually began to reflect on the current nature of Sydney's inner suburbs. By 2015, the year of my fieldwork, its membership is no longer working class but heavily tilted towards professionals, including itinerant internationals who may only be in the city for a few years, and gay men. While the club is predominantly white, it has made repeated efforts to recruit indigenous members through the Local Youth

Services but has had no success. It has recently launched a free programme with Sydney High School that it hopes will extend its demographic into new race, class and ethnic constituencies.

Across time several gay-identified members have gained in influence and continue to recruit new rowers through different social circles, including running an information stall at the Mardi Gras Fair in 2010. There has been no resistance to these initiatives within the club. Rather, the 'old boys' seem to take pride in this shift as reflecting the club's ongoing investment in non-dominant cultures and communities relative to those clubs that continue to have strong links to private schools and universities. Across time these gay-friendly recruitment patterns have generated gay-specific practices and events, such as a gay men's social eight that rows every weekend and then has drinks in the clubhouse. More interestingly, while Kenswick is not officially a gay rowing club, its gay-friendliness is a key element of its general culture. Unlike the Argonauts, Melbourne's gay rowing club, the gay-friendly aspect of Kenswick is not officially mandated but remains dependent on personality and the tacit understanding within the club around appropriate and inappropriate behaviours related to sexuality and gender. As my participant observation matured, I began to see how volatile these understandings were.

My first impression of the club was of the faded and peeling sign saying 'Kenswick Rowing Club'. The club house is a small, brick building that has an industrial appearance. This hard architecture transformed as I walked inside to find a light open space. No-one noticed my presence. There was an appealing sense of casualness and security in the place. Unusually the club opened up onto a new walkway and public pontoon, where its members washed down their boats or tinkered with tools. The city skyline made a dramatic backdrop

behind them. Cyclists and dog walkers went by, often looking in as they passed and this visual openness seemed to add to the club atmosphere. The space seemed more about community connectedness than patrolled enclosure, which is often a necessity since rowing clubs typically represent a huge investment in property and equipment, not least easily-damaged rowing sculls that can cost tens of thousands of dollars each. As well as details about its architectural layout, my early journal entries confirm that what struck me as unique about the place was the lack of ego apparent in it. At all of the other clubs I have been a part of, there has been a clear hierarchy of influence in which loud and often arrogant personalities dominate and control the space on the pontoon, in particular. Rather than taking up space with strong postures, Kensington members looked down at their boats and went about their business un-selfconsciously.

Following a prior arrangement, a member I had a connection to introduced me to John (37), the vice-captain and one of the senior rowers in the club who had agreed to facilitate my research. John's physical presence was impressive even among other athletes. He had a toned, strong body and a body-fat percentage so low that large, blue veins stretched up and down his arms. John had an unassuming, personal confidence and as we talked it became clear that he wanted me to understand the club's attempts to create an open, welcoming atmosphere for everyone. In the course of our conversation, John asked me what my research focused on. Among many hazy ideas, I spoke about the powerful experiences I associated with rowing as a teenager. In response John asked me if my research focused on sexuality. I found I was not prepared to answer his question as directly as he had asked it. Until that point I hadn't considered the role of sexuality within rowing clubs nor the implicit expectation of heterosexuality that governed the clubs I had belonged

to previously. At the time I responded to John in a way that put the emphasis on gender rather than sexuality, something I now see as a deflection away from my original disclosure. John went on to say that as a gay man his experiences of rowing significantly departed from my own and that even within Kensington he found that his homosexuality was at times unwelcome and made things personally 'difficult'. This exchange was significant to how I conceived my research: it made clear from the outset that my inquiry into masculinity would have to engage the question of male sexuality, its embodiment, and its self-policing within the institutional context of the rowing club. It was also clear that my status as a straight-identified man would be invariably engaged in the inquiry ahead. Participant observation suddenly seemed a very real thing.

Reading over my early journal entries, it is clear that I first thought I had stumbled onto an open-minded club that was utterly different to the clubs I knew. Since I was recovering from a back injury, I attended the club's weekly yoga class, which brought together women and men, competitive and social rowers, one night a week in the open studio above the rowing shed. We cleared the floor and set out oversized mats alongside each other on the dusty floor. Compared to the strong, heavily muscled bodies around him, the male instructor's small frame was light and fluid. He moved with what I can only describe as a confident smoothness, as he assumed various poses at the front of the room with the lowering sun reflected in the high-rise buildings of the Sydney skyline behind him. To me, this experience was bewildering. The instructor moved and spoke in a way that I had never seen or heard in a rowing club. His physical flexibility and camp-inflected voice captured the group's attention in a way completely removed from the authority usually commanded by the tall, strong bodies that tend to excel in rowing. The class had a different

schema of physical competency in which the muscled bodies appreciated in rowing made for terrible yoga students. In this space the older female members took up the first two rows while the men followed at the back. The atmosphere was convivial and seemed to acknowledge that this was a context in which the usual order of things was reversed. While I later noticed that most of these men didn't know the names of the women at the club, these first experiences of Kenswick culture seemed to embody the future potential of my work. Here was a rowing club whose large gay-identifying membership created an open and welcoming space in which a broad-spectrum of masculine behaviours seemed not only accepted but highly valued. However, this initial impression changed the more I became embedded within the club.

The Elite Competitive Men's Squad

Adam to Peter: 'Don't be a cunt!'

John: 'Adam, you can't say that here. You can only say that kind of stuff on the water.'

Adam: 'But John, you just said the same thing to me a few minutes ago!'

John: 'Yeah, on the water.'

The competitive men's squad consisted of ten athletes. They avoided the busy, early morning hours, and chose to train at 5:30 in the afternoon, when the club was mostly empty. They considered the club their space in the evenings and their disregard for the other club members made this clear. These men's ages spanned from twenty to thirty-eight so that a significant age gap separated the group. Young university students made up the

primary athletes, while older gay-identified athletes participated in and ran the sessions. The squad had an unconventional structure insofar as there were no formally appointed coaches. Rather, the squad operated around John, a captain-coach figure who ran all of the sessions as an active participant.

John had unparalleled influence throughout the squad. His physical abilities and experience were unmatched both on the water and in the land-based training exercises that centred on the use of ergometers (individual rowing machines capable of recording energy outputs across time as measured in watts produced or metres travelled). Before getting the boat on the water, everyone waited for John in the upstairs studio, stretching and chatting. When John arrived, he would lean against the stairwell in his lycra rowing suit, his hands behind his back to accentuate his well-developed shoulders and arms. Everyone watched as John outlined the training session ahead. John was only ever challenged in his role as team leader and coach by one person, Adam, a twenty-three year old rower whose influence in the squad far outweighed his athletic ability.

When I first met Adam, he was sprawled across the only couch in the upstairs studio. He had a nonchalant presence that contrasted with that of the two younger men standing near him. Adam spoke with an authoritative manner that assumed knowledge and experience exceeding that of everyone else in the room. I initially described him in my journal as a 'Mr Eccentric with a know-it-all tone'. In contrast to the other members of the squad, whose bodies were taller and physically well-toned men, Adam's body looked relatively unconditioned. However, whether lounging or moving about, it was clear he took an almost performative pleasure in dominating space, often in a manner that tested those around him. I found his demeanour both domineering and self-conscious. My acknowledged status as a research observer drew Adam's interest and I suspect he exaggerated his

physical and social mannerisms for me. 'Honours is difficult,' he told me, making sure I understood that everything I was doing he had already done. My increasing sense of the squad's internal dynamics struck me as odd. I had previous experience at two different rowing clubs in which athletic ability and potential conferred authority. At Kenswick these hierarchical systems of power, often to be expected in competitive sporting cultures, seemed absent or somehow disoriented. I could not initially explain Adam's dominance within these spaces, and my confusion continued until I became more socially embedded within the squad and its training practices. There was something beneath the surface, which I couldn't initially understand.

My first encounter with Adam occurred towards the beginning of my participant observation and significantly altered my perception of the club. Unlike the ease and good humour I observed in the yoga session, the elite squad training sessions were marked by aggressive critique between the participants. Rowers who didn't want to train or 'pull hard' on the ergs were chastised with an avalanche of sexist jibes: 'Whimp!', 'You're just soft,' 'Have you got pussyitus?' Adam often led this chorus but others fell in with it. It seemed there was an element of excitement in this 'banter' and an interest in how far it could be pushed in terms of misogyny and sexual explicitness. These constant jibes were shocking to me but I fell in with the practice of those around me who found themselves on the receiving end of these comments and responded by smiling knowingly and telling the accuser to 'fuck off'. There was, however, another element to this banter, which only Adam practiced. Adam made sexually explicit comments which targeted specific members who he knew to be gay or maintained ambiguity around their sexual orientation. These comments ranged from lewdly asking John for a '10-inch spanner' to asking me early on whether I gave sexual favours to those who consented to my research. The more I observed Adam, the more I

could see that the content and effect of his comments changed depending on who they were directed at and who else was around.

Adam's practice of homosexual taunting had a complex relation to the club's gay-friendly atmosphere. For the most part, the club valued a spectrum of ambiguous and gay-identifying sexual orientations. This, however, changed within the competitive men's squad in which, while including clearly out members, observed strict protocols around the expression of homosexual identity more generally. Around the young members of the squad, who were mostly in their early twenties, there was a sense of ambiguity in their sexual orientations that was never directly spoken of. Unlike Adam, who boasted loudly of having sex with multiple women, these young men never discussed their sexual partners. It struck me from the beginning that after training sessions the squad never showered together, although there was a relatively new communal shower facility adjacent to the studio. Instead, they stood in the studio, each man facing away from the others and awkwardly pulled shorts and t-shirts over their wet rowing suits. They looked downwards, withdrawing their gaze from anyone else. It seemed as if any form of bodily intimacy, even so much as a look, was avoided at all costs. This was true of everyone except Adam, who verbally drew other men's attention to his heterosexual prowess whenever he could.

Throughout the initial two months of my research, I found it difficult to understand how these contradictory sexual discourses worked within the squad. Adam moved between aligning himself with influential gay men to openly challenging their authority in statements such as, 'John, will you lick my asshole?' I knew my silence in relation to these remarks potentially marked me as complicit within the group context. When I responded to Adam's testing question about whether I gave sexual favours to those who consented to my research I felt I was playing into his hands: 'For you Adam? Sure'. I felt out of my depth both

socially and intellectually, and doubly compromised by the requirement to behave as an ethical observer. I often wondered, what would that even mean in this context? As an anti-homophobic gender studies student I was in some ways an easy target for Adam, just as other more sexually reticent members of the squad were.

Three months into my Kenswick participant observation, I still could not explain to my own satisfaction how a personality like Adam could dominate this space. With deadlines approaching, my writing on Kenswick was still made up of half-formed ideas, which could not be reconciled with the abstract concepts I had initially framed my project in relation to, specifically the notion of hegemonic masculinity. In desperation, I began to re-read my journal notes. There was no eureka moment, but slowly I noticed that these men's practices altered significantly in relation to the different spaces of training they inhabited. When we rowed on the water we all went quiet, turning inwards to feel each other's movements. When we trained on the ergometers, we raced against each other with aggressive grunts and outbursts. In these different spaces and practices of training, dominant personalities wielded power with fluctuating potency. Power was differently realised and felt through the different forms of training that occurred on the water and on the erg. It became clear that in contrasting these zones of training I might begin to understand the underlying tension that influenced these men's practices more generally.

My ensuing analysis of the competitive men's squad focuses on these different spaces—essentially the water and the training room, with the pontoon functioning as the liminal space connecting them—and different forms of group collaboration and power dynamics in each of them. In the sections that follow I attempt to understand how these spaces, and the bodily practices specific to them, mediate and influence the socio-political nature of these men's intentions. By focusing on these diverging spaces of training and

inter-corporealities, I hope to become more analytically sensitive to parallel sub-texts of embodied meaning and the corporeal nature of social practice. As I outlined in my introduction, I also hope to stay to the mediating role of objects in guiding human interactions as outlined by Bruno Latour (2005) in his influential work 'Reassembling the Social': to consider how power works in social practice we must 'follow' (2005: 69) the agency of human and non-human actants. In line with Latour's work, the following analyses centre on the unique assemblage of actants that orient male rowers on and off the water.

Bodies on Water

As can be seen on any of the multitude of inspirational rowing videos uploaded on YouTube, while rowing and moving backwards at speed, rower's facial expressions are often slack and relaxed while their eyes stare fixedly ahead. At Kenswick we rowed in fours, doubles and singles, performing twenty-minute loops of hard rowing around the bay. While on the water we were mostly silent. When we did speak, there was no acknowledgement or discussion of what 'felt good', rather we focused on what didn't work, what felt off, and which aspects of our collaborative efforts were slowing the boat down.

On the water, John commanded incredible respect from the other rowers. Whether he was coaching the squad from a tinnie or rowing in the crew boat he led and dictated the entire session. Early in the season there was already an implicit hierarchy emerging in the boat. The boat forced the men to sit behind each other in a certain order, which usually began with John in stroke and Adam behind him. The order of seating had consequences for the direction of the squad. Those rowing behind had to follow and over time make incremental adjustments to match John and Adam's technique. John and Adam were the only rowers who directly commented on the movement of the boat. John's unassuming self-

confidence was disarming; he was incredibly comfortable with himself and likewise relaxed in making suggestions to others. John freely turned to talk to others and the younger men often looked up to hold his gaze when he instructed them.

In John's absence, however, Adam dominated. He would sit in the stroke position and lead with a style of rowing which everyone then imitated. Adam's technique was unconventional. Rowing directly behind him I could see that his core was not strong enough to support his stroke; his leg drive and back swing were out of time and his finish (the extraction of the oars from the water) exaggerated. Adam's shouted directions were, however, followed to the letter. He made arbitrary calls to 'pause' and then 'row' with square blades (an exercise in which the face of the oar remains vertical after its extraction from the water), which everyone followed. In between set pieces, Adam would draw himself up in the boat, twist around to face the rest of the crew seated behind him, and tell us what was not working. Our hands were too slow at the finish; our oars were not squaring in time to catch the water with each stroke; we were disrupting the boat's balance.

Interestingly, for one session I replaced John in the stroke position and led a four-man rowing boat. Adam sat directly behind me. After one loop, Adam gave me his tick of approval—the boat's problems, he said, could only come from the two guys behind us seated in bow. 'I don't know what you're doing back there,' he said to them condescendingly, 'but it's throwing the boat out'. He often told more experienced and faster rowers what they were doing wrong on the water. As in similar instances on the pontoon or in the land-based training sessions, these men would respond by withdrawing into silence. It was rare that anyone openly responded to Adam's criticism. Sometimes we were asked by Adam if we had suggestions for the crew, but none were made. It seemed that, like me, the other rowers withdrew from any potential confrontation with Adam,

whether on the water or while changing in the boathouse studio. It was in these moments on the water that Adam dominated. Rather than being afforded respect by others, Adam dominated in this space by engendering discomfort among those around him.

Adam once expressed his own uncertainty as to why despite having a 'weak erg' (by which he meant poor results in the weekly ergometer tests) he rowed in the 'best boats'. We were standing in the club shed, before other squad members arrived, and Adam was pointing at the most expensive quad in the shed. He leaned against the rack with one arm and said that John and Dave (another senior and long-term Kenswick rower) seemed to just 'like' him. With this said, he added that he couldn't think of many of the club's rowers who could pull his time splits. Adam's simultaneous boasting and drawing attention to the anomaly of his influence amongst the elite squad attempted to explain a power imbalance that was becoming increasingly visible and had clearly drawn my interest. There was far more beneath the surface than Adam simply being liked. This personal disclosure was consistent with his wielding of power in the group: while proud and performative in the way that he dominated space, his influence rested on deft manipulation. He sought out conflict, raised tension and in moments such as this developed the notion of a personal, one-on-one friendship; a brief exposure of vulnerability and empathy that made the acknowledgement of his other, more questionable actions difficult. These personal moments encouraged me, like others within the elite squad, to enjoy his friendship and antics, while ignoring the often hurtful ways in which he dominated space and disrupted the group's hierarchical workings of power

Adam's daily engagements with the men around him were highly attuned to the contradictory working of power in the squad. In particular, Adam made room for himself among the men's squad by delivering homophobic insults in the form of banter that drew

attention to male bodies and their potential for sexual intimacy. Pascoe's exploration of 'fag discourse' (2005: 330) demonstrates that we cannot simply label these forms of 'banter' as homophobia but must also consider their potential to communicate other meanings. Specifically Pascoe provides an analysis of how the term 'fag' is used among adolescent boys in an American high school. She argues that 'Invoking homophobia to describe the ways in which boys aggressively tease each other overlooks the powerful relationship between masculinity and this sort of insult' (2005: 330). In the Kenswick example, these discursive practices are tied to judgments of masculine competency but are also contextually specific insofar as they operated differently in the three zones that comprised the scene of rowing (water, erg-room and pontoon).

The Erg

The male behaviour I observed in the erg room contrasted dramatically to the silent rowing I participated in on the water. To begin with techno music blared inside a large concrete garage turned into a makeshift gym. The room was dark with no windows. The only light came from the open garage doors, which looked out onto the boat shed and car park. Like the shed, this garage had a Spartan, industrial feel to it. A thick blue fabric lined the concrete floor. It had a damp and mouldy smell. Eight rowing machines were lined up side-by-side facing one of the concrete walls. In the evenings the elite men's squad occupied this space. They performed a five-kilometre time trial under John's direction every Monday. Here young men who were quiet on the water, spoke and moved with confidence. They rolled down the tops of their rowing suits to reveal strong, toned upper-bodies. This gym was secluded from other club members: it was a space of training removed from the

clubhouse and the public pontoon. Here we applied our strength and fitness against each other, though due to my back injury there were weeks where I was forced to observe from a stationary cycle in the corner of the room. Audible grunts, sighs and moans were heard. Each man stared with furrowed eyebrows into the ergometer's screen read out. These tests ranged between eighteen to twenty minutes. Our scores were constantly on display, updated with every stroke. The amount of distance covered, the average amount of strokes per minute, and the speed were there for all to see. While moving back and forth on the sliding seat we would bend forward and pull our bodies up along the side of the ergometer rail into a compact position that mimicked 'the catch' with knees in armpits and arms outstretched. We would then unwind like a whip: legs would push at full force and the upper body would swing back with the oar handle slamming into the chest. As we moved back and forth we would take furtive looks of each other's ergometer screens and strain to produce a power output higher than the person alongside. Each athlete's ability to pull was converted into a wattage score. The harder and faster the erg wheel span, the sooner the time trial finished. John was always the first to finish. He stood up each time, dripping with sweat, and gasping for breath. He, then, determinedly walk outside. One by one every athlete that finished the five km followed, moving outside to suck in the fresh air.

In this space, the connection between male bodies was mediated by sight and the mechanical displays of the machines with which we interacted. In this space Adam's influence was negligible. Rather than the vocal personality that dominated on the pontoon and the water, Adam was silent. He was one of the last to leave the garage, after the stronger men had finished before him. This group compartment created a transparently hierarchical working of power. Here masculine competency and authority within the rowing

squad was captured in the tangible data generated by the rowing machines. The group practice of following one another out of the garage demonstrates a clear line of athletic ability: it established a clear hierarchy of masculine competency that assigned value to individual rowing bodies. The erg-scores were crucial to the way they understood their position within this hierarchy. Their athletic ability, as mediated by the ergometer, was a marker of difference and competency. Unlike the rowing boat, where rowers are seated behind each other, the ergs did not intimately connect the men with each other's movements but promoted vision rather than feel as the primary mode of interpersonal assessment and self-assessment. In the boat an intuitive understanding of different rower's movements was felt and subconsciously responded to but in the erg-room there was physical separation between bodies and a parallel cognitive separation that placed emphasis on the computer read-outs.

The Pontoon and Other Liminal Spaces

Adam: 'Hooters is eight minutes away'

Craig: 'Adam, we cannot go to Hooters!'

Adam: 'Did you go through puberty?'

Craig: 'Well, I have a moustache'

On the water and around the erg, the two most intensive sites of training, there were different non-hierarchical and hierarchical workings of power linked to masculine physical competency. Alongside these two sites were the pontoon and the pub, both liminal spaces in which these masculine schemas of influence clashed with other cultures. Every Tuesday night the men's competitive squad took advantage of a two-for-one meal deal at the local pub. As we squeezed into two opposing couches, there was a sense of ease intertwined

with discomfort. The intensive rowing session was over, our bodies were tired and there was an intense desire to collapse onto the couch and feel a tingling, pleasurable fatigue. At the same time as we wanted to relax, our bodies were maintained in tension with each other. Elbows were held down on each side, buffering one body from the next. Some leaned forward, while others lent backwards, each maximising personal space. There was one athlete, however, who was visibly at ease. Craig who is in his late thirties, leaned back onto the couch, his legs spread wide and his right arm draped along the couch behind the other rower's heads. Craig's heavier frame and belly protruded out into the space between the couches. Craig was one of the few men who came to speak about his sexuality. While not making explicit sexual comments, he nonetheless freely expressed his liking for men. This openness was pounced on by Adam, who responded with sexually explicit questions and derision so that, though fifteen years younger than Craig, he was able to bully him and challenge his position within the group. I recorded in my journal the tension that Craig's manner of being gay caused amongst the group. I remember that Adam's interjection of ridicule seemed to answer the wider group's discomfort in Craig's behaviour, his unspectacular way of being gay without performing it. Craig's identity as an ordinary gay man, as opposed to the spectacular gay athlete that John presented as, was something that needed to be ridiculed into submission and Adam was more than willing to take up this role.

Throughout these spaces Adam consistently worked the terrain between homoeroticism and homophobia. It was Adam's derision of Craig's homosexuality and his simultaneous equally aggressive but more admiring engagement with John that became clear in these contexts. Craig's lacking athleticism meant that, like Adam, he was one of the last to leave the erg room during the weekly five-kilometre erg tests. The rest of the squad

was conscious that both Craig and Adam were athletically weaker teammates but Adam's capacity to exploit the gay-friendly atmosphere of Kenswick in contradictory ways meant that he retained social power in settings which would seem to accord more status to bodily expertise. Adam seemed aware that he caused intense discomfort to those around. But, while Adam's sexually explicit discourse was used to dominate space, it somehow also suited the younger men that he take that role. It kept in place strict protocols that prevented any other kind of expression of male intimacy in contexts in which male physical intimacy was a given. Craig's expression of his own homosexuality was an opportunity to reinforce the implicit masculine protocols amongst the squad. Adam's role, then, was two-fold. He used sexually explicit discourse to dominate the squad on the water but in more exclusively social contexts he singled out Craig and subjected him to a form of homophobic bullying. Adam's behaviour, as I came to understand its more general function within the group dynamic, served the purposes of sheltering the younger men in the squad who did not want to acknowledge sexuality or the underlying tension that being around John as a model athlete aroused. In Adam's denigration of Craig and what I came to think of as his flirtation with John, he was able to reconcile his lack of athletic ability with the standards of masculine competency. He used homosexually focused banter to affiliate himself with John's masculine athletic authority but also emphasised his won heterosexuality as a key point of differentiation between himself and Craig. I liken Adam's socially flexible inhabitation of the terrain between homoeroticism and homophobia to the space of the pontoon which separated land and water. Adam's orders were followed to the letter on the water and his remonstrations elsewhere were endured by the men around him. Although I initially registered his effect on the group as an unpleasant one I came to see it suited everyone nicely, except perhaps Craig. Adam's lack of athletic ability was ignored as he was

able to dominate space by separately appealing to John with sexually explicit homoerotic banter. Whatever personal need this behaviour may have meant, the younger men, who identified as neither straight nor gay, never had to avow their own relation to John or Craig's homosexuality.

Over the racing season, however, Adam's influence began to wane. Towards the end of my participant observation period, the members of the squad were standing on the pontoon after a session on the water. It was late in the season and the squad had just undergone selection for two fours, which would race at nationals. John was in charge of what became an unofficial selection process. I was standing with Adam and James, who was the team member who seemed most engaged by Adam's homophobic banter. They stood alongside each other with arms folded and shoulders back watching the top crew on the water. The men in the top crew were serious. John was in the stroke position. Everyone was silent, only John spoke, and when he did there was a growling intensity, 'C'mon!' They stayed on the water for an extra half hour, leaving myself, James and Adam to watch on the sidelines, which clearly stung. While shaking their heads, James and Adam said to each other 'erg hierarchy'. The men in the boat had the best erg scores and John had selected them to row with himself on that basis, or so it seemed. They had originally planned on boating two fours, one made up of heavyweight rowers and the other lightweights. This, however, changed when John rearranged the crews. I then asked: what is the order of the erg hierarchy? James and Adam immediately ran off the names of the group together. There was a very clear understanding of physical ability, which the erg made evident. Adam was towards the back end of this list, and found himself, like James and Craig, watching the larger, fitter men take centre stage. It seemed that the space on the pontoon in which Adam

took so much room and satisfaction was contracting. He was not only sidelined, but the 'erg hierarchy' began to have knock-on effects throughout the club. John's seriousness about competition led to long debriefings after training sessions. Unusually, John was often angry after a session. He would take his usual position next to the stairs, hands behind his back, but now he told us that the evening's row was unprofessional. There was an intensity here that contrasted to the younger men, who awkwardly shifted on their feet while listening as a group. 'We are training for nationals' John told them. These moments contrasted to the beginning month of my research, where Adam dominated this space with his performative and accusatory banter. Adam still used sexually explicit accusations to catch his teammates off guard, and to chastise Craig, but it was pushed to the sidelines. It was no longer the main event after each session. Try as Adam might his control of the ambiguous and liminal space between the water and the gym sharply declined.

Up until nationals Adam's 'banter' moved to a more targeted ridicule of Craig's sexuality. These comments occurred when John was not present such as in car rides to regattas or at dinner. My notes record Adam as saying in one such situation, 'Don't swallow in general. That's my advice. I won't ask Craig or I'll be left with a faint sense of nausea'. At comments such as this, others would either shake their head or ignore it entirely. Craig was of a similar age to John but was not a physically idealisable man. His stomach bulged slightly in his rowing suit and his shoulders were rounded and unconditioned. Adam took advantage of Craig's lack of standing within the squad. In Connell's terms we might say that Adam used sexually explicit discourse to align masculine competency along a heteronormative schema. However, in front of John, Adam's performances often had a more ambiguous homoerotic nature: 'Be careful nobody loses their nuts', 'My dick, my dick!' Adam directly appealed to

John's homosexuality in an attempt to wield more influence within the group. To secure this power he was willing to align himself with John's interests at least verbally. But it is important to clarify that the squad understood that these exchanges were only verbal and that there was no possibility that John and Adam would, for instance, ever have sex. Adam's banter made repeated allusions to the possibilities of a sexual encounter between the two of them but this was his way of reinforcing the fact that he was out of reach.

It was during the week of national selection that cracks within the squad began to widen. A session out at Nepean was organised for the second boat and Adam was not consulted. He was incensed. At one point Adam told senior crew members to 'go fuck yourselves'. Later in the week things came to a head. Adam threatened to punch Craig and then made a show of leaving the rowing club. Talking to James a few weeks after Adam's departure, James said that the club was 'boring' without him.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Ethnographic Method

As a situated researcher I became privy to the working of power in the flesh. Moving alongside the men in the elite competitive squad at Kenswick Rowing Club, I was able to feel their physical force shudder through the boat and hear them strain as they pulled on the ergs beside me. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, different training zones engendered different forms of embodied understanding. Starting from the techniques of ethnography and embodied reflection, we can understand how power both works at the corporeal level and interplays with wider social expectations surrounding the performance of gender. Writing up the Kenswick case study, I have tried to remain sensitive to embodied as well as social workings of power by engaging reflective modes of analysis, phenomenology and new critical material studies. My methodology has expanded the conceptual tools that are conventionally used in sociological analysis of sporting cultures in order to access wider experiential dimensions of sporting activity. Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity continues to wield explanatory power in the analysis of sporting culture at Kenswick and elsewhere. However, it should also be acknowledged that the theory of hegemonic masculinity will fluctuate in its usefulness if it is not backed up with a deeper investigation of masculine interaction and embodiment in athletic culture. The ethnographic analysis of Kenswick helps develop a methodological approach to the analysis of sporting activity that keeps in the frame inter-corporeal collaborations in which material and human actants merge in the immediacy of experience.

The peculiar burden of male intimacy that I observed in the gay-friendly context of Kenswick rowing club is compelling in the way it brings together both bodies and machines,

and straight and gay identities. In the gym, high erg scores conferred masculine authority and standing within the group. The technology of the erg created a competitive and highly aggressive training space through which clear lines of masculine competency and athleticism developed. Rowing in crew boats on the water, alternatively, enforced an intimate physical collaboration between male bodies. In each session on the water we tried to make the boat feel lighter, together. On water the rower's ability to mimic the deft movements of others was valued. The water provided a different space of inter-corporeal movement through which physically intuitive responsiveness became a source of power. However, one member of the group (Adam) was attuned not only to the hegemonic workings of masculine competency but also to the potential discomfort that intimate collaborations between men engendered.

In the introduction I argued that it was unclear whether the heterogeneous nature of embodied communication is reducible to Connell's theory of the gender order. I was concerned that the application of the theory of hegemonic masculinity would perform a conceptual violence by funnelling complex textures of embodied meaning into abstract and static conceptions of hierarchical gender performance. However, Connell's theory of masculinity retains useful explanatory power when analysing corporeal intentions as they travel between embodied subjects. Here we can see the interplay between local practices at Kenswick, which conferred hegemonic influence in athletic ability, to regional 'templates' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 841) of ideal, masculine conduct. In their later updating of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasise that performances of gender and power are created between bodies, rather than being situated within them (839). They also recognise that there are no static or perfect embodiments of

hegemonic masculinity, rather influential masculine performances are in a continued negotiation with those that support their legitimacy (835). A dominant performance of masculinity, they argue, cannot be wholly oppressive otherwise it would not garner the support of others (840). Therefore, there is a constant interplay in performances of gender and the intentions they express. Hegemonic and marginalised masculinities are often complicit in the productive workings of power, as can be seen in the Kenswick case study.

The overt sexual discourse I encountered at Kenswick moved unstably between the poles of homoeroticism and homophobia. It sometimes acknowledged the unrivalled influence that gay-identifying men wielded within the group and sometimes denigrated those whose athletic capabilities and hence masculine competencies were considered questionable. This reveals the flexibility of power and its context-specific operation. In particular the operation of power between men was both difficult to challenge and paradoxically easy to deny. Despite the Kenswick club's gay-friendly atmosphere, heteronormative gender practices delegitimised the authority of men who expressed homosexual desire. Such is the pervasiveness of heteronormative expectations of masculine gender performance that even at Kenswick inter-corporeal practices between men were tightly policed. Though I don't mean to suggest that Adam was the only enforcer of such protocols, his awareness and exploitation of these dynamics was salutary.

Making the Familiar Strange

The methodology that I developed in order to capture the full range of male physical intimacy and communication at Kenswick Rowing Club is in part grounded in Merleau-Pontian existential phenomenology that understands social practice as the experience of inter-corporeal negotiations in space. I am indebted to the work of Beauvoir (1952), Young (1980) and particularly Ahmed (2006) as feminist interpreters of Merleau-Ponty. Specifically, I see my work as responding to Ahmed's call to make the 'familiar' strange' (2006: 177) in order to develop a sensitivity to the materiality of social practice.

Ahmed's re-orientation of the perspective of existential phenomenology involves moving away from a sole concern with how we perceive phenomena to how objects orient and engender socialised practices in space (2006: 3). My interest in rowing as a collaboration between bodies and things on water mirrors Ahmed's work. In understanding the boat as a prosthetic intermediary between men that makes their embodied intentions felt is an attempt to make the familiar strange. Rowing, as I have previously elaborated, is a complex movement that requires men in crew boats to collaborate together primarily at the non-cognitive level. They must feel each other's intentions through the boat. The mediating role of the boat is key. Far from being an inanimate object, the boat has agency as a prosthetic extension between bodies to which it communicates feedback. But it is also important to remember that the specific actants used within the varying spaces of training at Kenswick have a material history that engage factors such as class and race in addition to gender. Though my own study has focused on masculinity to the exclusion of femininity, the methodology itself could accommodate wider points of analysis. By attending to inter-corporeal practice we can track the complex merger of a range of material and social

influences. This points to the potential of participant observation as a methodology that acknowledges the historical and social agency of material actants in the context of sport and considers their agency within the framework of immediate embodied experience.

Some recent ethnographic examinations of sporting cultures have sought to use Latour's (2005) conceptual work on actor-network theory to understand how power is often conferred on and elicited by material actants. Kerr (2014) and Barratt (2011) each provide analyses of human-object assemblages that co-produce the performances of gymnastics and rock-climbing. Barratt's work focuses on the affordances that developments in climbing technology offer to climbers, and how these technologies often involve a mutually adaptive relationship between climber and, for example, climbing shoe (2011: 401). Barratt's work is interesting because it is concerned with directly asking his research participants about their 'kit' (405) and their experience of material actants as phenomena. While Barratt does not cite phenomenology, Jackeline Allen-Collinson's (2009, 2011) work on 'phenomenography' argues that ethnographies firmly rooted in existential phenomenological concepts are peculiarly well suited to the analysis of sporting contexts. Allen-Collinson provides in-depth accounts of the complex overlapping of different phenomenological schools of thought, arguing that a combination of Husserlian and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology is best suited to understanding inter-corporeal practice (2011: 284). She suggests that in order to maintain a methodology consistent with existential phenomenology a researcher's first concern is obtaining research participant's experiences of specific phenomena through semi-formal and informal interviews (291). Allen-Collinson builds on Young (1980) and Grosz (1994) in order to understand elements of experiences that are specific to women in sport (2011: 309). While Allen-Collinson's interest in gender has parallels to my own, her

emphasis on interview and discussion did not seem appropriate to the Kenswick case-study and the time-frame of my research, which drew on the techniques of participant observation and auto-ethnography.

The Kenswick case study develops a dual methodology that is sensitive to both spoken and unspoken, but also subject centred and object oriented, communications. Such an analysis extends both Latourian and phenomenological conceptual frameworks to consider the intersectional nature of embodied intentions as they work through space. Making the familiar strange draws to the surface undercurrents of embodied understanding, which I suggest has value for future ethnographic work concerned with the socio-political dimensions of sport.

Making the Self Strange

An ethnography focused on making the familiar strange can provide a framework through which the motivations of the researcher and their wielding of power are explored as they negotiate the field. Furthermore, it can provide a starting point to examine the subjective analyses of the corporeal intentions that an embodied researcher feels. At the outset of this research, I found a rowing club whose members had vastly different life experiences to my own. My heterosexuality was initially an impediment to understanding the rich textures of meaning that worked between these men. However, by focusing on the different spaces of inter-corporeal practice engaged in training my own presumptions and attachments to rowing were made strange. The strength of ethnography is its critical consciousness of the researcher's partiality. Certainly I had many heady experiences, which Doucet (2008) argues

visit us from the past, as I felt my body lever the boat backwards with the other Kensington men. These bodily memories were increasingly problematised as I became privy to the deep discomfort that worked through these spaces. These feelings brought about by rowing (and reflecting on rowing) significantly departed from the romanticised experiences of my youth. The 'new angle[s]' (Ahmed, 2006: 4) that my participant observation engaged, rendered these foundational experiences strange. At the same time, however, the embodied experience of rowing continued to feel habitual to me.

As I acknowledged in the introduction, the problematic history of ethnography has denied the situated position of the researcher, often claiming a violent, universal perspective. Working from the feminist philosophers Bordo (1983), Irigaray (1974) and Braidotti (1991), Ahmed contends that the 'disappearance of the subject under the universal' (2006: 34), can extend to how the 'masculinity might also be evident in the disappearance of the materiality of objects' (34) in which the historical, social and often gendered nature of using and negotiating objects is overlooked. Making the familiar strange, I argue, extends to considering the situated position of the ethnographer as they navigate the socio-political dimensions of the field, confronting assumptions that are embedded within our familiar flesh. In this process, parts of ourselves are made vulnerable to change.

Sport privileges inter-corporeal forms of embodied understanding, which are developed and honed with habitual movement. By focusing on the mediating role of actants in space we can begin to analyse the socio-political dimensions of practice that work at a corporeal level. We can become sensitive to subtexts of intention with the help of embodied research attuned to how spaces facilitate inter-corporeal practice. Our sensitivity to these corporeal intentions, furthermore, opens up new opportunities for intersectional

analysis. At Kenswick, Gramscian concepts of power continue to hold explanatory value within corporeal and discursive modalities of social practice. While hegemonic masculinity remains a fruitful conceptual tool, I believe I have demonstrated that it can be usefully augmented by other perspectives and methodologies, specifically an ethnography that is sensitive to subtexts of embodied meaning within the immediacy of experience.

From Places of Hurt

The experience of writing is peculiarly similar to rowing on the water. There is an element of masochism that accompanies these separate practices, where you are often forced to push yourself beyond the limits of your established ability. Despite self-doubt and the fear of failure experienced in these moments, your body urges you to find more capacity from inside yourself. These moments in the flesh have come to form some of the most formative events of my life.

While rowing as a teenager, I strove for an ever-elusive success. Winning was all I wanted. But, after four years of rowing, when I finally won my first race, it was a hollow anti-climax. There was no rush of pride and glory. There was no coach to accept me for the young man that I was. What I found was myself, sitting in a boat, still the same.

In moments of vulnerability, where you have given all that you have, whether it is the frantic rush for a deadline, or the last minute of the erg test, you offer up a final piece of your self. Across this year of learning to turn rowing into a form of participant observation, I have been able to find pleasure in the practice of sitting down in the library and writing, which has now become a habitual practice for me. As I take stock of my experience of fieldwork and writing a dissertation, I know I have attained new abilities and potential. Grounded in the comfort of the present, I see a twelve-year-old boy, sitting on an upturned boat, shivering, looking past his father, to see the person he has become.

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