

Weighing the Details: Gender Dualisms in Lightweight Women's Rowing

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research project was to explore how women lightweight rowers in Ontario negotiate their gender and body identity. Through a feminist post-structural lens I investigated both ‘acceptable’ and contradictory gender and sport performances that exist in the culture of rowing in order to understand how identity is constructed at the intersection of these discourses. My goal was to learn how human experiences are shaped by discourses of power, and resulting constructions of acceptable gender attributes. Seven university-aged lightweight women’s rowers were interviewed, and the following themes were uncovered: the women are constantly engaging in acts of bodily control; often body image is affected by participation in the sport; there are instances of femininity that exist within the culture of lightweight rowing; inequalities are present within the culture, as are excuse making practices; and the potential for resistance is extremely complicated.

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## Introduction

## **Introduction**

As George (2005, 318) states, among all female sports there is a “complicated relationship between athletic performance and physical appearance for women”. In 1972, the civil rights law Title IX was enacted, which stated that equal funding must go to men and women’s educational opportunities – including athletics (Kennedy, 2010). Stipulations of the law include equal practice times, equipment, facility provisions, and funding for male and female teams within schools. Although this is an American Act, the effect it has had on women’s suffrage is mirrored in Canadian sport as well. While the integration of Title IX has undoubtedly affected issues of gender equality in a positive way, women must still negotiate with opposing hegemonic constructions of femininity and athleticism that constrict women’s participation in sport (George, 2005, 318). Fundamentally, a conflict remains to extinguish the mutual exclusivity between the terms ‘female’ and ‘athlete’. With this said, women in sports continue to struggle with the reality of representing both femininity and athleticism.

Rowing is an on-water sport where athletes race against each other in boats that are propelled solely by the strength and teamwork of the rowers. Rowing is an activity that from inception demands continual discipline from athletes, as it is a physically arduous sport that requires cardiovascular endurance, physical strength and strong core stability. Athletes are required to wake up before sunrise, go to the rowing course, and row between 12 and 24 kilometers a day depending on the designated workout. In the sport of rowing there are four distinct categories, men’s heavyweight rowing, men’s lightweight rowing, women’s heavyweight rowing, and women’s lightweight rowing. What sets lightweight rowers apart from other rowers is that, unlike open weight female rowers, the lightweights are required to ‘make weight’ on a weekly basis (Chapman, 1997; Sykora, Grilo, Wilfley, & Brownwell, 1993).



In order to ‘make weight’ the females must step on the scale, in front of their entire crew, in the few hours prior to racing and weigh less than 59kg (129.8lbs). The premise behind weight restrictions in the sport is that athletes who compete at the same weight are placed on an ‘even playing field’ – much like in wrestling (Chapman, 1997; Sykora et al., 1993). Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d’Aviron (FISA) implemented the designation of lightweight rowing, in order to ensure “universality in the sport especially among nations with less statuesque people”. It does seem appropriate to create a distinction using weight restrictions, in order to provide fairness for more petite athletes. In this sense, the weight restrictions of the sport prevent women who are 59kg from having to contend with women who, on the international platform, can weigh up to 85 or 90kg. However, I was unable to find any specific reason why 59kg should be seen as the ideal ‘lightweight’ threshold, with the governing body being stated as the deciding factor, and no further rationale provided.

While the number itself is seemingly arbitrary, the weight restriction places emphasis on the female body and the paradoxes that exist within the sport. Often the females are expected to be feminine yet athletic, thin yet healthy, strong yet emaciated.

I connect with this topic and the pressures around ‘making weight’ on a personal level, as I have competed as a female lightweight rower since 2007, including 5 years competing on an Ontario University varsity rowing team. In September of 2011 I stepped back from the sport for 6 months, and it was during this time that I began to recognize some interesting and concerning relationships that I associated with sport, eating, and my female body. Even when I stopped rowing, I continued to count the calories I was consuming, work out vigorously for fear of being ‘fat’, and maintain a social circle dominated by other female rowers. There is no doubt that rowing has increased my overall health, but I was fascinated with how the culture of the sport

amplified personal awareness of my body, as well as a recognition of myself as both a university 'female' and a university 'athlete'. As a reflexive researcher, it was imperative that I take my lived experiences into account in order to understand how I would be navigating through the research process and make meaning from the stories of the research participants that I spoke with (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000).

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to explore how women lightweight rowers in Ontario negotiate their gender and body identity. Through a feminist post-structural lens I aimed to investigate both the 'acceptable' and contradictory gender and sport performances that exist in the culture of rowing in order to understand how identity is constructed at the intersection of these discourses. Through interviews I uncovered how human experiences are shaped by discourses of power and resulting constructions of acceptable gender attributes. My study focused specifically on the practices of body management enacted by lightweight female rowers, with the specific magnification of certain performances, including pathogenic weight-making behaviours, interpersonal bonds within and outside of the team, and individual understandings of the lightweight body. The growth of rowing in recent years, a continuing struggle for women to be regarded as beings outside of the feminine body, and a lack of recent research led me to this topic. Additionally, as a woman who has rowed lightweight for some time, I have a personal connection to this subject. My own story was an integral part of this exploration.

I aspired to unearth the following research question throughout the process of my research: How do university aged lightweight women rowers understand and negotiate their identities – both inside and outside of the sport? Additionally, I considered the following sub-questions: Are the pressures to represent both femininity and athleticism feasible? Do young

lightweight women rowers recognize these pressures? How do lightweight women rowers exist within these dualisms? And how are personal and group identities negotiated within these constructions?

### *Importance of Study*

This topic is vitally important to advancing knowledge about young people, and young women specifically, in sport. In line with post-structural theory, conducting this study unveiled some of the ‘common sense’ patriarchal discourses in society with regard to the female gender, persona, body and sexuality in sport. In conducting this study my aim was to expose various contradictory expectations surrounding sport and gender that collegiate lightweight rowers, and female athletes in general, are repeatedly struggling with (Chapman, 1997; George, 2005). In addition, by working with women to tell their experiences as petite female athletes, I was able to deconstruct how gender identities are continuously evolving in young people.

With regard to practical implications, I expect that learning how young women exist as athletes, how the sport of lightweight rowing may act as a catalyst for disordered eating, and how the division of sports teams is based on sex rather than ability may prove enlightening to the Rowing Canada Aviron and The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, and may produce lasting ramifications. In understanding how collegiate female athletes negotiate their gender, I anticipated that three key themes might prove prevalent throughout the course of this research: 1) that there is a conglomeration of power that exists within the sport of rowing in general, with a specific magnification on lightweight women’s rowing; 2) that there is a duality of identity which subsists in the lives of lightweight women rowers surrounding the constructions of ‘female’ and ‘athlete’; and 3) there is a question of possible change and resistance to the performance of a woman participating in the sport of rowing. After conducting the interviews

and analyzing the data, I found all of these themes to be prevalent within the culture of the sport, in addition to three other particularly interesting themes: that the women are in constant surveillance of both their bodies, and their teammates; that this constant surveillance often lends itself to a decrease in positive body image; and that there is often a denial of inequality within the sport by the women themselves.

CHAPTER ONE  
Theoretical Framework

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Feminism*

This project was conducted through a lens of feminist post-structuralism. As this project centres on the lived realities of young women, and the socially imbedded oppressions faced by women athletes, it is only fitting that a feminist understanding of the data is considered. Gender is engrained in the determination of society's consciousness, values, and institutions. As St. Pierre & Pillow (2000, 2) pronounce, "Feminism as a Western social movement has had a profound influence on the daily lives of women and men by challenging patriarchy at every turn". The work of feminist researchers contends that gender is central in discussions of power and privilege distributions. Feminism encourages women to understand and critique their subordination within patriarchal society. Patriarchy, as Weedon (1987, 2) discusses, "refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men". Feminism can be used to deconstruct power relations that exist because of dominating social values centered on patriarchy. Moreover, feminism contends that women should be more fully included in language and politics. Butler (1990, 5) argues that in addition to this, "feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of 'women', the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought". Therefore, feminism should act as a critique of society, politics, language, and itself.

### *Post-structuralism*

Language has authority as it constructs, defines, and contests individual consciousness and subjectivity, as "subjectivity is neither united nor fixed" to language (Weedon, 1987, 21). As Weedon (1987) emphasizes, post-structuralism rests on the foundation that language is a powerful and malleable tool that is used to compose and give meaning to social reality.

Language does not reflect a pre-existing social reality, but rather constructs it – there are no fixed intrinsic meanings in this world that cannot be altered by language. Post-structuralism differs from humanism in that it “offers critiques and methods for examining the functions and effects of any structure or grid of regularity that we put into place” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, 6).

Weedon links this theoretical framework to the work of structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who describes language as an abstract system that is constituted by ‘chains of signs’ (1987, 23). These chains are made up of a signifier (a written image or a sound) and the signified (the meaning that is placed upon the signifier). The meanings that are placed upon each signifier are consequential, although the link between the signifier and the signified contains no natural connection, and is arbitrarily assigned (Weedon, 1987). With this understanding of language, one can suggest that there are no essential qualities of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’. If words are arbitrarily assigned meanings, then larger concepts, such as ‘man’ or ‘woman’ and ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ are similarly imbued with arbitrary meanings that will inevitably shift and diversify over time. In other words, there is no one way to define ‘man’ or ‘woman’ or ‘femininity’ or ‘masculinity’ in a way that stands up across cultures, races, or individuals. But while these meanings are arbitrarily assigned, they are taken up within our society as if they always already existed as innate, natural gender characteristics that must be adhered to in order for normalcy to be claimed (Butler, 1990).

Beyond language, the basis of post-structuralism is the premise that subjectivity is a contestable area of conflict, which is central to the preservation of the status quo. Therefore, while discourses of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are deeply embedded in the fabric of social understanding, it is imperative that these definitions – which are used as a means of both organizing society and elevating/oppressing certain groups – be critiqued in order to question

and re-evaluate the supposed claims to ‘truths’ that each term offers. As our most basic understanding of the world is dependent on the truths of discourse, the framework of post-structuralism urges that language is regarded critically in order to acknowledge and critique social inequality.

Post-structural theory thus posits that meaning is produced through language, rather than the common assumption that language reflects a true, intrinsic, and unwavering knowledge. Post-structural research encourages critical thinking, as it contends that language is made up of alternative and competing discourses, and is therefore a potential site of political struggle and social change (Weedon, 1987).

In association with feminist post-structural research is the notion of discourse. Discourse is an element of language that is organized around a specific subject matter and gives it a particular meaning. Discourse can be conceptualized by viewing a subject matter as having a specific meaning that is socially, historically, and politically bound (Pomerantz, 2008; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). Post-structuralists describe discourse as being,

Not merely spoken words, but a notion of signification which concerns not merely how it is that certain signifiers comes to mean what they mean, but how certain discursive forms articulate objects and subjects in their intelligibility. In this sense ‘discourse’ is not used in the ordinary sense... Discourse does not merely represent or report on pre-given practices and relations, but it enters into their articulation and is, in that sense, productive (Butler, 1995).

To Foucault (1983), discourses are used as a means through which power and norms function, and exist as a prevailing tool through which linguistic, social, and political conventions are mediated and upheld,



[They] are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects that they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside their discursive articulation... (Weedon, 1987, 108).

Discourse is at the centre of post-structuralism because while language is arbitrary, everyone is held to a ‘normal’ standard, as dictated by language, and to navigate away from these normative discourses is to be unrecognizable in society (Foucault, 1983; Butler, 1990). Principally, discourses normalize performances that persons in society are forced to repeat as though their life depends on it – because it does. In order to be intelligible, or recognized as human normalized performances are a requirement of being recognizable (Butler, 1990).

#### *Patriarchy within Feminist-Post-structuralism*

There are times throughout this study when I acknowledge the upholding of patriarchy. While patriarchy is not a post-structural concept, in this instance I am using the term as a way to describe and contextualize the hyper-masculinized environment of sports. Therefore, I will be using feminist post-structuralism as a means of criticizing patriarchy and discourses of male dominance, which subsequently creates an opposing discourse of female subordination. The term subordination is provided as it presupposes that “there is an autonomous and self-perpetuating patriarchal ‘system’ in which oppression originates in men and is unilaterally directed toward women” (Butler, 1991, 88).

#### *Why conduct feminist post-structural research*

Post-structuralism, as a structure for understanding the world, works well with feminism (Weedon, 1987). As numerous scholars maintain (Weedon, 1987; Derrida, 1978), language produces reality, and therefore has the power to structure and organize entire systems of thought.

Foucauldian post-structuralist theory, which aligns most closely with the work of feminists, looks at specific texts, discursive relations, and social practices in order to question everyday subordination and the maintenance of patriarchy (Lather, 1991). This lens offers a useful and productive framework for understanding the mechanisms of power in society. By thinking critically about language, specifically the language of patriarchy, post-structural research opens up the possibility for social change (Weedon, 1987). St. Pierre & Pillow (2000, 13) state that “we live, work, love, and laugh within structures that we cannot and do not necessarily want to escape”, however feminist post-structuralism offers a productive framework that can be used to understand procedures of power at work in society (Weedon, 1987). As Weedon recognizes, “for a theoretical perspective to be particularly useful to feminists, it should be able to recognize the importance of the subjective in constituting the meaning of women’s lived reality” (1987, 8). With this particular study, a feminist post-structural framework provided an avenue for an in depth exploration of women’s bodies as sites of discipline and pleasure (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000).

Conducting feminist post-structural research is also beneficial, as the framework itself is relational and non-reductionist, allowing for researchers to view diverse social practices without quantifying or objectifying them, which leaves room for differences and contradictions to exist as key sites of analysis, rather than problems to be smoothed over. Weedon (1987, 6) argues that “one of the strengths of post-structuralist approaches is that they enable us to attend to the practical implications of particular ways of theorizing women’s oppression and to realize that feminist politics are critical in determining which existing theories might be useful in the fight for change”. This framework is valuable as it is conducted without assuming the existence of an underlying essence or ‘truth’ (Lather, 1991). Feminist post-structuralism is continuously being

reinvented, transforming individual identities, political agendas, and power relations (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000).

### *Gender*

Judith Butler (1990) describes gender performativity as something that possesses no ontological position outside of the various acts that comprise its reality. She states that the illusion of gender is discursively preserved in order to coincide with the hegemonic creation of normative heterosexuality. Therefore, in a patriarchal heteronormative society, gender is determined at birth, if not earlier, and is based solely on an individual's sexual organs. Gender is then regarded as the determinant for sexuality. According to Butler (1990), true gender does not exist, but rather it is a fabrication of reality, created through hegemonic discourses that constitute social hierarchies of subordination and unequal power. Butler has a particular interest in gender embodiment, which is the process of performativity, asserting that social identity is an ongoing process of recreating and enacting gender norms that permeate society. While gender identity is viewed as 'natural', Butler argues that it is actually an ongoing reiteration and performance of gender ideals upheld by society. If individuals fail to appropriately recreate accepted gender norms, they will fail to be recognized as fully human (Butler, 1990).

The theory of gender performativity works with Foucault's description of power and discipline, most specifically when individuals transgress their 'natural' performative gender. Gender discourses are maintained for the purpose of regulating sexuality – the body is formed through numerous political forces that embrace strategic interests in keeping bodies bound to a specific gender (Butler, 1990). Butler argues that in society, gender and sexual transgressions not only oppose normative gender performances, but also the transgressions appear to be a failure of self-surveillance and regulation. Butler (1990; 1993) argues that no girl is born feminine, but

rather society imposes feminine ideals on individuals born as girls, and additionally deters girls from enacting traits that have been discursively produced as masculine. In this argument, gender performativity is not a choice, it is part of the regulating practices in society, and is infused with power that is emitted from the dominant class (Butler, 1990; 1993).

### *Discipline and Power*

The concept of discipline is significant to this research, as it is intrinsically passed down to members of society. Foucault (1977) describes discipline as something that is neither an institution nor an apparatus, but rather a type of power. The power may not be explicitly visible, but its reality can be witnessed through interactions in many societal institutions, ranging from prisons to schools to the family. Foucault uses the metaphor of the Panopticon in order to illustrate the theory of surveillance and internalized discipline. The Panopticon is an architectural creation by Jeremy Bentham; at the centre of a circular prison is a watchtower with lights shining outwards towards the inmates' cells. Foucault (1977, 200) describes each prison cell as being "so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible". The illumination not only increase the visibility of the inmates' cells, but also make it impossible for the prisoners to see into the watchtower, compelling the inmates to believe they are under the constant gaze of a guard (Foucault, 1977; Brock Raby, & Thomas, 2011). Foucault uses this metaphor in order to demonstrate that visibility is a more effective disciplinary tool than darkness, as assumed constant attention forces individuals to be aware of their bodies, thereby causing external surveillance to be internalized through self-surveillance and self-regulation (Foucault, 1977; Brock et al., 2011). With the use of the Panopticon, visibility becomes a trap, as "[he] is seen, but does not see; [he] is the object of information, but never a subject in communication" (Foucault, 1977, 200). In this sense, constant fear of visibility

leads to social conformity and the creation of ‘docile bodies’, meaning that individuals inscribe the power relations in themselves, thereby playing a role wherein they are simultaneously the prisoner and the guard (Foucault, 1977; Brock et al., 2011).

Within the sport of rowing there is an accumulation of power – a body of control that subsists for the purpose of regulating the female lightweight body (Chapman, 1997). This network of power includes, but is not limited to the athlete themselves, the athlete’s coaches, teammates, and the institution of rowing itself. I have had significant personal experiences as a lightweight rower with regard to my body being disciplined by outside forces. For example, at a regatta years ago as my three crewmates and I stepped into the official weigh-in room, there was a tension among us as I had been close to the maximum weight the previous evening. As individuals within my crew began to step-up to the scale, the weigh-in official ‘jokingly’ evaluated and critiqued each female’s actual weight compared to the maximum weight. “You can have a steak and potatoes tonight for dinner!” He said to the lightest in our crew. “And you can have some pasta!” to the next girl “Maybe a sandwich for you!”

And then it was my turn. The other girls knew I had struggled to lose the last few pounds throughout the summer. I successfully made weight, but not before the official chided, “ Whoa – You are only allowed some salad!”

This example clearly demonstrates the theory of panoptic surveillance, as discussed by Foucault (1977), wherein frequent inspection by the watchmen (in this scenario the watchman is the act of weight making, or, more specifically, the weigh-in officiator) leads to a sense of perpetually being surveilled - leading to athletes verbalizing any transgressions in fear of punishment (Perryman, 2006; Foucault, 1977). In this example, my crewmates were all aware of my weight-

making tension, as they would have all known my pressure that morning on the scale anyway – both because of the officiator’s comments, and because of the requirement that lightweights weigh-in as a crew. In perpetuating the performance of ‘making weight’ everyone involved in the sport is participating in the cycle of succumbing, repeating, and reiterating what the women are to do. The Panopticon is an arena of visibility, however rather than prison cells, the athletes are prisoners in their own bodies, and surveillance comes from everyone. Within the sport of lightweight women’s rowing, watchmen exist everywhere, from the scale, to your best friends, to any number of people involved in the sport.

From this theoretical framework, it can be seen that gender performances and Panopticonic self-surveillance naturally emerge as a result of hegemonic discourse, specifically with regard to lightweight women’s rowers. By taking a feminist post-structuralist approach, and by using the theories of Foucault and Butler, it is my hope that this research project may begin to deconstruct the discourses that are currently executed and observable as ‘truth’ statements in the lives of young woman athletes.

### *Duality of Identity*

By acknowledging that gender is discursively produced, I am examining the duality that exists in female athletics, wherein sports produce strong, fit bodies that exist in opposition to traditional depictions of females as docile, small, and weak. In agreement with post-structural thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Patti Lather, and Chris Weedon, my research hinges on the notion that gender is not an inscribed, innate, or natural core of the self, but rather that it is produced through repeated acts that classify individuals as either masculine or feminine (Butler, 1990; Mikosza & Phillips, 1999). While the fit and fat selves live in binary opposition to one another, so too do the successful and failing lives. I contend however, the words female and

athlete continue to exist in mutual exclusivity as well. For lightweight women rowers, gender performances subsist in contradiction to one another, as athleticism is regarded as masculine however; the lean, 59kg bodies that the women are encased in are the very illustration of an ideal female being. In addition, the women must also be present in their bodies as watchmen, regulating and surveilling themselves to ensure not only that they perform appropriate gender traits, but also that they are diligent about maintaining their fit and slender bodies, so as to be eligible to participate in the sport.

In lightweight women's rowing there is an intersection of numerous different discourses surrounding the female gender; and through acculturation into the rowing society, lightweight women rowers begin to perform normative practices that include disordered eating, drastic weight loss mechanisms, and a fear of losing the body they worked so hard to earn (Chapman, 1997; Sykora et al., 1993). George (2005) states that because female athletes are still expected to conform to mainstream feminine beauty ideals, developing anorexia or bulimia is common as a means to manage both weight and muscle mass. Moreover, previous research has found that even after the athletes quit rowing, they continue to check in on their weight for their own psychological comfort (Chapman, 1997).

As Foucault (1977, 21) discusses through the metaphor of the Panopticon, corporal surveillance is predominantly experienced as an internalized and self-directed gaze wherein, "external surveillance becomes self-surveillance and self regulation". Women in general often feel pressure to achieve slender body ideals; this may be due in part to larger pedagogical practices that place women under constant internal surveillance and regulation (Rich & Evans, 2009). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990, 171) connects these two sentiments while discussing the work of Foucault when she states,

The strategy has been not to enforce a repression of their desires, but to compel their bodies to signify the prohibitive law as their very essence, style, and necessity. That law is not literally internalized but incorporated, with the consequence that bodies are produced which signify that law on and through.

What Butler is pronouncing is that women are not subdued in an outwardly oppressive manner, but rather, as Foucault describes with the metaphor of the Panopticon, visibility compels the women to re-signify their bodies as objects to regulate and discipline for the purpose of upholding societal norms, expectations, and values.

Lightweight women rowers exemplify a life of duality, a complicated relationship between maintaining both their athletic ability and their physical appearance. Although on the surface gender equality in sports has drastically increased women's participation, research has shown that the bodies of women athletes maintain more precedence than their athletic ability (Heywood, 2003; Duncan, 1994). In an effort to combat these attitudes, woman athletes often feel the pressure to strive toward the ideal feminine body, while simultaneously improving their athletic ability (Duncan, 1994). Foucault would argue that this is because multiple forces of power construct the athletes in contradictory ways.

I contend that disciplining behaviours have productive power over the lives of women, and that is exactly the response that hegemonic discourses intend to produce. As Butler states, "it is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created" (1990, 167). Women become anxious and concerned about the appearance of their feminine physique, and the performance of the feminine athlete becomes engrained in their very identity. Butler argues that gender is non-



existent; rather, gender as a reality is created solely through a reiteration of social performances that validate and sustain hegemonic domination (Butler, 1990).

### *Resisting Subordination*

When discussing lightweight women's rowing, it appears as though many women in the sport, and even those who exit the sport, continue to struggle with the maintenance of both gender and athletic performance. Since athleticism is a trait commonly linked to masculinity, but the bodies of lightweight women coincide with hegemonic ideals of the feminine body, this population of women exists in a body of mutual exclusivity. George (2005) declares that women who attempt to challenge or transgress gender norms in their appearance or behaviours often are confronted by stigmatization. Butler (1990) would agree with this sentiment, as she argues that society regularly punishes those who fail to perform their gender appropriately. These proclamations lead me to question the ways that lightweight female rowers resist normative discourses without facing devaluation. Is resistance even possible? Butler poses a similar question in the introduction to her book, *Bodies That Matter* (1993, x), asking,

If gender is constructed through relations of power and, specifically, normative constraints that not only produce but also regulate various bodily beings, how might agency be derived from this notion of gender as the effect of productive constraint?

In posing this question, Butler supposes that in some way individual agency is possible, so long as an individual recognizes they will never be unrestrained or free from their gender or other power constructs.

I argue that there is liberatory potential for female athletes to resist normative discourses, however due to Panoptic surveillance of gender performance, this opposition must remain bound within discourses of femininity (Mikosza & Phillips, 1999; Chapman, 1997). Foucault (1990, 95)

also agrees with the plausibility of resistant actions, stating, “Where there is power, there is resistance”, but these actions are bound by language-formed discourses. Post-structuralist thinkers argue that we can never get outside of these social inscriptions, because as much as we are intertwined in the discourses, we are also dependent on them (Hughes, 2012). Therefore, gender performativity is not a choice; rather it is part of the regulating practices in society that are infused with hegemonic power (Butler, 1990). It is impossible to shed gender entirely even during resistance, as society is dependant on the understanding of a normative gender dualism, and to wane from the grid of intelligibility would be to enact a performance with punitive consequences from the ‘watchtower’ – specifically those who maintain a gaze over lightweight women’s rowers (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1977). However, women in sports do have the ability, even within their discursively produced gender identities, to question normative discourses that attribute multiple contradictory meanings of femininity, slenderness, and athleticism (Chapman, 1997). While discussing gender performance, Butler (1990; 1993) claims that power is normalized by the reenactment of the performance. Therefore by resisting normative discourses of lightweight rowing, athletes would terminate the façade of the performance, which is the pathogenic cycle of attempting to be both athletic and feminine, and instead re-signify what it means to be both a slender female and strong athlete.

This research study will approach the topic of collegiate lightweight women’s rowing from a feminist post-structuralist perspective, primarily using the theories discussed by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Researching this topic adds to a growing amount of research on bodily regulation, particularly from a gendered perspective, as numerous studies theorize that female athletes face specific pressure to conform to an ideal body shape (Thompson & Sherman, 2009; George, 2005; Chapman, 1997). By exploring the discourses that perpetuate these

pressures, there is the possibility for deeper understanding and future change. It is imperative that I question why discourses of women in sports represent and reproduce women and athleticism in the manner they do. Moreover, we need to question why disordered eating, negative body image, and fear of portraying gender transgressions have been normalized and internalized into the lived realities of woman athletes. To conclude, bodily surveillance and performativity are constantly reiterated into the norms of lightweight women's rowing. Although lightweight women are bound by the regulations of their sport and hegemonic discourses in society, there is potential to oppose these normative behaviours, and re-signify women's rowing as a sport that no longer prides itself on the panoptic surveillance of pathogenic female body regulation.

CHAPTER TWO  
Literature Review

## **Literature Review**

### *Women's Acceptance into Rowing*

Prior to discussing the specific growth of women's rowing, it is imperative that a brief history of women's acceptance into the institution of sport is provided. In the early twentieth century, gender division in sport was not discussed, as the idea of vulnerable, fragile, beautiful, and feminine women competing in competitive sport was taboo. In 1912, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, creator of the modern Olympic Games, bluntly affirmed

A female Olympics would be inconvenient, uninteresting, un-aesthetic, and not correct.

The true Olympic hero is, in my opinion, the individual male adult. The Olympic Games have to be restricted to men; the role of women should first be to crown the winners

(Ferez, 2012, 273).

In 1919, women's athletics pioneer Alice Milliat<sup>1</sup> asked the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to allow women's competitions in the 1920 Antwerp Olympics. After the IOC initially refused this demand, Milliat founded La Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI) and led a quest to birth an independent and self-governing Women's Olympics (Ferez, 2012). This independence threatened the IOC, and in 1928, the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) and the IOC bargained with Milliat that in exchange for changing the name of the event to the Women's Games, 10 women's events would be incorporated into the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam. Although the IAAF and the IOC only included 5 women's events in those 1928 Olympic Games, this paved the future for women's liberation in sport (Ferez, 2012; Kidd, 1994).

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<sup>1</sup> Who interestingly enough competed in the sport of rowing (Kidd, 1994)

Following this initial wave of women's Olympic competition, numerous doctors contested this decision, citing many probable negative consequences that participation in athletics would have on women's biological functions with regard to fertility (Ferez, 2012). Biological function was not the only concern of governing men, but also a perceived lack of femininity that woman athletes were portraying in their sport. For example, the women's 800m track and field event was eliminated following the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, as IOC members and managers were appalled by the sweat and lack of femininity that the women displayed while competing. This event was not reinstated until the Rome Olympics in 1960 (Ferez, 2012).

Although the inclusion of women into the Olympics has advanced the acceptance of females in sport, women's collegiate athletics did not witness a surge towards equality until the passing of Title IX in 1972. Title IX is an American Federal law that states all colleges and schools in the United States must provide equal monetary and other supports to both male and female athletics (Polk, 1999; Kennedy, 2010). As a result, the number of woman rowers in North America has risen drastically in recent decades, as woman rowers often receive scholarships to American Universities in order to equalize the amount of funding that male sports (predominantly football) receive (Wallace, 1997). This influx has led to an increase in Canadian rowing as well, as the largest North American regattas bring together both Canadian and American crews, and rowers in high school are exposed to the numerous scholarships they may receive in America and in Canada to a lesser extent, if they continue to row (Polk, 1999).

In the 1970's women's rowing saw rapid advances in terms of acceptance, due in huge part to approval of Title IX, and the inclusion of (open weight) rowing at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal (Mallory, 2011). In 1984 women's international race lengths were changed from

1000m to 2000m—the same distance as men’s. Prior to this, women were viewed as incapable of completing the same distance as men (Mallory, 2011).

When looking exclusively at lightweight women’s rowing, the progress has remained slow, but forward moving. Lightweight women’s rowing as a sport was officially accepted into the Olympics at the 1996 Atlanta games, and has been in all subsequent games. However, although lightweight rowing has garnered some acceptance on the international level, heavyweight men’s rowing reigns supreme, with heavyweight women’s rowing also receiving substantial attention, specifically during the Olympic Games. As well, while men’s lightweight rowing has been allotted only two events at the Olympic level (the coxless four and the double sculls), international lightweight women’s rowing remains further restricted, receiving only one third of the number of seats as lightweight men – with their sole Olympic event being the double sculls.

While the paradigm of the sport institution continues to transform, the sport remains, as Ferez (2012, 272) states, “a place where gender division is institutionalized from a legal and an organizational point of view”. Indeed the continuing acceptance of women in sport is optimistic, however men and women in sport remain entirely alienated by gender. In rowing for example, regardless of ability, men and women are not eligible to compete in the same boats at internationally recognized regattas.

### *Pathogenic Weight Behaviours*

As a lightweight rower, individuals participate not only in competitive sport, but also in drastic, and often-dangerous weight-making rituals. There is a surplus of research that discusses not only the physical risks that weight-making athletes may acquire, but also the threat of possible mental and psychological affects. Moreover, much research has found that when the

weight-making athletes are women they are at an increased risk for the psychological hazards, as they face dual pressures: to make weight as a fit, lean individual, and to be successfully categorized as a feminine being. This research is fundamental in beginning to understand the female/athlete binary that exists for woman athletes.

As DeBruin, Woertman, Bakker, & Oudejan (2009) report, athletes who compete in aesthetic, endurance, and weight classed sports have frequently reported high levels of dieting and disordered eating symptoms. Disordered eating may be defined as sub-clinical or abnormal traits that parallel numerous traits of clinical eating disorders, however they do not meet the criterion as set forth by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.) (DSM-IV) to be defined as a clinical disorder. For example, as LeBrun and Rumball (2002) note, athletes displaying anorectic behaviours represent a unique sub-population of eating disordered persons, as their weight loss is conducted under the guise of enhancing athletic performance. Lebrun and Rumball (2002, 24) have categorized this guise as ‘anorexia athletica’, and state that in addition to being an athlete, individuals must also present the following criterion

- 1) Excessive fear of becoming fat
- 2) Restriction of caloric intake
- 3) Weight loss
- 4) No medical disorder
- 5) Gastrointestinal symptoms

For many woman athletes struggling with anorexia athletica, the body is regarded as something that should be managed, regulated, measured, and compared against (Nordbo, Espeset, Guliksen, Skarderud, and Holte, 2006). Anorexia athletica is often perceived as a gateway to success and



accomplishment in sports, rather than as an unhealthy disorder (Nordbo et al., 2006). As Buchholz, Mack, McVey, Feder and Barrowman (2008, 309-310) identify

... The similarity between traits of ‘good athletes’ and characteristics of anorexic individuals, such that both groups will train/exercise excessively, deny pain or injury, and are selflessly committed to sometimes unattainable and unhealthy body composition goals.

From this excerpt, one may observe that often the very characteristics of a dedicated athlete are the same attributes that assist in fostering an eating disorder. The pressures to push one to limits that are sometimes unattainable are often self-induced, for example, athletes participating in endurance sports claim that excess weight is viewed as impairment to performance (Chapman, 1997).

Anorectic behaviours may also be endorsed, both in conscious and unintended ways, by coaches and sport personnel who share the belief that a lower weight and body fat percentage will result in enhanced athletic performance. Athletes have reported reducing body fat in order to increase speed, strength, and endurance, thereby endorsing beliefs of the sport, rather than questioning the foundation or validity of the statements (Chapman, 1997). This endorsement is interesting as research suggests that muscular, aerobic, and anaerobic endurance has been found to decrease during periods of rapid weight loss (Sundgot-Borgen & Garthe, 2011). Regardless, numerous athletes, specifically those in weight regulated sports, such as lightweight rowing, have stated that dieting and weight loss are central to their everyday lives (Sundgot-Borgen & Garthe, 2011). Therefore, I suggest that in the sport of lightweight rowing (and other weight making sports), eating disorders have been normalized and deemed by the athletes as an inevitable, albeit negative, aspect to the sport (Chapman, 1997; Byrne & Mclean, 2001). In fact,

in multiple studies (Chapman, 1997; Sykora et al., 1993) athletes state that after the season ends, or as a transgression throughout the season, binge eating is a common occurrence. Sykora et al., (1993, 206) describe binge eating as “the discrete consumption of large amounts of food coupled with a sense of loss of control, and followed by emotional distress”. According to the lightweight rowers that Chapman (1997) interviewed in her qualitative study, when binge eating occurs during the season, athletes often participate in a confession with their teammates. The unnecessary calorie consumption accompanying binge eating is regarded as selfish and a hindrance to the success of the team, therefore the women view the admission to their crewmates as both an acknowledgement of what they did, and a form of surveillance to ensure they will not binge eat again.

While anorexia athletica might be viewed as a serious disorder that affects both the body and the mind, there are numerous other methods enacted by weight making athletes that are often regarded as practical and necessary to the sport. Some of these sub-clinical traits include food restriction via caloric and fluid reduction, forced vomiting, use of laxatives, diuretics or other purgatives, and over-exercising (Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Sundgot-Borgen & Garthe, 2011; Sykora et al., 1993; Karlson, Becker, & Merkur, 2001). Additionally, athletes report the use of extreme dehydration immediately prior to a weigh-in. Both passive (such as a hot bath or the use of a sauna) and active (such as sweat runs, i.e. running in a garbage bag or a sweater) tactics are common (Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Chapman, 1997).

The health consequences associated with extreme weight loss methods exist as both short and long-term issues. Short-term health problems include dizziness, hot flashes, nausea, headaches, and nose bleeds following weight loss periods (Sundgot-Borgen & Garthe, 2011). Additionally, dehydration is a common concern among weight making athletes, which results in an impairment

of the thermoregulatory functioning. Athletes usually intend to lose body weight via dehydration over a 1-7 day period, however loss of fat and muscle mass is unavoidable during periods of fasting or caloric reduction, especially with regard to individuals who are already lean (Sundgot-Borgen & Garthe, 2011). These short-term disturbances may be an indication of future long-term health problems; for example, athletes are at an increased risk for deficiencies of calcium, iron, and micronutrients, and studies have found that cognitive functioning and psychological well being may also be impaired with increases in anger, fatigue, and an impairment in short-term memory (Sundgot-Borgern & Garthe, 2011; Karlson at al., 2001; Sykora et al., 1993).

Lightweight women's rowers also are at increased risk for developing symptoms of the female athlete triad, which is the interrelationship that exists between energy intake and food availability, menstrual functioning, and a girl or women's bone mineral density. Symptoms of female athlete triad are concerning, as there is potential for long-term dangerous health effects, including eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, functional hypothalamia, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis (Sundgot-Borgen & Garthe, 2011).

Female rowers who participate in weight cycling for many years (losing and gaining weight repeatedly) may have a lower metabolic rate than athletes with no history of weight fluctuation. Many experienced lightweight rowers have discussed increasing difficulties in making weight and report needing to enlist more aggressive weight loss methods. Multiple ethnographic studies have exposed that often the athletes fear gaining weight or getting fat, even when the season had ended, or when the athlete has left the sport (Chapman, 1997; George, 2005). In the long-term, the stress of persistently denying hunger for prolonged periods of time may lead to a food fixation and an obsession with body weight. Both of these have been shown to lead to mental

exhaustion in current and former athletes (Stirling & Kerr, 2012; Sundgot-Borgen & Garthe, 2011; Chapman, 1997).

Constantly guarding the food entering and leaving their bodies, many lightweight women's rowers report that dieting and food are main topics of conversation among the team. As Chapman states,

New rowers would learn the principles of restricting fats and emphasizing carbohydrates from experienced members of the team. New fat-free recipes and discoveries of low-fat foods were shared as women drove to workouts together. The norms directing food restriction were reinforced through the rowers' informal monitoring of each other's food consumption (1997, 212).

The rowers in Chapman's (1997) study specify that often lightweight women will coordinate food consumption to align with other aspects of their training regimen, using eating schedules in order to assist in food control and intake. This is further indication of the constant regulation that lightweight women have over their bodies. The literal starvation and physical measures enacted in order to lose weight also affect individual women's body image. Athletes routinely compare and compete with other teammates with regard to physical appearance and athletic performance. Therefore, in lightweight women's rowing, athletes are not competing against each other solely to win a seat in a varsity boat, but also they rival for lowest weight, biggest weight loss during the season, and how 'fit' they look in their athletic clothing (Stirling & Kerr, 2012).

### *The Feminization of Athletes*

Although women athletes are increasingly accepted in Western society, and women's sports have begun to receive positive recognition via televised events and discussion of major events, the excitement surrounding women's sports is insignificant in comparison to men's sports. With

women's sports, often it is not the athleticism of the women themselves, but rather their femininity that garners viewer's attention. For example, in an article critiquing the many controversies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Thompson and Sherman (2009) discuss the clothing differences among men and women participating in the same events. Scholars have found that women athletes receive more press attention by posing for sultry photographs than for competing in championship games (Heywood, 2003). Similarly, the governing body for soccer stated prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics that the woman players needed to wear more tightly fitting, 'feminine' clothing in order to draw more spectators to their games. Managers of women's soccer and the Olympic Games thought that by wearing more feminine apparel, the women would be offered endorsements from cosmetic and fashion companies. In other sports, while men are seen wearing loose fitting, more practical uniforms, women are regularly squeezed into tight fitting clothes, baring their midriffs, and wearing running shorts that resemble bikini bottoms (Thompson & Sherman, 2009). There is no definitive reason why this happens, however, as Ferez (2012) contends, historically women were actively dissuaded from participating in sports, as they were viewed as modest, vulnerable, and beautiful creatures—characteristics that stereotypically exist in opposition to the intensity of athleticism. These clothing choices are used to explicitly define women as feminine beings, as well as athletes. Fundamentally, women are constantly hyper-sexualized in sport as they are in all facets of society, as the femininity and sexualization of women athletes is the principal method used to garner attention toward their sports.

While women are gaining more freedom to participate in athletics, sporting practices such as gender division among athletes, guarantee that gender remains the primary demarcation for women athletes. This demarcation occurs in regards to reproducing women in athletics as

women who participate in sports, rather than as athletes with no further clarification required (Mean & Kassing, 2008). In an attempt to aid women's increasing participation in sports, numerous scholars propose that women engage in an 'apologetic defense', which is defined as "a coping strategy that allows a woman to compensate for the perceived masculinization effect of participating in sports by exaggerating femininity" (Malcolm, 2003, 1388). What exists at the foundation of the apologetic defense is women athletes' overemphasis of their femininity. It is thought that this occurs as a measure to compensate for a socially perceived masculinity that accompanies women athletes. Often woman athletes struggle to embrace both femininity and athleticism, habitually overemphasizing femininity in order to remain attractive to men (George, 2005; Malcolm, 2003; Chapman, 1997). The apologetic defense also occurs as a way of confirming what women athletes are not, namely, lesbian. As Malcolm (2003) states, the apologetic defense is closely linked to both sexuality and homophobia, and is used as a way of combating athlete's fears of being labeled a lesbian. With their declaration of athleticism, women athletes unwittingly assume membership into one of two conflicting female identity options in sport. As Mean and Kassing (2008) contend,

... This includes being framed as masculine and hence lesbian resulting in derogation, exclusion, and invisibility, or subjecting oneself to re/producing traditional heterosexual femininity and 'softer' forms of masculinity like the 'tomboy' to achieve a form of inclusion (130).

In order for women to preserve their femininity therefore, scholars suggest that parameters of the female body are enacted via the employment of self-regulating mechanisms. These performances include conforming to stereotypical heterosexual feminine beauty ideals, such as wearing hair ribbons and makeup during competitions, wearing dresses and 'girly' outfits, and

overemphasizing the desire to have heterosexual relationships, for example, by discussing boyfriends, husbands, and potential children (Mean & Kassing, 2008; Adams, Schmitke, & Franklin, 2005; Malcolm, 2003). Apologetic defense mechanisms are also viewable with regard to sport participation. These actions include: downplaying the importance of competition, aggression, and personal athletic achievements; and emphasizing the importance of friendship and cooperation. Additionally, Malcolm (2003) questions whether female athletes enact an apologetic defense out of a need or yearning to validate their femininity to others. Additionally, she contends that these over-feminizing actions are only deemed important when the athlete is motivated by a fear of being labeled as masculine or a lesbian – explaining that the apologetic defense need not be applied if that trepidation is not present.

#### *Negotiating Bodily Control in Athletics*

With regard to the relationship between woman athletes in university and body image, George (2005) states that there has been a paradigm shift from the past ideal of ultra-thinness; now it is believed that an appropriate athletic body necessitates that women be muscular and toned in addition to being thin. Female musculature is now seen as the standard for female beauty, however, as George (2005) suggests, negotiating the specific amount of appropriate muscle is another area of pressure for women, as having not enough muscle is regarded as unfit, while excessive muscle is regarded as a violation similar to having too much body fat. Moreover, women remain under pressure to balance contradictory body ideals: to be lean, toned, and feminine, while constantly striving to get stronger and more muscular in order to compete productively in their sport (Mosewich, Vangool, Kowalski, & McHugh, 2009). From this understanding, one can connect that the discourses of the fit body intrinsically coexist and cannot be separated from discourses of the fat body. Moreover, while the fat body is coupled with

failure, the fit body is often associated with personal wellbeing (Duncan, 1994). This may explain why in numerous studies, girls and women have measured their personal, athletic, and educational successes on some level to the outward appearance of their bodies (Duncan, 1994; Chapman, 1997; George, 2005; Rich & Evans, 2009).

While the fit and fat body exist in opposition to one another, the female appearance body and the women's athletic body engage in a complicated and interconnected relationship, wherein the desired body is altered depending on the circumstance (at a sporting event or in an appearance emphasized environment). These pressures create a situation where woman athletes can never have a perfectly ideal body, to themselves or to others. As a lightweight rower, the body becomes an object that is not only inspected by general society in order to maintain dominant discourses of femininity, but also by those within the sport who oversee the women's fitness levels and weight (Chapman, 1997). Mosewich et al. (2009) describe this same surveillance for women track athletes, in which athletes, teammates, coaches, and parents also use the body as a tool of comparison.

To individuals outside of the intimate rowing group, the bodies of lightweight women may be viewed as ideal. However to the athletes, their teammates, and their coaches, to exceed 59kg, eat excessive amounts of food, and have too much extra fat or not workout frequently enough is tantamount to failure. Numerous writings have exemplified this failure. One such example comes from an interview with members of the Australian women's lightweight double sculls rowing team prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, wherein the Australian duo described their Finnish opponents as being 'fat' and 'tubby'. Perhaps the most ironic aspect of this anecdote is that while the Australians were eliminated in the semi finals, the 'tubby' Finnish crew with the less feminine bodies advanced to the finals and won a silver medal (Thompson &



Sherman, 2009). What this example reveals is that perhaps success in the sport of rowing is not established by winning alone, but also by a woman's ability to make weight and look appropriate at that weight.

Additionally, the association that athletes construct with regard to weight-making and rowing ability should be discussed. Often success and failure are deemed as related to an individual's ability to monitor her weight and control her eating. Often crewmates reinforce this belief by informally monitoring each other's weight. An example of this team supervision and scrutiny arises from a discussion that Chapman had with one lightweight woman who was concerned with the eating habits of another on her team. Chapman describes, "... she had told a crewmate who could not stop eating cookies that if she did not 'want gold' she should quit (the team) immediately so the team could replace her" (1997, 212). Understanding that many rowers have this mentality is essential, as it says a lot about the culture of the sport, and the attitudes that are encouraged of athletes, specifically those competing as lightweights.

From this literature review, it is evident that my project is relevant for numerous reasons. This research will allow me to make connections between the historical, physical, social, political and cultural components that constitute lightweight women's rowing. In doing this, I will be filling a major gap in the literature with regard to creating a holistic account of the lived experiences of lightweight women rowers.

In order to conduct this research I accessed the population, specifically with regard to women's body image and gender identity when competing in lightweight women's rowing. Much of the previous research has tip toed around issues of body image and idealistic bodies in young adult athletes, however I contended that by conducting one-on-one interviews and talking to the niche population explicitly, I might begin to uncover how body image is negotiated in

lightweight women rowers. Not only do I focus on what body types constitute a model of female athleticism and how these ideals are created, but I also explore why and how these ideals are maintained. Within the interviews, I addressed issues of gender identity that the women face on a regular basis. Finally, in carrying out this research through the lens of feminist post-structuralism I was able to add a theoretical level to the research that is uncommon in much of the previous writing regarding women athletes, and lightweight women rowers specifically.

CHAPTER THREE  
Methodology

## **Methodology**

“To do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the centre of one’s inquiry” (Lather, 1991, 71).

Brayton (1997) contends that, “patriarchal values and beliefs in our social world shape both the construction and definition of how research is done and how knowledge is determined” (Feminist criticisms of the qualitative/quantitative debate, paragraph 4). Often ‘male knowledge’ is admitted into society as ‘knowledge’, via discourses, thereby silencing women’s understandings of the world. In order to contest the overpowering patriarchal vision that is often inherent in research, my project was shaped by the lens of feminist post-structuralism. This perspective was ideal as it incorporates underlying assumptions of two uniquely distinct philosophical approaches, which provides an avenue for women’s lived realities to be contextualized.

### *Qualitative Research*

The methodology that I chose for this study is qualitative research. Qualitative research, as Brayton (1997) describes, refers to the collection and analysis of material, while seeking to uncover meaning and understanding of participant’s experiences. There are numerous objectives associated with a qualitative research methodology, with perhaps the greatest intention being to contextualize the multiplicities of lightweight women’s rowing, as described by the research participants. This contextualization is done by collecting data from a particular setting or source, placing a significant emphasis on subjective, personal meaning making, and providing a voice for those who might otherwise go unheard (Brayton, 1997). In conducting qualitative research, I aimed to use a particular kind of data, interviews, in order to explore individual qualities of human existence (Pomerantz, 2008).

### *Feminism*

Feminist research creates a space where debates over power and knowledge production can occur freely, allowing for the renegotiation of meaning. I contend that the overarching goal of feminist research is to question, critique, and undo the history of invisibility surrounding women's individual experiences, as well as to question years of distorted stories that are regarded as the 'truth' in order to end the unequal social positioning of women (Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1987). Feminist research is of particular importance to my study, as I looked at the ways in which women athletes negotiate their way through incompatible discourses of femininity and athleticism.

### *Post-structuralism*

The concept of 'knowledge' is intimately linked to post-structuralist theory, as post-structuralism focuses on the use of language used to demarcate the world (Brayton, 1997; Weedon, 1987). With post-structuralist theory, language is regarded as the most essential factor for analyzing social organizations, social meanings, power, and discourses (Weedon, 1987). Language is used to construct what is acceptable as the 'truth' as it defines and contests individual consciousness and subjectivity. Building off of post-structuralist theory, discourses are a means through which power functions in society, and are perpetuated via language. Therefore, I used post-structural research, in order to understand the type of language and discourses that are used to perpetuate the performances that lightweight female rowers regularly enact (Foucault, 1983; Butler, 1990).

## **Methods**

### *Recruitment*

Recruitment for my project was conducted via word of mouth and snowballing, or the practice of asking one candidate to take part in the study, and then asking them to recruit friends (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). A poster detailing an overview of the study and participation criterion was distributed to female candidates regarding the project. As a former lightweight rower, my access to the population was easy to obtain, and participants included former and current teammates, and other acquaintances that take part in rowing at the university level. Numerous times I stated to participants that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary. I provided both my phone number and email address in order for participants to contact me should they have had any inquiries, or require additional information regarding the study.

### *Participant Sample*

All of the participants were involved in rowing at the university level, and expressed interest in being involved in the study. In order to be considered for this project, interested candidates had to have participated on a competitive (racing) rowing team for at least two seasons<sup>2</sup>, with at least one of these seasons spent competing as a lightweight athlete. The reason for this requirement was to ensure that the athletes were not novice rowers, and that they had spent a considerable amount of time within the rowing culture. All of the women I interviewed were experienced lightweight rowers, with the most 'novice' woman still having rowed for two and a half years. Initially my goal was to interview women who were exclusively undergraduate students, however when I was locating participants I did recruit two women who were in graduate school, as they showed extreme interest in participating. All of the women remained within my anticipated age range of 18-24. I chose to interview women in university as opposed to high school for a number of reasons. I wanted to interview women who were a little older, and

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<sup>2</sup> On water racing seasons are autumn (September-November), spring (April-May), and summer (May-August).

perhaps more versed with the sport of rowing, so that they might have greater depth to their answers. Also, I was more interested in interviewing this group of women because I *was* one of these women (however I did not row lightweight in high school), and in asking them questions I had also asked myself, I was able to compare their responses with my personal experiences as well. While ideally I would have interviewed women who were ethnically diverse, since I was picking from a sample that is pre-existing, and an overwhelming majority of university lightweight women’s rowers in Ontario are Caucasian, so too were all of my participants. Of the seven participants, four universities were represented, three southern Ontario universities, and one American University. The woman who attends an American university is a Canadian originally from southwestern Ontario. While at university she rowed as a heavyweight, however, upon returning to Canada during summers she would compete as a lightweight. Figure 4.1 provides some basic information regarding the participants.

[Figure 4.1]

Chosen Name	Age	Years Rowed lightweight	Why do you row?
Chantelle	24	8	“The competition”.
Vanessa	18	4 ½	“You can always push yourself to get faster”.  “The feeling at the end of the race, which is pretty irreplaceable”.
Marie	22	2	Fitness, and the sport has become a passion.
Samantha	21	2	“ I like the competitive outlet, training gives me purpose each day” .
Laura	19	6	The friends and community around rowing. To keep in shape.
Jody	21	4	“Because I love being fit”. Rowing can be so rewarding.
Alex	22	2	I love how fit you have to be, and how competitive it is.

*Feminist post-structural interviews*

The interviewing style for this research was feminist post-structural. In feminist interviewing, the central tenet is that there is an emphasis on the reduction of power between the researcher and those being researched. As Ann Oakley suggests, (cited in Esterberg, 2002, 92) “the preservation and hierarchy between interviewer and interviewee makes for poor interviews. How can researchers expect intimacy when they are not willing to reciprocate”? The hierarchical relationship between researcher and researched may be combated via strategic disclosure on the part of the researcher, which involves either sharing personal information, or at the very least a willingness to reveal information that guided me to this topic. During the interviews I had to consider the power forces that were at work in the interviewing process, as DeVault and Gross (2006, 181) consider,

In the conduct of any interview research, feminists must maintain a reflexive awareness that research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and line of power, but, rather, are always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference, and significance.

Additionally, during interviews I was conscious to ensure that I remained engaged in the practice of listening, fully. This involved listening to more than just the words. I also had to consider context, tone, environment, and emotions that were impacted by the words the participants were saying. In addition to these considerations, I remained attentive to the structures and organization of language, talk and discourse that occurred between the participants and myself, as this is essential when producing post-structural research as well.

By including a post-structural approach to the interview process, I was attempting to encourage the collaboration of meaning making between the participants and myself, with the



understanding that meaning is co-constructed during the interview process. Ultimately, I maintained the overriding discretion of what is included in the final text, but as a feminist researcher, I had to ensure that I included the women being interviewed in a way that would honour their experiences and the multiplicities of their stories (DeVault & Gross, 2006). Post-structural interviewing acknowledges that contradictions, multiplicities, and fluidity of identity will shape the data collected. It was neither my job nor my intent to force these various narratives to cohere in order to suggest an overarching ‘Truth’. Instead, I attempted to remain open to the differences and inconsistencies in and across interviews in order to tell the women’s multiple stories, rather than attempting to produce a singular, unifying narrative about lightweight women’s rowing. In this way, I was able to collect and explicate rich data that reflects the complexity of the topic.

### *Procedures*

This study explored prevalent ‘truths’ that have been accepted and enacted by female lightweight rowers as a way of making meaning and understanding their experiences as women in sport. The methodology for this research is qualitative, with the predominant method being interviews, which is particularly valuable for learning about the lived experiences of the participants. Interviews conducted through a feminist post-structural framework demand more than minimal reciprocity, as there are numerous power structures at work, which generates the potential for conversations regarding the resistance of normalized performances. In an effort to move toward reciprocity in research, Lather stipulates that interviews must be “conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner that requires self-disclosure on the part of the researcher [to] encourage reciprocity” (1991, 60). Therefore, interviews needed to be mutual and dialogic, with the intention of the interviewer/participant negotiating meaning collaboratively (Lather, 1991).

Dialectic exists between individual self-understanding and facilitating context that encourages questioning of the implicit and taken-for-granted beliefs and influence that cultures have. Lather (1991, 61) contends that: “In the nexus of that dialectic, lies the opportunity to create reciprocal, dialogic research designs which lead both to self-reflection and provide a forum in which to test the usefulness, the resonance, of conceptual and theoretical formations”.

The interviews within this study touched on some personal topics, relating specifically to the participants’ relationships, and possible sport-based eating disorders. In order to ease participants into the more in depth questions, I began by asking general questions that relate to the sport of rowing and responsibilities as an athlete. Beginning the conversation with broad open-ended questions assisted in making the participants feel comfortable, as well as encouraging the women to be involved in the discussion of the sport (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2012). As the interview process progressed, I was able to engage in extremely valuable discussions relating to binary constructions of ‘female’ and ‘athlete’, as well as ‘fit’ and ‘thin’ that the participants experience in their everyday lives.

By conducting one-on-one interviews, I hoped that participants might feel more comfortable with discussing intimate and private aspects of their lives. Throughout the process I found this to be true, as the women were extremely open and willing to answer all of the questions that I asked. I also anticipated that by conducting individual interviews, I would acquire a deepened understanding of each participant’s experience, as the participants could relay their understanding and the personal meaning making they gained through their lived knowledge (Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1987). I also found this to be true, as I learned many intimate and personal stories surrounding the women’s experiences within the sport.

Attached, as *Appendix B*, is a pre-interview questionnaire. The questionnaire is concerned with demographic information, choosing a research pseudonym, and basic information relating to participants experiences as an athlete. This form was helpful in compiling demographics, and also with learning participants' background information.

The accompanying interview guide is attached as *Appendix C*. While I included these questions in order to cover the same general topics among all of the participants, I allowed for freedom and flexibility within each interview, because I recognize that the lived experiences of each individual are different, and that distinctive questions would elicit varying responses among the research participants (Lather, 1991). Participants were encouraged to move away from specific questions as they saw fit, in order to provide a meaningful depiction of their experiences. Asking open-ended questions proved to assist both the participants and myself in laying a framework of topics that we should discuss.

Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed, and field notes were made after interviews to assist in remembering the atmosphere, the participant's body language, and the setting in which the interviews took place (Esterberg, 2002).

### *Setting*

The interviews were conducted in a variety of places, from coffee houses to a personal home, to a university-dining hall. In addition, because of an inability to meet in person, one interview was conducted online via Skype. I understand that conducting interviews online will change the dynamic of the conversation, as the participant has unlimited time to provide an answer. When I had to determine whether the benefits outweighed the drawbacks however, I determined that in this instance they did, as interviewing these seven different women would

prove to provide extremely diverse perspectives, and conducting the interview online would not take away from that.

### *Obtaining Consent*

Ethical approval for conducting this research was obtained from the Brock University Research Ethics Board (file #11-308). Interested participants were required to return a signed consent form. As all of the participants were university students over the age of 18, it was unnecessary for anyone to complete a parental consent form. An information letter and informed consent form were distributed either in person or via e-mail to potential participants, which provided attention to important details surrounding the project.

With regard to potential issues surrounding informed consent, voluntary participation, and voluntary withdrawal, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study or refuse to answer any question(s) without penalty, both in the information letter as well as prior to the interviews taking place. All data obtained throughout the study will remain confidential and will be held in a locked cabinet at Brock University until completion of this study.

### *Ethical Concerns with Feminist Post-structural research*

It is vital that as a feminist post-structural researcher I remain consistent with the theoretical framework, as I must be vigilant in assuring that I do not reaffirm the very discourses that I am attempting to critique – although as a researcher I am never fully able to escape this as a possibility. Moreover, it is important that I do not attempt to impose my beliefs and biases on the participants (Lather, 1991). Feminist research strives to question histories that have been written through a male centered lens. With the inclusion of women's stories, feminist research adds layers to what was previously held as 'truth'. The deepening of the context via women's

stories can never be claimed as a complete truth however, as post-structural work works against claims of truth, totality, and certainty (Lather, 1991). As there is no absolute certainty to uncover, I must accept that what I find is part of a multidimensional, intersecting, and fluid truth (Lather, 1991). As Meese states, “What feminist and deconstruction call for is the displacement of hierarchization as an ordering principle” (as cited in Lather, 1991, 82). Uncovering numerous narratives without declaring one as victor is at the centre of feminist post-structural research, and I had to be observant that I did not unknowingly assign one perspective as the alpha narrative.

Additionally, while I was conducting interviews and analyzing data, I had to remain vigilant to ensure that I was neither robbing the women of their agency, nor insinuating that they are unaware of why they do what they do. For example, I cannot make the assumption that the women I spoke with are not making a choice to live and perpetuate common performances of petite woman athletes, as perhaps they are. My duty as a feminist post-structural researcher was to report but not blame or oppress participants’ accounts; my focus was to generate experiences of the women, as told by the women, without victimizing or glorifying their actions (Lather, 1991; Pomerantz, 2008).

Perhaps the two grandest ethical challenges that I faced during this project were 1) To honor the multiplicity of the project, by acknowledging that there are multiple perspectives to the same story, and; 2) To unearth power structures. Rather than persecute or praise I aimed to describe how power structures operate to authenticate a particular way of being.

### *Reflexivity as a Researcher*

“...Developing the skills of self-critique, of a reflexivity which will keep us from becoming impositional and reifiers ourselves remains to be done” (Lather, 1991, 80).

As Lather (1991) proclaims, reflexivity is imperative as a critical post-structural researcher. I encouraged myself to contemplate new or different perspectives and intelligibilities than I am accustomed to, because although I was produced to understand the world in a specific manner, mine is only one perspective in a greater, grander story (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). In thinking critically, I invited the presence of a critical lens in my research, which I hoped would allow me to “produce different knowledge, and produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, 1). Reflexivity is a methodological tool that ensures researchers do not make unknowing assumptions, or become guided by prior ‘truth’ facts. This may be unavoidable however, as some research is agenda driven and relies on mock reflexivity to legitimize findings. As a researcher, I was required to take into account the discourses of the self that guide individual exploration. Studies that are not committed wholly to self-critique may have their legitimacy questioned, which some might argue is fatal to the academic integrity of the researcher (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Lather, 1991; Pomerantz, 2008). As Lather argues, “our own frameworks of understanding need to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail” (1991, 80).

As I conducted my research from a feminist post-structural perspective, I needed to consider the power differentials that were present between the participants and myself during the interview process. It was imperative that as the researcher, I recognized that I was in a position of dominance, meaning that the language I use to present my findings, and to pose my questions as opposed to others, provides the precedent from which readers will come to understand the meanings of the stories I tell. As an individual with prior experience and an established knowledge of lightweight women’s rowing, it was important that I remain attentive to ensure I was not making personal knowledge claims, or alleging that I uncovered solutions to issues that

the lightweight women I interviewed deal with (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). This was challenging during the interview process, as I was studying a culture in which I am intimately entwined, and many of the women's stories were strikingly similar to situations I had been in as well.

Throughout the research process I had to remain critical and conscious to not make assumptions that the women are or were unknowing of their subordination, as they may be more aware than my assumptions suggest (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1987).

Finally, as a researcher, I aimed to recognize that I was a key instrument in both the data collection, as well as the analysis of this study. To encourage reflexivity throughout my research I kept a self-reflection journal of my personal research process, as numerous researchers have suggested that it would be beneficial for me to keep a record of my evolving understanding of the complexities of my research project (Ortlipp, M., 2008; Watt, D., 2007). The following are two journal entries that I produced while conducting the interviews with the women.

I wish I had interviewed myself prior to conducting interviews, because now I cannot in any type of 'objective manner' interview myself without considering the statements provided by the women I interviewed. For example, I do not know what my answer to the question "do you consider yourself a typical lightweight" would have been prior to conducting these interviews. But now, after listening to the women's definitions on what a typical lightweight is, I do seem to consider myself one. I am close to weight, sometimes slightly above, and while I have never had to 'sweat down' in a sauna to get to weight, weight control is a necessary aspect of my training and my everyday life, and living a lightweight lifestyle prompts this. (March 8, 2013)

I feel an immense amount of pressure now that I am conducting the data analysis. Am I going to be able to represent these women in a manner that is truly reflective of their lives? Will I be doing an injustice by excluding some of their great points and perspective due to a lack of adequate space within this article? Am I twisting their data to reflect my agenda? Am I representing lightweight women as deranged, obsessive and pathologic? Today is a hard day emotionally – Having an intimate understanding of this culture means that I cannot let these women, let us, down by being indolent in my analysis (March 27, 2013)

Conducting research within a culture I am intimately familiar with was extremely fun, challenging, and stressful. I often found it difficult to produce writing because I spent such a considerable amount of time questioning and analyzing the women's data and my own understanding of lightweight women's rowing. Being an insider researcher and actively participating in the culture I was analyzing was beneficial, as I was able to clearly understand and relate to many of the topics the women discussed. Conversely, I often found myself struggling, and questioning myself as a researcher, worried that I was too intimately connected with the persons and research I was uncovering. The writing process was stressful as I was attempting to understand lightweight women's rowing from a feminist post-structural perspective, which entailed actively questioning and critiquing my own participation in the sport. Overall, the experience of being an insider researcher was powerful, and I was able to learn more about myself, lightweight women's rowers and the culture of the sport in Ontario, than I could have anticipated. Additional excerpts from my reflexivity journal are provided throughout the data analysis.

### *Collection and Data Analysis*

In the process of qualitative research, data analysis is the process of creating meaning out of raw materials. The first task of data analysis was to audiotape and transcribe the participants' interviews. Following the interview period, each of the interviews were put through a rigorous organization and coding period. From this, themes and overarching discourses were observed, and will be discussed in the following chapter. From a feminist post-structural perspective I was looking specifically for themes of gender, including femininity and normative performances. Additionally, I continued to question the possible existence of resistance present within lightweight women's rowing



*Relevance of Findings*

The findings from this project will contribute to the overall writing of Women's Studies, and specifically, add to the growing body of literature regarding women in sport. Perhaps what I most hope to encourage throughout this project is the deconstruction of socially scripted 'truth' statements (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Lather, 1991) relating to gender, athletes, and sports. By giving a voice to the women involved, perhaps my research will allow an opportunity for the stories of other women to be added to complex narratives that form social discourses.

*Strengths and Limitations*

While this research provides insights into the typically un-discussed world of lightweight women's rowing, I understand that the strength of the research might be questioned, as it cannot be applied to a greater population. I find this critique to be unfounded however, as I believe that any research that contributes to a greater understanding of one person's life story is worth conducting.

From a personal perspective, some might argue that this research would be strengthened if I were unfamiliar with the group I am researching. I contend however that my association as a woman lightweight rower is an asset, as perhaps it was easier to erase the researcher/researched power structures that are typically at play in qualitative research, and it may have been a more relaxed interview setting for the participants.

The findings from this research are important, as they verbalize the lived experiences of a specific group of women, in a specific location, at a specific moment in time. There are some limitations to this type of research, as poststructuralists face uncertainty around the ability of qualitative research to capture individuals lived experiences (Esterberg, 2002). This is because "if there is no one objective reality, then a researcher cannot, of course, capture that reality in a

study” (Esterberg, 2002, 21). While a lack of one central ‘truth’ means that I am unable to provide a holistic account of the participants ‘reality’, my research remains beneficial in contributing to a growing body of women’s writing on the female experience. While participants are only providing a small glimpse into a particular context of their lives, this information should not be dismissed as illegitimate. It is my hope that their voices add layers of depth, complexity, and richness to women’s experience of their gendered identity.

CHAPTER FOUR  
Data Analysis

## **Data Analysis**

While feminist post-structural researchers contend that there is no verifiable or ontological ‘truth’, many would agree that women’s bodies are sites of both discipline and power in society. As a lightweight rower, I knew that discipline was an integral component for success within the sport, but I failed to understand how power surrounded, and was woven into the fabric of rowing. Interviewing these women provided me with a surreal perspective. I was both the researcher and the researched. For this reason, at times I felt an immense pressure to adequately embody how lightweight women’s rowers experience their lives. Through the analysis of these interviews however, I came to realize what feminist post-structural research represents, an inability to present a holistic or broad account. While I am presenting a glimpse into the lives of some lightweight women at one particular point in time, this is not a complete picture, nor will it ever be. In fact, a ‘complete’ picture is never desirable, as that would represent a smoothed over narrative that generalizes data, thereby privileging some information while ignoring others. Feminist post-structuralism represents a refusal to generalize, and a desire to represent life in all its messy and contradictory forms.

The women in this study spoke of both the struggles and accomplishments that came with being a petite female athlete. Subsequent to the theoretical groundwork of this project, the following themes will be discussed: surveillance over the body; body image; feminizing and masculinizing within sport; inequalities and excuse making; and the potential for resistance. While the five themes are being presented as distinct from one another, in reality this is not the case. These themes are extremely muddled, interwoven, and inseparable, and at times it will be impossible to discuss the importance and repercussions of the participant’s words without discussing how they connect to the other themes.

In interviewing the women I found that the culture of the sport is extremely subjective, in even the most basic sense. For example, the women were unable to agree upon a definition of what a 'typical' lightweight women's rower is. Additionally, I asked each of the seven women if they would consider themselves a 'typical' lightweight rower, with only two of the women responding that yes they were indeed 'typical' lightweights. Interestingly, when I asked the women why they would or would not consider themselves a characteristic lightweight woman, their answers were quite varied, although interestingly weight dependant.

*I: What would you say typical is?*

*Chantelle: ...you're always thinking about your weight, your ideal weight is the lightweight threshold, and anything over that you don't think you're at your optimal fitness of performance level.*

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*I: How come [you don't consider yourself a typical lightweight]?*

*Vanessa: Because I've never had to cut weight...*

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*I: Would you consider yourself a typical lightweight?*

*Marie: No, I would not.*

*I: Why?*

*Marie: Because I am a lot taller than a lot of the other girls on the team and I... am not naturally a lightweight. I have to get down below the body fat percentage that a person should have in order to be a lightweight rower.*

As viewable within these excerpts, the women had varying views on what it meant to *be* a lightweight rower, with the only substantial consistency being that weight and the body were central to all of their characterizations. This aligns with the work of post-structural theorists who contend that language is arbitrary. There is no pre-existing truth outside of language, so the women individually construct what being a lightweight rower means. Language can never capture the complexities of these women's experiences, nor can it ever point to an objective reality. These notions may be learned from older athletes, coaches, and experiences within the sport, but they are not grounded in any one fixed definition (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). There are no essential qualities to vocabulary, and therefore definitions are able to shift and transform throughout time. However, while language is capricious, Foucault and Butler (1983; 1990) contend that everyone remains held to a normative standard, with Butler stating that

The disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproduction domain...The regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that is purports to describe (1990, 172-173).

So while each of the women's definitions and understanding of lightweight rowing is slightly different, the overarching discourse, that weight is central to the sport, remains consistent. This is particularly interesting, as every woman in the sport is literally held to a 'normal' weight standard (maximum) of 59kg. While there are numerous themes that emerged within the data, the discussion of weight remained central.

As a lightweight rower, I predicted that weight would be involved in our interviews and discussions surrounding lightweight rowing; however I failed to consider how centralized weight

is in the lives of many lightweight women's rowers. In our interview Jody stated that when you meet a new lightweight rower for the first time there is always an instant bond, because you will always have something to discuss. Whether it is food, weight making techniques or late night cravings, Jody contends that there is always a relationship between two lightweight rowers. Take for example, when meeting one of the women at a coffee shop, before formally beginning her interview we discussed how many calories were in her cookie, and in my hot chocolate. Conversations around weight are so normalized with my friends and teammates that it isn't until I am extremely critical of my own everyday experiences that I notice. Discussions of calories, workouts, fat content in foods, weight loss techniques, and how well clothes are fitting permeate everyday discussions of lightweight rowers – as well as my own everyday thoughts and conversations, although I am no longer [at the time of data analysis] a rower. Perhaps this is because lightweight women are conditioned to become docile bodies. In joining the sport culture of lightweight rowing, women are gradually taught that it is accepted and encouraged to keep a constant gaze on both the individual body, and the bodies of others, as women are both objects and targets of power, and of surveillance via the panoptic gaze (Foucault, 1977). Moving forward, particularly regarding the themes of surveillance and body image, one might notice that many of the stories and examples relate to the body and weight. This may be the case for a number of reasons, with one being that perhaps I connected most with the women's stories of their body struggles, and with that motivation I was compelled to feature and discuss particular data over other pieces.

Moreover, while most of this discussion regarding surveillance and pressures will be surrounding the women's body, the athletes' time is also closely monitored by teammates and coaches, and must be acknowledged. For example, during the data analysis process I was

training to compete with my university team in a less competitive, more experience-oriented regatta. Being dissatisfied with the level of commitment by some of the women within my boat, our coach one day stated,

*Girls, I realize that you are busy with jobs, and with the semester winding down there are assignments and presentations and exams. But we have to make rowing a priority here.*

I found my coach's speech to be an accurate depiction of the struggles and juggles that university rowers in general are constantly attempting to balance. While I argue that power is exercised to an even greater extent on lightweight women, the pressure to adequately manage schoolwork and athletics is a further demand that female university rowers are handling continuously.

#### Surveillance over the body

*Samantha: There can be some whispers like 'there is no way that girl is at weight', and everyone is sort of wondering.*

Samantha is discussing instances when she and her teammates are attempting to determine who is and is not 'at-weight' (meaning under 59 kilograms). She goes on to discuss that they are not criticizing their crewmembers, but rather they are voicing concern that they won't make weight for the sake of the team. Rowing is an interesting sport in this regard, as weight making determines not only if the individual woman can participate, but also if her entire team is eligible to compete. Perhaps for this reason, all aspects of weight were an extremely common conversation topic among the seven women interviewed. Weight watching of both the self and the team (as Samantha describes above) ensures that the act of 'making weight' within the sport is anything but private. All of the women expressed feelings of pressure with regard to weight, which included surveilling the weight of both themselves and their teammates, as Samantha demonstrates, as well as the women's perceived external and internalized pressure to



be at weight. Power may not be explicitly viewable; however it can be witnessed within all institutions ranging from prisons, to family, to a university rowing team. As well, Foucault argues that this power is not centralized, held by one and enforced over the many, but rather it is panoptic: a surveilling gaze by all, leading to an internalized discipline on the individual.

Furthermore, he argues that power is not necessarily concerned with oppression, but rather social organization. For this reason, when analyzing power relationships, Foucault (1977) contends that while it is important to question power's foundation, it is of greater importance to examine the ways that power relationships are used, rationalized, and internalized. Alex and Jody each describe such instances,

*I: Would you say that there is pressure [to make weight during the rowing season]?*

*Alex: Yes.*

*I: From who?*

*Alex: Coaches and teammates. Coaches because they want everyone to be at weight. And teammates because if you are not at weight than you are jeopardizing the boat.*

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*Jody: And trying to make weight, and... that's when I felt pressured, and it was always on my mind.*

*I: Who did you feel pressured by?*

*Jody: Coaches, and myself especially. As lightweight rowers we already put so much pressure on ourselves to make weight, and it coming from outside sources just adds so much more. And I'm always thinking about what they are going to think. Like I'm always thinking, 'okay if I'm going to have to step on the scale and I'm not 60kg, but I'm 61, what are they going to think, what are they going to do to me?' That is always on my mind.*

*I: Have you had anyone actually talk to you about it? Pull you aside and talk to you about your weight?*

*Jody: Yes. This past summer... I was told like, at that point I was probably like 64kg, and I need to be at least 60 to even [seat race], so that's when they were like 'okay, listen, this is what needs to happen, you can't [seat race] if you're not at this weight'.*

As each of the women demonstrates, there is a constant pressure from teammates, coaches, and of course the scale to be near or under that 59kg maximum weight. If one is over that weight, then murmurs begin within the team, and they are not done secretly. This indiscretion therefore instills a constant fear, and therefore surveillance, emerging from the lightweights to not 'fail' their team by being too heavy. This persistent inspection of the woman's body mirrors the metaphor of discipline and the Panopticon discussed by Foucault (1983). Lightweight women are encased in their bodies as cages, and are on constant display. Similarly still, the women are unsure when they are being watched, and by whom (prisoners in their cells). Under constant visibility the women must learn to self-surveil for fear of punishment, which might include being pulled aside by the coach, removal from the boat, the crew being ineligible to race, or gossip and shaming between and within crews. None of the participants acknowledged pressure from the scale to be at weight, however after listening to their responses I would argue that many of the women feel this pressure as well, because by stepping on the scale there is an automatic visibility and vulnerability. Weigh-ins are particularly vulnerable since they are conducted publicly at regattas, in front of teammates, and with many competitors in the same room.

As many of the girls reflected, there is a very real pressure to make weight during the rowing season from a number of people, and for a number of reasons. For example, regulations

in the sport explicitly state that if one individual in a crew does not make weight, then her entire crew is ineligible to race. When asked how the girls knew to ‘feel’ this pressure, often they explained instances of very explicit, direct bodily surveillance from outside inspectors.

*I: [Pressures] from whom?*

*Marie: Um, coaches mostly. Teammates occasionally. Last year for example, during the summer rowing season I was approached by the coach and told that I need to start losing weight because I wasn't losing it fast enough. And also, sometimes, other rowers who are lighter worry about your weight if you're heavier during seat racing or if your erg testing and stuff like that.*

*I: In a rude manner, or in a genuine concern manner?*

*Marie: I don't know, because I didn't actually get told this to my face from the person.*

*I: Okay – So probably –*

*Marie: Probably more like rude... like gossip. Like ‘oh Marie is bigger right now, so she is going to have an advantage in seat racing’.*

*I: Right. What about when the coach approached you?*

*Marie: It was not in a rude manner, it was just... it was just a fact I guess, I needed to start losing weight.*

Jody also describes being pulled aside by a coach,

*I: Have you had anyone pull you aside and talk to you about your weight?*

*Jody: Yes. This past summer... I was told like, at that point I was probably like 64kg, and I need to be at least 4kg lighter to even [seat race], so that's when they were like ‘okay, listen, this is what needs to happen, you can't trial if you're not at this weight’.*

Jody ended up not getting down to weight as quickly as her coach expected, and was not allowed to trial for a spot on the team. As Jody's example reveals, in lightweight rowing speed is not

always a determinant of success within the sport. The first obstacle always remains the scale, and the watchful eye of others.

One of the lighter athletes that I interviewed explained to me that coaches pressure them to question their teammates about their weight-making behaviours as well,

*[Laura, after stating that coaches had asked her to approach a teammate and question her on her weight]*

*I: What did you say to the person when you approached them?*

*Laura: Just kind of asked them “what methods are you taking? Are you at weight, are you over weight? Is the weigh-in going to land at what point in your menstrual cycle” that kind of stuff.*

*I: Do they get angry because you are asking and you’re so light?*

*Laura: Probably in some cases. Some people probably are like “you don’t know what you’re talking about”, but at the same time, I’ve seen it and been through it with a lot of people, so I’ve seen people making weight. And even if we are sitting in a group and I’m sitting with girls that are close to weight or over weight, I’m not going to eat a ton or anything, but at the same time, I’m going to eat. And then they like, take offence to me eating.*

Perhaps what is most compelling from this conversation with Laura is how normalized she finds her inquisitions into other women’s weight, which includes her asking what point in her menstrual cycle her crew member is at. As a former lightweight rower, I have had the same conversation with teammates, reminding them not to worry, that the end of the menstrual cycle signals weight loss. Stepping back however, this is a gross invasion of an individual’s private and intimate bodily functions. It is also another example of the normalization of outside surveillance on the bodies of lightweight women.

With all of the women discussing the pressures they feel within the sport to get down to weight, I asked Chantelle why she thought the women still openly discuss it within the team. She contends that if you are over weight, but still within an acceptable realm, talking openly to your teammates will calm them, because the athlete is being transparent, and shows awareness that they know they need to get down to weight. In my years as a lightweight rower I have noticed this transparency that Chantelle discusses, and the other women I interviewed provided similar examples. After eating a big meal, or ‘binging’ on a forbidden food, like cookies or ice cream, we as lightweights can often be heard divulging this information to our teammates. Similarly, if we step on the scale and are particularly light or heavy this is not kept a secret to the women on the team. If the women weigh-in light they often reveal this to their coaches, but on bad (heavy) days the women attempt to keep their weight undisclosed to the coach, even having their coxswain (who is typically in charge of recording the weights for the coach) lie on the paper to keep the coach uninformed.

Additionally, Jody describes an instance when, leading up to an extremely important regatta, she experienced a scenario of extreme power imbalance between her and coaches with regard to her weight,

*J: There was always a plan, this is what you're going to eat the day before, this is what you're going to eat for dinner, and this is when you're going to sweat down. And I just thought "oh my gosh I never want to go through this again".*

In this scenario Jody explains that her and her teammates were being told exactly what to eat, when to eat, and when and how to sweat down. She describes that in lightweight rowing control over the body is shared among teammates and coaches, and at times control maybe lost altogether. Throughout the interviews, Jody was not alone in expressing feeling pressure from

coaches and the governing body with regard to her weight making. In one instance, Chantelle explains how she came into the summer rowing season quite over weight. She had considered not rowing that year, but had been granted 'funding' from one of the organizations governing rowing in Canada.

*T: Did you ever care more about making weight at any point in the summer than you did about your performance?*

*Ch: I think so... being in stroke seat, you can't... you have to make sure you can do certain things right, no matter what, which is mostly rate and technique. I think that summer too, I had funding and I couldn't let the governing body down because I couldn't make weight, because they had given me funding based on the assumption that I could make weight. I think that making weight was my biggest concern.*

In both examples, the women discuss that their pressure came from various places, including the institution of the sport. With coaches, teammates, the governing body and the individual creating and enforcing a pressure for the women to remain a particular size, they may at times be compromising racing speed for size.

Bordo (1993) contests that women's bodies are the site of constant struggle, which exists on an eerie axis of duality, wherein the body is a requirement to survive while simultaneously being an enemy and source of distraction because of the requirement for food. Grosz (1994, xi) mirrors this understanding of the body when she states that, "The body is a most peculiar 'thing', Thus it is both a thing and a non-thing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an inferiority". For some lightweight women, mastery of the body, as an object, is excruciating, because in controlling the size of the body (physical) they must deny the needs and wants of the body (mental). Much like anorectics, lightweight women must engage in this

mastery of the body. The body requires enough nourishment to produce positive race results, but not so much that weight control becomes an issue. The sport culture of lightweight rowing compliments and mirrors the very symptoms of anorexia athletica, that is, women who have developed an eating disorder under the guise of being a martyr for their chosen sport. Many of the girls I interviewed expressed a fear of becoming fat, restricting calories while increasing exercise (specifically during the rowing season), as well as rapid and sometimes prolonged periods of weight loss.

As Nordbo et al. (2006) discuss, those who have anorexia athletica often regard the body as something that requires constant management and regulation. For athletes, this form of anorexia is disguised as a mechanism for achieving success and achievement in the sport, rather than a disease requiring intervention. As previously discussed within the literature review, often the attributes of ‘good athletes’ are very similar to the characteristics of anorectics. Interestingly, while the women are faced with a constant demand and gaze to be near the weigh-in maximum, they are also warned not to be unhealthy, or get ‘too thin’.

*I: Have you ever been approached by a teammate?*

*Jody: Yeah. But that’s... I think... when I was trying to make weight, or I was at weight when I was at school, a lot of my friends—some of them understood what I was trying to do... but some of my friends from school, their like ‘oh my gosh, this is not healthy, you’re starving yourself’ sort of thing. But they don’t understand what you need to do in order to get down.*

In this example Jody is approached for enacting dangerous weight making methods, and being ‘too thin’. Samantha describes a similar instance happening as well,

*I: Have you ever approached a teammate whose weight you were concerned about during the rowing season?*

*Samantha: Yes, but it wasn't that I thought she wouldn't be able to lose the weight, it was the method she was using to lose weight. She was running 11 miles 4 times a week on top of cutting caloric intake and certain high carbohydrate foods.*

*I: How did she take it when you approached her?*

*Samantha: She understood... she was completely exhausted from everything she was doing, so she knew that something had to change. But at the same time, she was a little bit hard headed, because she was like 'I have to do this because I'm not going to make weight otherwise'.*

Previous literature has found that athletes in sports where weight is central, such as wrestling and figure skating, often state that dieting and weight regulation are central in their everyday lives (Karlson et al., 2001; Chapman, 1997; Sykora et al., 1993). I predicted that lightweight rowing might have normalized pathogenic eating behaviours, and a compulsion of vigilance over weight. Throughout my interviews I found this to remain consistent, as all of the women stated that they weigh themselves daily, or more than once daily, during the competitive season. Even the two women who reported being consistently underweight stated that they weigh themselves daily, and eat significantly healthier during the racing season. As well, many of the women described being extremely conscious of their weight and size, as well as their teammates', and often their competition's size, throughout the season. The logic behind the weight awareness stems from the very foundation of the sport. The women describe at length that, while the weight making process is an individual act, they are not alone, as rowing in a crew boat dictates that solidarity exists from the scale to the racecourse to the podium. The women's fear and guilt of potentially letting down the team is internalized, and may perhaps be the strongest hold on maintaining surveillance over one's body.



Alternatively, two of the women who reported constantly being underweight also commented that coaches and teammates were watching their weight as well, because being 'too small' is deemed inefficient or ineffective within the sport. In this scenario 'too thin' and 'too small' should not be regarded as equivalent. When the women describe being 'too thin', it is described with crash dieting and losing excessive weight in order to fit into the lightweight category. However, the women describe being 'too small' as being numerous pounds underweight without effort, which results in less muscle mass to assist the women in being fast and effective on the water. However, being too far under weight merely adds another layer of complexity to an already peculiar circumstance, as Laura and Vanessa illustrate,

*Laura: ... even being my size, and being smaller and so much under [weight], I mean as much as I don't want to admit it... I don't want to gain weight. When I don't workout I actually lose weight... so it is kind of like "why am I even trying"?*

*Vanessa: I do pay attention to the scale because part of me wants to gain weight to get faster. Part of me obviously wants to stay small so there's a bit of a conflict there.*

In this instance, when the women are 'small enough' to be an acceptable petite, feminine weight according to North American social standards, they are then deemed 'too small' to be regarded as legitimate competitive lightweight athletes. As these examples demonstrate, lightweight women are often perceived as never capable of being an ideal weight.

Contrasting the extreme food restraint that the women discuss during the season, some of the women also admit to some periods of extreme binging after the season ends, followed soon after by feelings of extreme guilt. For example, when Jody was asked if she liked her body after the season has ended she stated,

*Jody: Umm... about a month after [the rowing season] is over I think I look fine, but then two months I think I look pretty awful. I do [come to terms with weight gain] But I'm always looking to lose weight here and there, and I'm always thinking about it. But I mean, if there are cupcakes I'm going to eat them if I don't have to make weight. If there is food in front of me, I will eat it.*

*I: Do you feel bad about it after?*

*Jody: Yes. Always.*

In this example Jody admits that when her weight is not being constantly monitored by herself and others, she will allow herself to indulge in foods that are restricted throughout the season, however the guilt of eating remains present. Chantelle expressed related feelings,

*T: Is it different in the off-season?*

*C: You don't have to obsess every morning with like, 'did I lose that 0.2 I wanted to because I did that extra workout yesterday'. You kind of... you feel... failure is a little bit too much of an extreme word, but you feel guilty for not maintaining your fitness.*

In Chantelle's example her weight gain is not her only source of shame. She also expresses that losing some of her fitness, which had peaked throughout the season, causes her to feel humiliated for indulging in food and missing workouts once the big races had ended. While the off season marks the official end of weight restriction and excessive exercise, many of the women expressed that at times they would lapse momentarily in their dieting regiment, but then out of fear of getting 'fat' they would begin the cycle again. These perpetual fears of fatness will be discussed in further detail with regard to body image.

#### The Impact of Lightweight Rowing on Body Image

*Jody: I think I have a really skewed perception of my body, and I think that stems from always having to drop weight, but... if I'm not... even like 60kg. I'd be okay with... but if I'm not at like*

*59kg, then I automatically think like... I might not actually be fat, but I automatically think, 'oh my gosh I look so awful because I'm so fat'. I can just see it in my face, like everywhere on my body.*

In her research, Chapman (1997) found that lightweight rowing affected the body image of athletes by revealing to them that their efforts frequently amounted to a tanned, toned, and lean body, which reflects a desirable feminine physique. Moreover, once the women become knowledgeable of the 'ideal' body's attainability, there is no unknowing. As she states,

Most of the women had not dieted prior to joining the rowing crew, and most said they used to see themselves as thin or slender people. Having learned the techniques of self-monitoring and having discovered that the idealized body image was attainable, they found it difficult to regain their previous sense of satisfaction with their 'normal' bodies. (Chapman, 1997, 216).

This was consistent with my research, as well as my own personal experiences. Of the seven women I interviewed, only two stated that they had some appreciation of their body size prior to rowing, as one of them had been a figure skater, and one was involved in ballet. Vanessa may have had a skewed perception of her body prior to joining rowing; stating that coming out of ballet school she believes she had been programmed to think she was fat. However, the other girls in my research stated that beyond a basic understanding of the 'ideal' body by society's standards, none were particularly aware of their body in comparison to the ideal, nor how to achieve the ideal body if they desired.

My experience when joining rowing was very similar to the five other women; I was slightly overweight but unaware of my inadequacy to idealize the 'ideal' feminine body. When I began coaches told me that I was too short to be a competitive heavyweight, and besides, I had

some extra weight to lose. Since becoming a lightweight in 2007 I have progressively enforced stricter and stricter dieting regimens on my body during the rowing season. These include, trying fast-diet tricks I had heard of from teammates, for example, a ‘magic’ tea that could make you lose five pounds in one day! It is an extreme laxative. It worked, but it was not worth it. I have also exercised at times up to seven hours a day and memorized the calories and fat content in every imaginable food from a medium apple to a medium Dairy Queen Blizzard. To show how extreme I have at times been with food restriction in the name of lightweight rowing, here are some excerpts from a food journal I used to keep when leading up to larger regattas.

July 19 2011  
Protein powder 170  
Apple 100  
Apple 100  
Peach 100  
Grapefruit 200  
Lara bar 220  
Bran 300

July 20 2011  
Apple 100  
Protein powder 120  
Apple 100  
Greek yogurt 120  
Protein bar 270  
Grapefruit 100  
Tomato 50

July 21 2011  
Protein powder 200  
Banana 100  
Apple 100  
Protein bar 270  
Tomato 50  
Grapefruit 100  
Apple 100

July 22 2011  
Apple 80  
Apple 80  
Protein powder 130  
Protein bar 270  
Grapefruit 100  
Grapefruit 100  
Broccoli/cauliflower 100  
Apple 80

Many of the women stated that their conversations during the rowing season were centered on food or weight loss and when asked about weight loss mechanisms I was provided with a comprehensive list by many of the women. The following are all weight-loss techniques that at

least one, but often many of the women told me that they themselves have used, or that teammates have used, in order to get to weight.

- *Keeping food logs*
- *Cooking my own food*
- *Consuming dieter's tea (a laxative)*
- *Extra workouts – At times double the amount on schedule*
- *Eliminating specific foods*
- *Restricting calories*
- *Eating foods high in fiber*
- *(From lightest athlete interviewed) "I eat healthier during the season"*
- *Weighing self daily – all 7 said that they use this method*
- *Weighing self before and after workouts*
- *Sweating out morning of races*
  - o *Sweat run: putting on numerous layers of clothing, a garbage bag, or a sauna suit, and running until the weight has been sweated out via water.*
  - o *Sauna*
  - o *Sitting in a hot bathtub*
- *Stop taking birth control so water weight won't be retained*

Interestingly, one of the girls who is constantly underweight expressed to me that she was missing out on a part of the lightweight 'experience' by being so small, and that she felt she needed to separate herself from others in her boat when she was eating so that some of the girls wouldn't be mad at her, or so she wouldn't be teased since she can eat in the days prior to racing. When asked how the girls come to know about the diet methods, Samantha responded, "*its just part of the atmosphere I guess... of lightweight rowing. Like you get to the [course] in the morning and you see people jogging with their hoods on tight, and its summertime and its hot. And everybody knows what's happening. Teammates will tell you because... there is no other way to be at weight*".

Similar to what Chapman (1997, 212) found, the women I interviewed state that they hold their weight-making actions and bodies to a "standard of shared norms". Some of the women describe the act of keeping a food diary similar to mine above, as well as a weight diary. These are both examples of surveillance, which create and perpetuate a discourse of bodily

surveillance and dissatisfaction among lightweight women's rowers, and women in general. Discourses again, are a means, through which power functions within society, which hold everyone to a standard of 'normal'. Therefore, the enforcement of a weight standard in lightweight rowing is continuously supported by the re-enactment of weight making performances (Foucault, 1983; Butler, 1990).

While the weight maximum for lightweight is 59kg, some of the women I spoke with, myself included, would not be content with the appearance of their body until they were well under 59kg – at times weighing in up to 2kg under the maximum. There are a number of reasons that this might happen. The most persistent is a fear of eating too much and not making weight, and because of this some of the women described being mortified by their lack of self-control if they were unable to be as petite as possible. Additionally, many of the women, and myself, were constantly conscious of how we looked. I felt an obligation to not only be at lightweight, but also look at lightweight. I would do the daily 'fat check', which included pinching my hips, and my stomach, seeing how full my cheeks looked in the mirror, if my clothes looked too tight on my body. Jody and Marie illustrate similar instances,

*Jo: When I look in the mirror during the lightweight season... I see my face – people say I look skeleton like, but I'm like "oh my gosh, I look so good!"*

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*I: When you look in the mirror, what do you see during the rowing season?*

*Marie: I don't think that I look very skinny; I don't think I look sickly or unhealthy skinny. My family says that I look too skinny. Sometimes close friends say that I look too skinny, but I don't really think I do.*

Interestingly, Jody and Marie both discuss the role of outsiders, friends, and family members, expressing trepidation over their extreme thinness, but neither of the women agrees with their concern. During the season, the women do not view their body as ideal because it is never small enough, as illustrated here,

*Chantelle: Your ideal weight is the lightweight threshold, and anything over that you don't think you are at your optimal fitness or performance level.*

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*I: Okay, when you look in the mirror what do you see during the rowing season, as opposed to when the season is over?*

*Chantelle: This sounds a little contradictory, but during the season you always feel just a little... like you're not losing enough weight, or you're just a little overweight. But sometimes you'll wake up and if the scale reflects the number you want it to you'll feel good... if it doesn't... it kind of guides how you feel about yourself.*

These responses coincide with quotes by the women interviewed in Chapman's (1997, 217) research. As one of the women states, "the only reason you're losing weight is because you want to win. But then because you look really good and its summertime, and you're skinny it gets kind of fun too". This reveals a struggle wherein the women are reaching their peak fitness, which simultaneously assists them in attaining 'flawless' tanned (from so much time outdoors), and thin (from excessive exercise) bodies. Bordo (1993) discussed the obsession with the body that often accompanies athletes. She states that while athletes are often preoccupied with the vain enjoyment that accompanies a fit body, the pleasure derives from their ability to control their urges of hunger. This theorization aligns with Chantelle's appreciation of her body, wherein she

doesn't believe she is trying hard enough or looking thin enough (controlling her body 'enough'), until the scale reflects her effort.

In response to my asking, "How does it feel once the season has ended?" Most of the women explained to me that in the first weeks following the season, eating and lounging around are constant. Ice cream? Sure. McDonalds? Sure. But once that time frame is over many of the women explain that they are disgusted with what they have done to their previously fit, thin bodies. A couple of the girls stated that they felt as if they had failed everything you spent months working towards. And while the women describe that post-season weight gain is not immediate, it feels instant to them, as they have developed an intimate understanding of their bodies, and the effects of food, hydration, and exercise. Even during the off-season, the 'lightweight threshold', as termed by Chantelle, is regarded as the ideal weight. Linking to body image, the women's ideal body is fit, and close to weight, gaining too much weight, and losing too much muscle or fitness is regarded as failure, and the women deem themselves as such.

A couple of the women explained that throughout their rowing career they had taken a season off, or stepped back from the sport for awhile. I've been in a similar situation twice, where I chose to step away from rowing for a length of time. During this time I learned that rowing might have distorted my bodily perception permanently. After leaving the sport I have discovered that what was once 'good enough' in terms of my appearance is no longer acceptable. Rowing gives lightweight women the ability to learn what their bodies have the potential to look like when they dedicate their entire being to fitness. Therefore, while physically one may have left the sport, their disordered perception of their ideal body remains with them,

*Chantelle: I mean, I think it... I don't want to say it has messed me up, but it gives you unrealistic expectations for your entire life. So, you're always going to think you are coming out*



*below the standard, because you aren't achieving the standards you set while you were in the highest fitness level of your life.*

My personal experience has mirrored Chantelle's description of some longtime lightweight women's rowers. For example, even when I step back from rowing I find myself mentally adding up calories, and being angry at 'missed' workouts. It takes will power not to step on the scale, because I know that the number that will be reflected back at me will cause me to feel panicky, fat, and dissatisfied with my body. Would I say that I have an eating disorder, an exercise disorder? No. But I would say that I have idealistic expectations surrounding my body's appearance and physical performance as a non-athlete.

Today one of the women on the heavyweight team came up to me after practice; this was the interaction we had:

Her: You look like anorexia Barbie.

Me: Thank you!

Her: That wasn't a compliment.

Why am I grateful for reaffirmations that I am 'too skinny'? Why does this make me feel beautiful? (September 18, 2012)

The body is an absolute site of struggle, and these themes all relate back to an initial research question, wherein I considered "how would young people attempt to exemplify both femininity and athleticism?" There is an obvious paradox, which Bordo (1993, 171-172) acknowledges when discussing the opposing duality that modern women face.

Even as young women today continue to be taught traditionally 'feminine' virtues, to the degree that the professional arena is open to them they must also learn to embody the 'masculine' language and values of that arena – self control, determination, cool, emotional discipline, mastery, and soon... our bodies too, as we trudge to the gym everyday and fiercely resist both our hungers and our desire to soothe ourselves, are becoming more and more practiced at the 'male' virtues of control and self mastery.

Overarching themes within body image mirror the colloquialism that the grass is always greener elsewhere. The girls who are overweight are constantly trying to lose weight in order to meet an arbitrary standard as set by the governing body, Rowing Canada. Meanwhile, lightweight women who are very far under weight are in a double bind of conflict. The women want to gain muscle mass and strength in order to become better competitors in their sport, but simultaneously they want to stay small in order to maintain social discourses of female beauty. Once leaving the sport there remains a resistance, wherein you are no longer an 'athlete', however you have become accustomed to looking, eating, and feeling like one.

#### Gender Demonstrations within Lightweight Women's Rowing

*Jody: Yeah, I like to be presentable and look good. I mean, I'm always sweating so I'm like, "might as well try to colour co-ordinate or something"*

Within this excerpt, Jody maintains her feminine performance even while participating in athletics. But for whom is she attempting to be 'presentable'? Butler would assert that Jody may not necessarily know why she likes to look this particular way, or for whom, but in doing so she is reifying a specific gender performance. Reflecting on Butler's (1990; 1993) theory of gender performativity, the body is a site upon which discourses are inscribed and routines are enacted; it is a cultural text (Bordo, 1993). Although there is no fundamental ontology of gender performativity beyond its various acts, those actions are foundationally rooted within society. Gender is determined by sex, which is previously determined by organs. 'Gender' is then held liable for determining social hierarchies, with patriarchy maintaining social supremacy. These gender discourses are so normalized within society that often they are regarded as 'natural', and so too are their associated performances (Butler, 1990). Indeed, to deviate from a person's 'natural' gender would be considered a transgression of normative gender routines (Butler,

1990). Therefore, in Jody's example, in order to avoid accusations of transgressing her femininity by competing in athletics, she attempts to "be presentable and look good" in order to maintain an acceptable level of femininity.

No girl is born 'feminine'; these are traits that are imposed as a regulating practice (Butler, 1990; 1993). Acts of femininity were constantly discussed in relation to the sport of lightweight rowing, with women dressing and acting the part of a heterosexual 'female' athlete. I contend that perhaps, without being cognizant of such, the women display hyper-feminized traits within the sport in order to avoid accusations of transgressing traditional femininity, which might lead to questions surrounding sexual orientation. While I did not explicitly question the women's sexuality, there is an atmosphere of compulsory heterosexuality within lightweight women's rowing, with no one throughout the interview process, and only one individual throughout my eight year rowing career identifying as LGBTQ. In fact, on multiple occasions throughout the interviews the women acknowledged a concern for being regarded as 'butch'. For example,

*I: Do you think that there are any pressures from teammates or coaches to present yourself as ultra-feminine when you are competing?*

*Jody: No, I don't think I've ever felt pressured, I think that is just myself doing that.*

*I: Why do you do it?*

*Jody: Um... because I don't want to be seen as butch or lesbian, because I'm not. I just like to row and workout. Although, I've never met anyone who wears makeup to practice, because usually those who train are pretty serious or just don't care, or are around girls all the time.*

*I: Do they wear makeup to big races?*

*Jody: Races, yes. Most people do, I think. And I think if you are around guys, a lot of girls do [wear makeup], but around other girls I'm just like "whatever".*

Within this statement Jody is providing numerous details surrounding her reality as a lightweight rower. While Jody states that she does not feel pressured to be feminine, I argue that although it is not an outwardly forceful or repressive pressure, there is a constant fear of being regarded as a lesbian, stemming from the normalizing of heterosexuality and subsequent demonizing of differing sexual preference (Bordo, 1993). While Jody believes that she is acting of her own free will to present herself as ultra-feminine when competing, her reasoning is a fear of being labeled as not heterosexual. She is adamant in clarifying it is “*because [she is] not*” butch or lesbian.

Adding a further layer to Jody’s story, she states that she does not try to appear ‘too feminine’ (by wearing makeup to practice) because she wants to be regarded as “*serious*” in her training, thereby implying that acting ‘too feminine’ might deflect attention from her performance as an athlete. However, she admitted that this is further complicated if participating on a team where the men and women practice at the same time, because while wanting to present herself as a serious athlete to the coach and teammates, there is also the pressure of presenting her femininity and desirability for men.

Chantelle also acknowledged the importance of hyper-femininity for women athletes, particularly in regard to becoming an elite level rower.

*I: Is it important to conform to a certain kind of femininity in order to row lightweight successfully?*

*Chantelle: There are some people who do really good things and go really far in rowing with no consideration for some of the feminine aspects of it. If you wanted to go and do the public events, get sponsored... and do other stuff that is related to the sport that isn't just going down the course fast, then yeah you might.*

While she states that appearance and gendered performances are not a necessity of competing in lightweight rowing, Chantelle believes that in order to elevate to more than an athlete, gender specific performances are required. Her sentiments relate back to numerous examples throughout the literature (Thompson & Sherman, 2009; George, 2005; Heywood 2003; Malcolm, 2003; Chapman, 1997) wherein women athletes are hyper-sexualized in order to generate discussion around women's sport. Butler (1990; 1993) might argue that this occurs because, in order for women to participate in the masculine arena of sport, normative feminine performances need to be enhanced in order for women to be deemed eligible for publicity. The women need to present themselves as the ultimate female athlete, fit, fast, slender, and sexy. As George (2005, 318) states, there is a "complicated relationship between athletic performance and physical appearance for women". Chantelle verifies this notion when she states that in order to have the 'whole package' women in sports must present themselves as ultra-feminine, even throughout competitions in their chosen sport.

Beyond this bind of femininity, as Malcolm (2003) found in her research, and I too found throughout my interviews, woman athletes often employ the use of an 'apologetic defense' – that is an overcompensation of femininity in order to downplay their perceived masculinity obtained from being an athlete. As previous research has found, women often struggle to embrace their femininity and fitness simultaneously, and in a bid to be regarded as heterosexual and attractive to men, over-emphasize their femininity (Mean & Kassing, 2008; Malcolm, 2003). Most of the women I spoke with stated that they did not feel pressured to present themselves as ultra-feminine one they had experienced some time within the rowing culture, as Samantha illustrates, *I: Are there any pressures from teammates or coaches to present your self as ultra-feminine while competing?*

*Samantha: I think when you first get involved in the sport... you will see novices that still come to practice every morning looking like they got ready just to go there... like put on makeup and did their hair. But... I don't know, I feel like once you get into it you quickly realize that it is not a priority, or not something that anybody cares about in the sport.*

Vanessa reiterated these sentiments, stating that women who have participated in the sport for some time become capable of separating their 'on-water' masculine side with their 'off-water' femininity. Vanessa suggests that there is a "... *bestly, competitive side that comes out at rowing. There's no room for typically 'feminine' things such as emotions or concern for looking attractive*". This is a significant example of women athletes' requirement to maintain a dual identity, wherein they are capable of being 'masculine' at rowing, so long as they maintain their 'femininity' outside of the sport.

#### Gender and sport based inequalities and excuse making

*Alex: With summer rowing it is the men's championships that are the big races. So for women's rowing it's like "Oh that's nice, congratulations". But everyone stays to watch the heavy men's 8+, no one stays to watch the champ women's 8+.*

Alex is providing an example of some of the frustrations that lightweight woman's rowers and often women's rowers in general, have to contend with. While women are training just as much as the men, and competing just as feverously, often the attention given to woman's rowing is lackluster compared to men. Interestingly, at times some of the women empathized with this inequality, stating that they understood why spectators would be more interested in watching the men's races than the women's, because men's are faster. Chantelle and I had an in-depth discussion surrounding this,

*Chantelle: The reason there aren't as many lightweight events is because people want to watch the fastest boat go down the course. The fastest boat is a heavyweight men's boat.*

She went on to state,

*Chantelle: I don't think it is just about audience appeal, but it is a sport, and by the nature of the sport you want to have the more competitive athletes competing.*

It was Chantelle's use of the term 'competitive' that agitated me, because in the midst of this discussion, she also described her frustrations about not being taken seriously as an athlete.

*Chantelle: For me the thing that is really frustrating... I can deal with the fact that men are going to be faster than women at this sport, but I can't deal with the fact that people don't give women the same respect, considering we push our bodies to the same limits... So whenever men are giving me crap about "oh you're not fast", or "you were in a race with only two boats".*

*Yeah, but I trained just as hard as if I was in a race with a million crews.*

So while Chantelle describes her irritation when the men don't take her participation in the sport seriously, she is not aware that perhaps she too is perpetuating the inequality within the sport of rowing. While she stated that it was unfair that heavyweight men and women, and lightweight men receive additional events in elite level rowing, and were taken more seriously at the club level, she 'understood' why this was the case. Her reasoning was that unfortunately, lightweight women are slower than other groups. This sentiment reminded me of Baron Pierre de Coubertin (Ferez, 2012), who believed (among other reasons) that since women would undoubtedly be slower and weaker than men, there was no place for them in sports. Throughout this interview Chantelle and I openly discussed our differing views, and it was obvious that we were at odds on the subject. While she was able to understand and empathize with the decision

makers in sport, I remained adamant that women's sport participation should be judged equally to men's.

Originally I believed that this research project would be an investigation into the lives of university aged, lightweight female rowers. What I have uncovered however is that this research touches on socially reproduced pervasive, and potentially oppressive, beliefs regarding gender 'equality' – with sport being merely the canvas under investigation. (February 15, 2013)

Jody too had encountered inequality within the sport, but was not as forgiving as Chantelle. Here she provides multiple examples of the inequality she has witnessed as a lightweight women's rower.

*Jody: Like one of the days we were in the ice bath and one of the track guys was like "Why are you even icing your legs"? They just didn't get it [that rowing was a serious sport], and it made me so mad".*

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*Jody: The fact that there is only a lightweight double, why not just make it a quad, you know? (Speaking about the international platform).*

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*Jody: ... And even the big races like the boat race. Oxford and Cambridge, huge amounts of money go into those programs.*

*I: And there is a women's equivalent ---*

*Jody: There is a women's equivalent, but it is not televised, it's not held to as high of standard or esteem.*

Jody's opinions regarding equality in rowing were in stark contrast to Chantelle's, showing that some of the women within the sport are unhappy with the current state of equality. I spoke with Jody following the 'formal' interview and questioned her on how she thought advancements



could be made for women in rowing, particularly lightweights, however no feasible route towards equality was established.

Others I spoke with seemed to have not considered the (in)equality within the sport until I began asking questions on the topic, with examples of gendered difference provided upon request of participants. For example, initially when I interviewed Alex she struggled to answer questions surrounding differences in the sport based on gender, stating that she had never considered it before. I encouraged her to contact me for an informal follow up if she had any questions or wanted to talk more. The next week I received the following message,

*Alex: All of the stuff you had brought to my attention has been bogging my mind all weekend. You've opened up my eyes to all of these little things. And even little things in other sports I've played. Like even – for cross-country at the university level women will always have shorter races than the men. Why?*

In this example I was able to generate discussion with Alex surrounding men and women's equality in rowing, which assisted her in critiquing her sport.

As St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) contend, feminist research encourages women to critique their own subordination by forcing gender to be central in discussions, particularly surrounding power and distributions within society. Alex, Jody and Chantelle provide three differing applications of feminist acts within society. While Alex entered our interview fairly naïve to her own subordination, she left with some new enlightenment and began to apply a feminist critique to some of her encounters within sport. Jody had already recognized her treatment within the sport. She was passionate about rallying for change, and frustrated by a lack of equal treatment being fostered by the governing bodies, not only in club rowing, but also on the international level. While I provided her with some additional issues of equality to consider, Jody had already

established a strong understanding of her subordination within rowing. Chantelle's demonstration of feminism was confounding, as it seemed throughout the interview that she has noticed and is frustrated by some of the inequalities within the sport, however, with some examples she was condoning of this inequality. Her excuse making for her own subordination was similar to many of the other girls, such as Marie, who stated that women rowers would be treated equally to men if their performance was better.

*I: Do you think that the men and women's teams are treated equally?*

*Marie: Um... not really. Well, in [my] situation, rowing for [university] for example, the men are treated differently because they succeed more, and the women... we don't do as well as them so we are on the back burner.*

Marie was not the only woman I interviewed who shared this sentiment, personal blaming for the lack of equality within the sport. In fact nearly all of the women stated that perhaps if they performed better, than their participation would be legitimized, with Alex being the only one to truly question herself,

*Alex: I think [the coach] pays a little more attention to the men's team but... I mean especially when the men have brought the university a lot of success compared to the women's team. But, at the same time, if he wants the women's team to be good he also needs to focus on them.*

In this instance, many of the women are creating excuses for their coach's behaviours, and therefore perpetuating their own subordination within the sport (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000).

Moreover, when we began discussing inequity within their sport, often I found the women's perceived equality to be more concerning than their comprehension of blatant inequalities. For example, when I asked Marie what being a female athlete meant to her she stated,

*Marie: I guess it is... I don't really know. I think being a female athlete is representing females and proving that we can do things just like men can do. Maybe not quite up to the same level, but we can train just as hard. And it is proving to everyone else that we can do that. You can be competitive. You can go through the same motions. The same technique. Win things.*

In this illustration, Marie believed that she was discussing her personal liberation as a female athlete, whereas I regarded it as her downplaying her own ability by stating that women can't do things "quite up to the same level", thereby feminizing herself as weaker, or less able, when directly compared to male athletes.

From these stories of inequality and perceived equality, the force that joins these illustrations is power. Panoptic surveillance and disciplinary power are used as a means of producing people as certain types of individuals, or seeking to obtain productivity from individuals by gaining access to their actions, attitudes, and behaviours, hence making persons subject to manipulation. In a greater sense, this manipulation is used as a means of managing the conduct of a population. More specifically, it is used as a means of instilling acceptance of subordination within lightweight women's rowers (Foucault, 1990). Foucault (1990) identifies that when analyzing relationships of power, it is not as important to seek its foundation, but rather to examine how power relationships are used, rationalized, and internalized; such as they are within the women's experiences.

Today I almost sent an email to one of my coaches, apologizing if it seemed as though I was 'bashing' rowing in our area. However while I was writing this email I realized a couple of things. First, many of the issues that I am critiquing within this paper are greater than one coach, and many of the issues require the resolve of coaches, athletes, and the governing body of the sport to work together toward change. Additionally, even if my critiques were more centered on one particular coach or club, why as a woman do I feel an immediate requirement to apologize for my worries? (June 15, 2013)

The discussion of equality within my interviews caused me a great deal of strife. While at times I believed the women to be discussing their subordination within the realm of women's rowing, the women were revealing to me what they comprehended as equality, and a resistance to normative views of women as docile, fragile, and soft. These differences of interpretation lend to a discussion of resistance. As Foucault (1990) argues, the potential for resistance is embedded within language, whereby language is vulnerable to resignification, providing this resistance with the potential to develop. In the following piece, a discussion of resistance will be provided in detail, with specific emphasis on the possibility of micro and macro changes in lightweight women's rowing.

#### Complicating resistance

*I: What does being a female athlete mean to you?*

*Alex: I don't know, I'm an athlete, and I just happen to be female.*

*I: There is no difference than if you were a male athlete?*

*Alex: I don't think so.*

It seems that within the discussion of woman athletes, a conversation surrounding resistance is undoubtedly required. To begin, the questions of "what is resistance?" and "what does it have the potential to do?" must be answered. Resistance is regarded as an act, or a series of actions that enhance personal freedoms (Shaw, 2006). As Raby (2005, 151) suggests, resistance is a tool that "recognizes and values oppositional behaviour as political and informed". Additionally, Shaw (2006, 535) states, "While resistance can occur in all settings and circumstances, it has been argued that leisure provides enhanced opportunities for self expression and self-determination", as leisure allows demonstrations of how closely the personal is tied to

the political. Therefore, lightweight women's rowing may be an ideal venue for witnessing acts of opposition, as it is a site of recreation for women.

Foucault (1990) contends that resistance is viable wherever there is power, as "resistance is not against power, but imbricated within it" (Raby, 2005, 161). Resistance then is a force that is widely available to all, and through the use of actions and the re-significations of language, the boundaries of discourses can be tested (Shaw, 2006; Foucault, 1990).

Sport is an important avenue for women to demonstrate their resistance towards patriarchy, and while Alex may not have recognized it, the normalization of herself as an athlete who "*just happens to be female*" is a re-signification of the concept of an 'athlete'. Alex's nonchalance is a resistance to the historical significance of men as strong, fit, and athletic, and women as weak, docile, and domestic. However, if Alex is unaware of her possible resistant behaviour, can it be regarded as such? Has previous opposition occurred surrounding the topic, thereby making it seemingly obvious to Alex that she can successfully call herself a 'female' and an 'athlete'? Does such a discourse yet exist? Surely by the response from Alex the answer seems to be *yes*, however when considering the women's deep discussion surrounding inequality specifically within rowing, it appears that the answer may not be so clear cut, and perhaps may invoke further questions. In the life of a female athlete what is resistant behaviour? What can be considered resistance for lightweight women's rowers?

hooks and Weston (As cited in Raby, 2005) discusses that within resistance there can be both 'thick' and 'thin' acts of opposition. 'Thick' oppositions are considered the larger, macro-structural, organizational, and institutional systems, while 'thin' oppositions are everyday micro-practices. Butler (1991) refers to everyday acts of resistance as cracks or fissures, which reveal minute forms of resistance. As she states, "It is politically conventional to understand the process

of factualization in purely negative terms, the splits and fissures are sites that call for a politically significant remapping of power relations” (Butler, 1991, 88). I contend that these fissures, or everyday oppositions, are present within the lived realities of the women I interviewed. For example, when I questioned the women on their weight making habits, while they stated that they eat healthy to get down to lightweight, many of them also admitted to occasionally sneaking inappropriate ‘junk’ foods when they should be dieting, as well as using unhealthy tactics to lose weight quickly, such as laxatives or going in the sauna. Additionally, when I questioned Jody on her femininity in the sport, she stated that she was making the choice to be overly feminine in order to ‘prove’ to younger girls that you can be an athlete and a woman simultaneously, and that one does not dictate or negate the other.

From the previous illustrations, additional questions arise surrounding the legitimacy of the examples as actually dictating ‘resistance’. When I interviewed Jody, she believed her over-feminization was an act of defiance within the sport, as sports is a realm of masculinity; however I contend that this may be a demonstration of both resistance and reproduction. While her feminization was a reification of her body as a site of traditional femininity, perhaps she was also acting in resistance to the notion that women should not be in sports. In wearing girlish outfits, and occasionally make-up, she was unintentionally enacting a normative gender performance (Butler, 1990; 1993), however she was simultaneously pushing the boundaries of previous binaries wherein athletics is associated with masculinity, and femininity is synonymous with fragility and docility.

Moreover, when the women admit to resisting weight making deadlines by continuing to eat bad food, or attempting to use ulterior weight loss tools, they believe themselves to be resisting the ideal weight making mechanism of a healthy, low calorie diet. However, as Butler

(1993) contends, resistance may threaten the existence of the subject, as language is used to produce and signify the subject, and to transgress these would be to alter the self. Words dictate discourses and social rules, and in lightweight rowing, to resist weight making is to oppose the very foundation of the sport, as weight making is central to lightweight rowing. Therefore, while fissures may emerge, such as sneaking a cookie or consuming a laxative, to resist weight making entirely is to sacrifice your ability to race. Additionally, in this scenario, the Panopticon (Foucault, 1977) once again reigns supreme. If a woman attempts to resist weight making for what is deemed ‘too long’, her coach holds the power to remove her from the crew and replace her.

But what about Alex’s declaration that she is a ‘female athlete’? Is she resisting everyday expectations of femininity? Is this a larger structural re-signification of gendered expectations, or is she actually resisting anything? After presenting all of these findings I ask myself, is Alex truly resisting a notion of inequality, or has she been duped into believing that equality within the sport is an actuality? Given my feminist post-structural framework, I have to acknowledge that there is no definitive answer; it is bound within complex and competing discourses of ‘feminine’ and ‘athletic’, as well as Alex’s specific culture, in its specific time, space, and location. Further examples throughout this paper also demonstrate how there is potential for some resistance within the sport. Recall when I spoke of a coxie lying about the girls’ weights. Or when Marie explained that she would row lightweight regardless of if she was considered ‘too tall’ to be healthy. Many of the examples present within this thesis reflect that resistance is not inherent, but rather shifts by context, and depends on how individuals understand the concept of ‘resistance’. As well, individual’s perceived understanding of specific instances as resistant or not is instrumental in determining an incident as oppositional.

Resistance may be an appropriate avenue for breaking down barriers and encouraging opportunities to participate in leisure activities, such as women's competitive sports, as "resistance emphasizes leisure as a site where the personal is closely tied to the political" (Shaw, 2006, 541). The fact that women are even attempting to resist (even when I would argue, at times, they are unsuccessful), speaks volumes to the future of women, as well as the great ability for sport to act as a catalyst for social equity.



## CONCLUSION

## **Conclusion**

This thesis set out to use a feminist post-structural framework guided by the writings of Butler (1990; 1991; 1993; 1995) and Foucault (1977; 1983; 1990) to examine the numerous relationships and conflicts that exist among gender, the body, sport, and power within lightweight women's rowing. The weight restriction in lightweight rowing emphasizes the female body, as well as paradoxes present within the sport. Previous research found that often women athletes are expected to be feminine yet athletic (George, 2005; Chapman, 1997). I believed that lightweights might also feel pressured to be thin and emaciated yet strong and healthy. My research focused primarily on the lived realities of 7 lightweight women who participated in Ontario University rowing, as well as my own personal experiences within the sport. While these women provided a great detail of insight into their daily lives as women athlete, feminist post-structural qualitative research is grounded in the understanding that these experiences are individually based, and exist within a specific time, space, and location, and could never be adequately generalized or representative to all lightweight women's rowers.

I found the women within my study to be extremely open and willing to answer questions, as well as to explain how they conduct themselves as women and as athletes. What was more difficult than conducting and analyzing my interviews with the women was to critically analyze my own participation in the sport. As I have stated, I competed in university lightweight rowing for 5 years, as well as rowing throughout the end of high school. Because of my intimate relationship with the sport, as well as having a personal relationship with many of the women I interviewed, I was at high-risk for making assumptions about the women's lives and their interview answers. I found that I was often right. But I was also often wrong. The women

offered deep, insightful answers surrounding their participation in the sport, their lives as woman athletes, and the control they demonstrate over their body.

The goal of this research was to create additional layers and provide detailed accounts from lightweight women rowers by conducting interviews with attention directed towards the following questions: How do university aged lightweight women rowers understand and negotiate their identities – both inside and outside of the sport? Are the pressures to exemplify both femininity and athleticism feasible? Do young lightweight women rowers recognize these pressures? How do lightweight women rowers exist within these dualisms? And how are personal and group identities negotiated within these constructions? While feminist post-structural research posits that no definitive answer is plausible, I did gain a great depth of knowledge surrounding these research questions, as well as watching numerous other themes emerge throughout the data. These themes included surveillance over the body, body image, feminization and masculinization within the sport, and inequalities and excuse making, as well as a discussion surrounding the potential for resistance within lightweight women's rowing.

To review, in lightweight women's rowing the women must make weight at numerous regattas throughout the season, and cannot step on the scale weighing more than 59 kilograms or they and their crew will be disqualified. Within the weigh-in room, coaches, officials, crewmates, and competing athletes are all present, thus creating an arena of surveillance within lightweight rowing. My study focused on specific practices of body management enacted by lightweight female rowers, including the magnification of certain performances, including weight-making behaviours, interpersonal bonds within and outside of the team, and personal stories regarding the lightweight body. It is from these observations that my connection between lightweight women's rowing and the Panopticon (Foucault, 1977) was formed. The theme of

surveillance in the sport was often discussed by the women, with the entire performance of ‘making weight’ being regarded as an area of constant visibility. This often led the women to maintain a continual surveillance over their bodies, at times described by the women as obsessive, in order to ensure they would make weight, so as not to let anyone down, including themselves. Chantelle describes this constant struggle to maintain control over the body, as well as the reasons she continues to do it,

*I: Did [you ever feel like] “why am I doing this”?*

*Chantelle: Definitely. And I had reasons. Certain instances you question it more than other [times]. When you’re in a bigger team you know exactly why you are doing it, because you’re committed to something, and most people would never back out on that. I think that is it mostly for my teammates. Sometimes there is the pressure to say “I do it for myself”, sitting on the bus at 6am going to the gym because I was overweight, and thinking, “What am I doing with my life, like, I’m 24, my pants are inside out on the bus at 6 o’clock on a Sunday morning. Why am I doing this?” And I just say [to myself] “well first of all because you said you would”, so for me that is a big thing.*

One of the most compelling parts of Chantelle’s story is her dedication to making weight for herself as well as because of her promise to her teammates. This selfless devotion to the sport was consistent among all seven of the women I interviewed. While Panoptic surveillance was pervasive within lightweight rowing, so too was their desire to succeed on multiple levels, from weight making to racing competitively against themselves, their peers, and other crews.

In addition to panoptic surveillance, I was also extremely interested in understanding how lightweight women negotiate their gender performances within sport. As Butler (1990) contends, gender performativity posits no ontological value outside of the various acts that comprise and

maintain its legitimacy. Gender however, remains upheld in society through the reification of hegemonic discourses and the upholding of social hierarchies that deem gender performances as 'natural', therefore positioning women to present themselves as feminine, particularly when they are participating in activities, such as sport, that call into question their 'natural' gender. Within the interviews, most of the women stated that they did not feel any explicit pressure to present themselves as overly feminine within the sport; however they do feel pressured to maintain an overall feminine identity. The women often reported attempting to appear more feminine when men were present, or on race days when they would be seen by a variety of outsiders, or their picture might be taken. Many of the women acknowledged that long after their rowing seasons had ended they felt a continued pressure to remain close to weight, as well as a longstanding fear of getting 'fat'. This was both an example of panoptic surveillance within the sport, as well as a pressure to uphold normative gender performances as dictated by society.

Additionally, as most of the women stated, they had at one point dated a male rower, or at least all of them knew male and female rowers who were dating. Assumed heterosexuality was constant throughout the interview process, with little acknowledgement of crewmates who were LGBTQ. Panoptic surveillance was pervasive in this aspect as well, with sexuality being regulated through discussions of dating among teammates.

With regard to inequalities in the sport, the beliefs of the women were extremely divided. Some of the women believed the inequalities in rowing to be understandable and excusable. Others had never considered inequity within the sport until I asked them if they noticed or were bothered by the disparity. One woman was angry with issues of equality within the sport, and was passionate about creating change, although no specific ideas were discussed. By the

conclusion of this research all seven women, and myself, had critically considered each other's opinions surrounding sport equality.

I spent a substantial amount of time considering if 'resistance' was possible within lightweight women's rowing. Shaw (2006) provided encouraging insight by stating that leisure activities provide opportunities for resistance to occur. This research process has forced my critical awareness of the realities of the sport, and I found that resistance might be possible through the reconstruction of the subject via 'thin' oppositions (Raby, 2005). I contend however that 'thick' oppositions may not flourish within the sport; to question larger, macro-structural and organizational foundations of the sport of lightweight women's rowing would be to change it entirely.

Incidentally, throughout the research process I was faced with having to resist my role in the sport, but neither as a researcher nor an athlete. As I stated previously, I have rowed as a lightweight for some time, and because of this I have a deeply personal connection to this subject. While I rowed for some time, I have also transitioned into coaching competitive high school crews as well, having coached girl's rowing for 4 years. In grades nine through eleven, the girls all rowed open weight in order to prevent angst over weight-making in high school - perhaps for myself more so than the athletes. This year however, I had some smaller girls, and thought that a specified weight category might be ideal for them in order to be competitive at large high school regattas. There were two girls that I was interested in having row in a weight-restricted category, one of which was consistently one or two pounds underweight, and the other who, in February, was around ten pounds over the weight limit. As an athlete, I knew that this girl, with restraint and the development of intelligent eating habits, would be able to safely make weight by the high school championships in June. Throughout the spring season however she

lost very little weight, and began asking me (as she knew I rowed lightweight) about some weight loss mechanisms I have used to get down to weight. Interestingly I found it impossible to provide her with any of my ‘tricks’ after conducting this research. Although I did watch when she stepped on the scale, and I ensure she weighed herself often, I could not give her any dieting tricks after hearing seven women’s stories, and considering my own, surrounding weight-making and how constant body surveillance often leads to long term issues with body image.

With one week until the national high school championship regatta, she ended up making the decision herself that she would no longer diet in attempts to make weight, as she was also in an open weight event and did not want to jeopardize their speed for her 6 pound weight loss. When she told me her decision I did attempt to *gently* persuade her to continue her weight-making pursuits, as I truly believed they could win a medal in the event. When she persisted at saying she was uncomfortable, I backed off, although in the moment I was internally agitated. But why? Who am I as a coach of young women to think I know what is ‘best’ for their bodies, and why did I, after she said she didn’t want to race in the weight restricted category, attempt to change her mind? Is one race really that important? For a month I was constantly watching and critiquing the adolescent girls’ diet and body. It’s a little disgusting, and entirely ordinary. I’ve gone from being a constant participant of lightweight women’s rowing and its associated internalized discipline, to a coach, and one of the metaphorical ‘guardsmen’ of the panoptic body, and following months of research, I’m unsure how I feel about my new role.

#### *Future Research and Recommendations*

With regard to future research, I provide the following recommendations, based on my analysis of the interviews. I propose researching other lightweight rowing populations to observe when body and weight-making pressures emerge (for example, high school rowing), and if they

are maintained throughout elite level rowing, in order to gain insight on how to prevent future generations of athletes from dealing with the same demands. Additionally, I believe that there should be a continuation of research on women in sports, which might include women's rowing more generally, as well as sports wherein women's bodies are over-emphasized, similar to lightweight rowing. This might include figure skating, gymnastics, long distance running, or weight lifting. One specific research possibility may include questioning how heavyweight women's rowers consider and conduct themselves as athletes, as well as with regard to weight and body discipline. Is this similar to how lightweight women conduct themselves? As well, how do lightweight and heavyweight rowers talk about one another? Is camaraderie or competition more common between the two weight categories? In the future I believe that more emphasis should be placed on listening to women themselves, and learning from their lived experiences.

With regard to applicable recommendations, I propose increased education for all of those involved in lightweight women's rowing, and the sport of rowing in general. This education includes athletes, trainers, and coaches, as well as parents. Education should include discussions of eating behaviour and appropriate caloric intake, healthy body image, critical considerations surrounding gender equality, and the importance of sport as being a site of happiness, as opposed to stress and pressure. Similar to arguments by Sundgot-Borgen & Garthe (2011), there should be a de-emphasis of weight within the sport, and instead the focus should be placed on enhancing sport performance through non-dieting strategies, which include improving overall nutrition and health, and altering mental, psychological, and physical approaches to the sport. I also propose that the governing body of lightweight rowing in Canada critically analyze their current role within the sport. While a specific de-emphasis on weight making within the



sport may not be feasible as a goal, perhaps measures could be enforced to promote healthy weight-making and body image for the women involved in the sport.

Throughout this research project, I remained optimistic about my ability to make intelligible connections between the historical, physical, social, political, and cultural components that constitute lightweight women's rowing, as well as to add layers of depth to the culture by allowing the lived experiences of 8 lightweight women rowers to be observed. While there were times throughout the research project that I was concerned about adequately representing the women's words, I believe I was able to accurately portray both the highs and lows that accompany lightweight women's rowing. I conclude with the following insight from Laura.

*I: Do you view yourself as a role model to others?*

*L: [Hesitant] No... I don't know that is a tough question; I don't know what people think. I don't think I should be a role model to others. People should make their own choices. I don't think you're ever going to be happy if you're looking at someone else and trying to model your life after them. If you're not enjoying what you are doing... why are you doing it?*

While the women may at times be unaware of their subordination, or may be accepting of it, I learned throughout this process that it cannot be assumed that the women feel constantly oppressed, or that they necessarily are seeking macro-structural changes within the sport. While there are issues that continue to exist, and may be pervasive within the sport, these issues do not necessarily mean that those involved in lightweight women's rowing are purposefully subordinating women. The women all provided critiques of the sport in which they participate, however Laura stated what perhaps all of the women's responses reflected—each of the women

made the choice to begin rowing, make the choice to continue rowing, and are ultimately happy with their decisions.

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## APPENDICES



## **Appendix A**

Project Title: WEIGHING THE DETAILS: GENDER DUALISMS IN LIGHTWEIGHT WOMEN'S ROWING

Principal Investigator: Dr. Shauna Pomerantz  
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Student Investigator: Teresa Hill  
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### **INVITATION**

You are invited to participate in a study that involves qualitative research. The purpose of this study is to explore how female university rowers, specifically lightweights (<59kg), negotiate their gender identity while participating in sport. I aim to investigate acceptable gender and sport performances that exist in the culture of lightweight women's rowing in order to understand how identity is constructed. Specific performances that may be explored during interviews include: pathogenic weight-making behaviours, interpersonal bonds within and outside of the team, individual understanding of the lightweight body, and the sexualization of lightweight women's rowing.

### **WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will last between 60 and 90 minutes. Additionally, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire for general information and demographic purposes. The primary student investigator will be present during the interview and will provide an agenda of questions and issues that may be explored. Moreover, participants are invited to contribute to add to the agenda as they see appropriate. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for research purposes.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

The main purpose of this research is to understand how female university rowers who compete in the 'lightweight' (<59kg) category understand and negotiate their gender identities – including looking at possible pathogenic behaviours that occur within the sport. For this reason, there is the potential that you will be asked to reveal personal and confidential information about yourself. As well, there is a chance that you may learn some personal characteristics about yourself that you previously did not know. To combat these risks, you are encouraged to tell the researcher if you are uncomfortable at any point throughout the interview and you may withdraw at anytime without any negative consequences. Conversely, this study may present you with a great experience, as you will learn about the research process. Additionally, it may be personally beneficial for you to discuss constructs of body, gender, and identity that exist within the sport in a private, confidential setting. These insights may contribute to positive changes in the culture of women's lightweight rowing in the future.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All data resulting from interviews and discussion groups will be kept strictly confidential. This means that your name, or any other identifying features, will not be associated with interviews you provide, so as to maintain identity anonymity. Only the principal investigator and the student investigator will have access to the interview data, and thus may know your identity by first name only. Please note, neither the principal investigator, nor the principal student investigator are qualified to discuss details such as weight loss or weight gain in detail, nor are they able to make a clinical assessment based on your responses – responses will be used solely for research purposes. All electronic and paper versions of the data will be destroyed when the final research is complete and printed.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of this study. As a participant you may feel some obligation to continue participating in this study because of the nature of your relationship with the student investigator, but please know that you are free to decline to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time prior to April 1 2013, and should you choose to withdraw from the research be assured that there will be no academic penalty, negative attribution, or personal repercussion because of this decision. In addition, your decision to not participate will not affect the student investigator's ability to complete her research project or Master of Arts program.

### **PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have any questions regarding this study or require further information, please contact Shauna Pomerantz (Principal Investigator) or Teresa Hill (Principal Student Investigator) using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file # 11-308). Additionally, if you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca).

### **CONSENT FORMS**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information that I have read in this Information-Consent letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details that I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions at anytime in the future. I understand that by signing this consent form I am agreeing to participate and that my research contributions will be audiotaped. I understand that I may withdraw this consent to research at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

Weighing the Details: Gender Dualisms in Lightweight Women's Rowing  
Research study by Teresa Hill, MA candidate, Brock University  
Preliminary Questionnaire

### Instructions

Please answer these questions honestly, and to the best of your ability. If you are uncomfortable or otherwise unable to answer one of the following questions, please do not hesitate to leave the space blank. All of the information provided on this questionnaire is private and confidential.

- 1) Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Name for this study (may be anything *except* your real name): \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Email address: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Birth date: \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) University affiliation(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Year of study: \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) How long have you rowed for? \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) How long have you rowed as a lightweight? \_\_\_\_\_  
When the on water season ends do you gain weight? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. If so, how much weight do you gain?
- 10) Why did you begin rowing?
  
- 11) Why do you continue to row?
  
- 12) What are the best things about being on the lightweight women's rowing team?
  
- 13) What are the worst things about being on the lightweight women's rowing team?
  
- 14) What other extra-curricular activities are you involved in?

15) What other sports do you, or have you played?

16) Do you have a significant other?

17) If yes, does your significant other participate in rowing?

The following questions relate specifically to the weight making aspect of your sport, please feel free to discuss these questions in more detail during the interview if you would like.

- Have you ever experienced any negative physical repercussions from dieting?  
For example, loss of period, lightheadedness, illness

If yes, please elaborate

- What methods do you take to monitor your body to ensure that you will make weight?

- Has your performance ever suffered to due to weight loss?

- Would you say that any of the following are present with you or your teammates during the rowing season:
  - b. Excessive fear of becoming obese
  - c. Restriction of caloric intake
  - d. Weight loss

If yes, please describe.

- Have you ever approached a teammate whose weight you were concerned about during the season?

If yes, please elaborate

If you have any additional comments regarding your participation as a lightweight rower, please include that here.

Thank you for your participation!

If you would like to receive an executive summary of the completed research, please provide your address below:

## Appendix C

### Interview Manual

1. When did you begin rowing?
2. Describe your rowing background
  - e. How long have you rowed for?
  - f. Have you always rowed lightweight?
  - g. Describe your rowing accomplishments
3. Why do you row? What aspect of the sport appeals to you?
4. Describe yourself as a rower in a few words.
5. Describe yourself and your personality outside of rowing.
6. Would you say that lightweight women's rowing has its own "culture"?
  - a. Describe this "culture"
7. Describe in a few words some of the characteristics of university rowers
8. Describe in a few words some of the characteristics of lightweight female rowers
9. Would you say you are a "typical" lightweight female rower?
  - a. If yes, how?
  - b. If no, why not?
10. Would you consider weight control a necessary aspect of your training?
11. How does your body feel when you are "at weight"?
  - a. How does weighing 59 kg (or less) make you feel about yourself? I.e. in terms of self confidence
12. When you look in the mirror what do you see?
  - a. During the rowing season
  - b. When the rowing season is over
13. Do you like your body?
  - a. During rowing season. Explain.
  - b. When rowing season is over. Explain.
14. Were you aware of your weight and your body before you began rowing?
15. How do you feel about the pressure to make weight during rowing season?
  - a. Has it made you more aware of your body? How?
16. Have you ever experienced any negative physical repercussions from dieting?  
For example, loss of period, lightheadedness, illness
17. What methods do you take to monitor your body to ensure that you will make weight?
18. Has your performance ever suffered to due to weight loss?
19. Have you ever approached a teammate whose weight you were concerned about during the season?
20. Describe what you wear to practice
  - a. Do you feel this look is organic to you or part of rowing culture?
21. Describe how you prepare for regatta days, especially bigger regattas like Henley and OUAs.
  - a. Are you ever nervous? Why/why not?
  - b. Do you have any pre-regatta rituals?
22. Would you say that rowing is more of a masculine or feminine sport?
  - a. If masculine: How then do women integrate into the sport?

23. In your opinion, are there any differences between heavyweight and lightweight women's rowing experiences?
  - a. What about between men and women's experiences?
24. Do you feel that men and women rowers are treated equally?
  - a. Why or why not?
25. Do you feel like your participation in the sport is not taken as seriously as the women's heavyweight team?
  - a. Why or why not?
26. Do you ever feel that the women are treated differently than the men by coaches, officials, or equipment sponsors?
  - a. Describe the differences
27. Describe some instances of femininity that you participate in on a regular basis (either within or outside of the sport).
28. Are there any pressures from teammates or coaches to present yourself as ultra feminine while competing?
  - a. If yes, elaborate. If no, do any of your teammates present themselves in this way? Why is this?
29. How does lightweight rowing impact your identity as a woman? – Do you think that you would feel differently about yourself if you were not an athlete?
30. How does being a woman impact your identity as a lightweight rower?
31. Do you see any problems with lightweight women's rowing?
32. Do you think body image is impacted by rowing light weight
33. Do you ever resist the idea of making weight? (For example, do you ever leave weight loss to the last minute?)
34. Do you think that it is important to conform to a certain kind of femininity in order to row lightweight successfully?
35. Do you ever resist these conventions of femininity?
36. What does being a female athlete mean to you?
  - a. Do you view yourself as a role model to others?
37. Do you have anything in addition that you would like to add or that I missed?