

DOWN AND BACK AGAIN: A SWIMMER'S BODY MOVES THROUGH
FEMINISM, YOUNG ADULT SPORT LITERATURE
AND FILM

by

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ABSTRACT

DOWN AND BACK AGAIN: A SWIMMER'S BODY MOVES THROUGH
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Contemporary material feminism is interested in finding new ways of writing and liberating women's bodies in literature, and some of these feminists are looking at sport literature to do so. *Down and Back Again: A Swimmer's Body Moves Through Feminism, Young Adult Sport Literature and Film* analyzes the ways in which women are represented and/or embodied in feminist theoretical texts, sport photographs, young adult sport fiction and film. By examining these texts in relation to each other and in relation to my own experience in sport, this dissertation creates a circular and recursive story, much like swimming laps, as I interweave narrative, analysis, poetry and photography into my movement through the pool and project.

Examining and analyzing the Young Adult sport genre from a feminist perspective reinforced my theory that this field provides opportunities for writing women's bodies. Each chapter focuses on a discussion and/or critique of various types of texts, such as feminist classics, photographs of female athletes, a young adult sport film or a particular author's translation of sporting bodies onto the pages of his or her sport novels. These texts, more than any other genre, depict adolescent characters in a state of bodily formation and transition. Young Adult literature provides corporeal language and imagery where adolescents and adults can read about their bodies and themselves. In a culture that continues to view Young Adult literature as "juvenile" and marginalized, this dissertation recognizes that adolescent literature is a place to rediscover profound political and cultural corporeal agency in this time of identity formation.

So, at the same time that I discuss how women embody themselves and are embodied by authors in feminism and young adult sport literature, I also include creative non-fiction vignettes about my return to swimming after a miscarriage and 10 years out of the pool. This creative nonfiction attempts to "embody" the project by telling the story of my own body's journey after grief. My body is key in my theorizing, and I hope it will speak from the water.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT	v
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	viii
PREFACE.....	ix
Chapter	
1. VIEWS FROM THE STARTING BLOCK: READING FEMINISM AND BODIES.....	1
2. TAKE YOUR MARK: CONFRONTING THE FEMININE ATHLETIC BODY.....	26
3. THE HYBRID BODY: BABES, BALLS AND BRAS IN <i>BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM</i>	53
4. FALST START: OR, WHAT’S A GIRL TO DO ABOUT CHRIS CRUTCHER?.....	79
5. “FIT, READY, DANGEROUS”: WRITING FEMALE MIND-BODY POTENTIAL.....	100
6. GOING INTO THE TURN: A SWIMMER’S CONCLUSIONS.....	118
WORKS CITED	131
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....	138

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
2.1 Look at Me, and Smile!.....	28
2.2 Off to the Races.....	33
2.3 One Stroke at a Time.....	49
3.4 Me in a Swimsuit, Again.....	74

PREFACE

This is where we have to begin.

Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*

I slip the brand-new black swim cap over my tied-up hair, and the moment I feel it slide on, a huge grin comes over my face. I never could have remembered or imagined what it would feel like to put on a cap again after 10 years, but once I have actually done this physical act, standing in the locker room with flip flops and a swimsuit on, I feel a wave of happiness that surprises me. I know I wasn't always this happy putting a cap on, getting ready to swim. But the act of it gliding over my hair, and the look of my round, sleek head in the mirror somehow resound deep within me, and I see myself again as a swimmer. This is more than just a visual conversion, however; I've started to feel like a swimmer again, as if putting on the suit has transformed me. In a strange way, my body is starting to speak to me, of memories of muscles and how they used to work. My body is starting to write itself, and I must listen.

It's my third time back in the water in as many weeks, and now that I have committed to swimming again, yesterday I went to the local sports store and bought a

new pair of Speedo goggles and a black latex cap. It feels as if some force is testing me, trying to keep me from getting back in the lane. The first time I tried to swim, I drove all the way to the pool before I realized I had forgotten my goggles (an old cheap pair that I had found in a bin of purses), and I lost a contact lens during the first lap. I could barely see the wall. Feeling like a giant thrashing alligator, I bumped into the man in the next lane, a man with remarkable back hair that undulated like tentacles in the water. I recoiled in disgust, and for a moment I began to doubt that swimming again was possible. But I am determined to stick with it, to try again and again until I feel better, or maybe just feel something.

This will be the first time I have committed to swimming again since high school, with the exception of a semester course in Swimming for Fitness at my undergraduate university in Abilene (the same university where I now teach), and a handful of swims in various hotel and family pools. Whenever I tell people that I was a swimmer, they invariably ask me if I still swim, and out of guilt, I say, “Yes, sometimes. I really miss it.” And I do. But the truth is that I am terrified of swimming again. This is partly because I know what my body will feel like in the water: fat, slow and out of shape. And, having been a lifeguard in my youth, I know what kind of judgments the college-age lifeguards at the university pool where I am swimming would mete out on me. I have always been obsessed with bodies, and from my lofty chair I would watch the fat, old women huffing as they did torturously slow laps, stopping at the end of the pool to rest. But here I am, slipping into the SLOW lane (marked with a bright yellow plastic sign), feeling a very old 28 years and taking off

into the clear water. Most swimmers will tell you that the first lap feels the best, and it is the same for me. My hands slice through the water's surface like knives through the flesh of soft fruit, my lungs exalting in every gulp of water and air when I raise my lips sideways out of the water. Tonight, this third night, when I have unfogged goggles and a sleek cap keeping the hair out of my face, I feel like I can swim for miles.

When I began this project, I had no idea that my mind and body were to become so entangled, that the nature of my dissertation's thinking and writing would be so fully reliant on my body's actions in and out of the water. There were times when I could not write because I had not swum; there were times when I could not swim because I had to write; there were times when I did both at once. My crossing through these Young Adult texts, looking at the ways that bodies have been written, and my journey through grief, looking at my own body and the way I write my own body, have been intertwined. I am at ease with the paradox: I mean to tell you two stories at once, as I write one and as I also live another. The body I translate may be different from the one I write with, but I have accepted that. And there lies the crux of my obsession, my impetus for writing: to know how the corporeal body comes to life. My feminist foremothers convinced me of the project's worth; I felt their urgings every time I opened a book. De Beauvoir, Rich, Butler, Grosz... even as they all wrote it in different ways, they wrote their bodies. They dared me to try it myself. As Helene Cixious said, "By writing herself woman will return to the body which has been confiscated from her... censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (880). I felt my body had been taken from me after miscarriage. I wanted it back.

My obsession with bodies as a teenager was only fueled by recent studies in feminist theory, and I revel in the awareness that there is no single unified feminist theory but many theories, each based on unique perspectives and positions. My theoretical position is indebted to many feminists who have gone before, and although

this dissertation is not fully theoretical in nature, I feel that the aims of “material feminists,” (in Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s terms, who are pioneers in this emerging and innovative field, along with Susan Bordo, Elizabeth Grosz, Claire Colebrook, Ladelle McWhorter and many others) – those who address the impact of the human body on constructions of reality, culture and the self – are helpful in my expedition and exploration. Because material theories work with the ways that human bodies are produced, they challenge mind/body dualist epistemologies and allow for new models of subjectivity that speak to feminist concerns; for example, finding new ways of writing and liberating women’s bodies in literature. Young Adult sport literature seemed as good a place as any to look at bodies; not just because the adolescent world is one that I continue to identify easily with, but also because I think of my body as being strongest at that point in my life. Young Adult literature portrays adolescents (and their developing, imagining, sporting, physical bodies) negotiating the social and sexual standards of the dominant culture. Even now, 10 years later, I feel I am still on that quest.

Young Adult sport fiction deserves critical recognition, and should be studied separately from other texts, since as a sub-genre it focuses on a unique stage and part of life that is intimately connected to bodies, and not just because of puberty. After all, bodies are the primary vehicle for racing down the court, lane or track, and many athletic careers are forged from adolescence. But writing these burgeoning women’s bodies is a difficult task – one that has been done poorly, vaguely and condescendingly throughout the centuries. Although great advances in attitudes towards women’s bodies have been

made after Title IX, sometimes writing about this body means changing the terminology that is used to write and speak about women. Much of feminists' energy is put into sorting out how authors "represent" women in the text, and it is a valid pursuit. Feminists have made a complex appraisal of representation, or the construction of images that make a visible or tangible rendering of someone. To most feminists, the term "representation" or "signification" includes *processes* by which meanings are produced. Feminists argue that representation continually creates, endorses, or alters ideas of gender identity. Feminist analysis of advertisements, film, photography, art and literature has produced many strategies for feminist practice. For example, Laura Mulvey argues that representation in film is constructed on the absence of female subjectivity because woman is the silent object of a male gaze.

Currently, postmodern feminism that focuses solely on language and discursive practices as reality argues that there is no separation between "real" relationships (or bodies) and representations since representations are part of real experience in the way social discourses are constructed. One of the theoretical and philosophical motives for the pervasive use of the term "representation" is to *avoid* naïve realism, the easy lapse into perceiving a text as transparent, or just a window on "reality." A feminist cultural practice and theory that works towards productive social change understands that representation is a political issue and analyzes women's subordination within patriarchal forms of representation. However, for material feminists like Stacy Alaimo, Ladelle McWhorter and Elizabeth Grosz, and other feminist theorists interested in discovering ways to write "corporeally," it often seems that when discussing bodies, the term is

frustratingly distanced. While reading the description of a body moving through the water, for example, we are “seeing” something very real, something original in our minds: a body with arms and legs and a swimsuit, pulling through the wave, churning white water in its wake. For an athlete, or a swimmer like myself, especially, visual and bodily experiences of these bodies are an important part of the act of reading (and living). Developing theories and definitions of “human corporeality that can account for how the discursive and the material interact with the constitution of bodies” means, as Alaimo and Hekman compellingly argue, “rethink[ing] materiality, the very ‘stuff’ of bodies and natures.” They herald the arrival of the “material turn” in their Introduction to *Material Feminisms*, a collection of essays from “feminist theory that is taking matter seriously.” Their call to feminist theorists is that:

We need a way to talk about these bodies and the materiality they inhabit. Focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration... Moreover, bracketing or negating materiality can actually inhibit the development of a robust understanding of discursive production itself, since various aspects of materiality contribute to the development and transformation of discourses.

Drawing on their argument, I assert that by identifying and examining the “material” in many of these YA sport texts, feminists can find an empowering textual kinaesthetics, an aesthetic discourse that accounts for the perception of body position, movement and muscular tension. Yes, it may not be the same body for everyone who

reads and visualizes it, the same color swimsuit, but the image that comes to mind is one of flesh and blood, not a representation like one in an abstract painting.

I argue in this dissertation that when we can find new ways of seeing women athletes beyond “representations,” and start to see them as moving, becoming, breathing, sweating and straining bodies, we will participate in this “material turn” in feminist theory, “a wave of feminist theory that is taking matter seriously” (Alaimo and Hekman, 2007). I would like to discuss the ways in which female athletes including myself are able, to different extents, to shift from being seen in merely representational terms to a more “active,” valuable kinaesthetics. I do not want to do away with the term “representation” altogether, but as I see it, representation is a kind of flattening, a taking away of a crucial dimension needed in seeing and experiencing athletes’ bodies in texts. Instead of merely being represented, I would also like to look at how they “embody” themselves in the texts. The term “embody” feels more active, alive and full of agency and resistance. In addition to this more theoretical discussion, I also include the story of my journey back to swimming after a devastating miscarriage and a decade out of the pool. I touch on memories and photographs from my swimming past and my swimming present, in an attempt to “embody” myself in the text.

Thus, the aim of this project is two-fold: at the same time as I discuss how women like De Beauvoir, Irigaray, Bordo and Rich “embody” themselves in feminism and sport literature, I “embody” the story myself by telling the story of my own body, blurring the lines of narrative and fictional story. It is a circular story, one in which I am

using both mind and body to find answers about mind and body connections and how memory may play a part in these connections. My body is key in my theorizing. In this dissertation, I ask if it is possible 1) to find empowerment after loss and disappointment with my body through swimming 2) to find empowerment in the memory of my body as one that was strong, capable and disciplined 3) to find women who truly embody themselves in these sports books, drawing conclusions when possible about the characters or the authors who bring them to life and 4) to see how and where sport literature (and swimming, for that matter) fits in with material or corporeal feminist concerns about ways to “make matter matter” (Alaimo and Hekman, 2007) that have been addressed by material theorists, including Anne Balsamo, Kathy Davis, Elizabeth Grosz, and Susan Bordo.

In *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, Kathy Davis argues that postmodern body theorists have contributed greatly to our understanding of the body beyond its biological functions, but that these theories also limit the ways in which women experience the physical body in their daily lives. She writes that

recent feminist theory on the body has displayed a marked ambivalence towards the material body and a tendency to privilege the body as metaphor. Priority is given to the deconstructive project – that is, dismantling the mind/body split in Western philosophy or debunking gendered symbols and dichotomies rather than to attending to individuals’

actual material bodies of their everyday interactions with their bodies and through their bodies with the world around them. (15)

While this privileging of the “body as metaphor,” (similar to the body as “representation”) can free women of biologically-determined roles, it can also be destructive in that it denies and disembodies the lived body and fails to provide a rhetoric with which women can talk about their physical bodies.

Later in her essay, Davis adamantly asserts the need for theories of the body that include the material body:

Bodies are not simply abstractions, however, but are embedded in the immediacies of everyday, lived experience. Embodied theory requires interaction between theories about the body and analyses of the particularities of embodied experiences and practices. It needs to explicitly tackle the relationship between the symbolic and the material, between representations of the body and embodiment as experience or social practice in concrete social, cultural and historical contexts. (15)

So, the aim of these “material theories” of the body must carefully negotiate “a deconstruction of the material/discursive dichotomy that retains both elements without privileging either” (Alaimo and Hekman, 2007). Susan Bordo, in “The Reproduction of Femininity,” makes note of this project as well when she calls for “a critical discourse to dismantle and demystify” the rhetoric of femininity that places “the female body as a locus of practical cultural control” (104). She further argues that

the study of cultural representations of the female body has flourished, and it has often been brilliantly illuminating and instrumental to a feminist reading of culture. But the study of cultural representations alone, divorced from consideration of their relation to the practical lives of bodies, can obscure and mislead. (104)

Anne Balsamo, in *Technologies of the Gendered Body*, complicates Bordo's argument and argues that we need to understand the role that technology plays in the formation of the gendered body. She also acknowledges that the battleground for political transformation "emerges through the articulation between technologies, cultural narratives, social economic and institutional forces" (162). It is in this articulation, this intersection, that subversive and reconstructive discourses can be created and thus, connect directly to the work of writing women's bodies. Balsamo sees

the body as a site of mutually constitutive interaction between discourses about the body and the materiality of specific bodies. The body also serves as the locus for thinking differently about both feminist histories and feminist futures, and the political aims of feminist cultural criticism more broadly. (163)

Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies* also agrees that the body itself is a subversive site. She argues that the body is "the threshold or borderline concept that hovers perilously and undecidably at the pivotal point of binary pairs. The body is neither – while also being both" (280). While the concept of binary oppositions is complicated in that it is reductionist and in some ways essentialist, Grosz's idea that the body is a

“borderline” concept is an intriguing and useful way of discussing the matrix of discourses that meet and cross through the body. My dissertation is located at the matrix of young adult literature, feminism and sport. At this matrix, I found a place for writing and swimming to intersect, a place that I found a way to physically “play” with and listen to the language of bodies. In and under the water, words and movement took on new meaning, and through this movement, materiality presented itself to be reconceptualized on the pages and screens of young adult sport novels and films.

When I was younger, I do not remember reading any books about sports. I never really felt like there were sports books out there for me, ones that I could identify with, girls with bodies like mine, who didn’t want to get out of bed at 4:30 a.m. to race to the pool to swim. It has been only recently that I have discovered these books, books that I wish I had known about when I was a competitive athlete. Submerging myself (a phrase that has taken on new material possibilities) in feminist theory and sport literature has made me question the power of my body and how I live in relation to and with it. My over-arching aim is to, as Adrienne Rich writes, “write directly and overtly as a woman, out of a woman’s body and experience.” I am in the midst of becoming, and I choose to locate my dissertation in a particular place, time and body. That in itself, I hope, will be useful for women. I think the memoir element of the dissertation suits my own desire to write from a “woman’s body and experience.”

Young Adult sports texts I analyze include photographs of female athletes and photographs of myself as a swimmer, the film *Bend It Like Beckham*, Chris Crutcher’s novels *Stotan!*, *Chinese Handcuffs*, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, and Tessa Duder’s

novel *In Lane Three, Alex Archer*. I will engage these authors and athletes with questions of how successful these characters are at connecting mind to body, how successful they are at breaking stereotypes and shattering pre-conceived notions about female athletes and women's sports books in general, how successful the authors are at writing the female body in new and different ways, and whether or not these women find "freedom through the discipline of their bodies," as Ladelle McWhorter argues in *Bodies and Pleasures*. I will also argue that when I look at photographs of female athletes, and of myself as a swimmer, tension between constructing feminism and embodiment occurs. My main argument will be a critique of feminism, not of its ethical principles or politics, but of its cultural, aesthetic and physical/philosophical assumptions about women's minds and bodies in these texts, many of which I find limiting.

I ground my experience by leaning on several theorists who have done exciting work in thinking about bodies in texts in new ways: Simone De Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous and Adrienne Rich, and their more poetic notions of writing and the body, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Ladelle McWhorter's theorizing of power, discipline and deconstructing of dichotomies, and Ann Cooper Albright and Sondra Horton Fraleigh's ideas of the self through moving of the body.

My project here is to answer these calls to reexamine feminist body theories and to use them to focus on the body, especially in reading sport literature. I use my own body narrative to put this theory into practice. Along the way, I investigate the swimming body, the body of the researcher, and the bodies of the athletes as sites in which and on which this theory can be used. My goal is to demonstrate the ways in

which the body can be a powerful site for taking up writing. While I am not the first person to make this attempt, though one of a few, my own bodily experiences make this dissertation a unique contribution to current body scholarship and current feminist scholarship. I argue that “material feminist” (Alaimo and Hekman) theorists and young adult literature theorists should acknowledge the continued presence and importance of the young women’s athletic body and its capacity for providing places for formation of agency and empowerment for women of all ages and capabilities.

This research is worthwhile on a number of levels. Not only am I playing with form and genre, but I am also advocating Young Adult sport literature as a valid field of study, relevant to material theorists because the body plays such a significant part in these characters’ lives. I will be discussing texts that aim to convey bodily experience from writer to reader via a kind of mutual identification, as opposed to texts that are hyper-conscious of themselves as verbal and intertextual artifacts. I will also be telling the story of my body, putting my body into the text, at the same time as I am trying to let these other bodies “move” for themselves. Indeed, I am trying to “move” myself, to be able to breathe again. Literally, I learned to correctly breathe again in the water while I swam laps, and emotionally, I found that the repetition of doing so lessened the grief that I felt from my recent miscarriage. So part of this dissertation is for me, but it is not just for spectacle or confessional. I knew from the outset that it was going to be hard to write about what my body has been through, all of the ways it has let me down, and all of the ways it continues to surprise me with strength. I span the time from my childhood all the way through adolescence and to the present (though not in a chronological way),

remembering my body as something that was strong and powerful, and yet not realizing all the power it had in it. I write about how the body can be seen in the text, and I am hoping that my body is seen in this text, that I will embody this text, in addition to being represented in it or by it. I hope that other women (and maybe even men) will see their bodies in mine. Once again, I look to feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Adrienne Rich, who grounded their feminist ideologies and ideas for the future in their own bodies.

Ultimately, this dissertation discusses the body's involvement in sport literature and the reading itself of sport literature and feminist theories. While feminist scholarship in the late 20th century has focused on discursive constructions of self and world, theorists are becoming more aware of a material rhetoric; that is, a rhetoric that addresses the impact of the human body on constructions of reality, culture, and the self. Alaimo and Hekman's discussion and compilation of cutting-edge material theories in *Material Feminisms* in the fields of science studies, environmental feminisms, corporeal feminisms, queer theory, disability studies, theories of race and ethnicity, environmental justice, globalization and cultural studies challenges mind/body dualist epistemologies and allow for models of subjectivity that form new mind-body connections. Drawing from their work and the works of other material and feminist theorists, I argue that the female body should be conceptualized as embodying texts, not merely being "represented" in them. The goal of material feminists' arguments is to rethink the way we read and live and to allow for new ways of "bringing the body back in" (Alaimo and Hekman, 2007). Acknowledging and analyzing forms of embodiment, and envisioning a

feminist theory that accounts for material knowledges and athletic bodies is important to finding new ways of becoming a political body, capable of creating and invoking agency through the articulation of a physical self.

In addition to studying these female characters and representations of women in Young Adult sport novels, I will tell the story of how I came to question my body and to rethink my body through sport and sport literature. This work has developed creatively and methodically at the same time, and the memoir element will be a kind of exploratory writing in dialogue with more theoretical writing. I see this as an interweaving of the two genres into a hybrid methodology of sorts. I want to draw others into dialogue about what I went through when I was a swimmer, and what my body did for me and meant to me, in an effort to think about the journey toward my own embodiment.

This dissertation addresses themes relevant to the construction of female sexuality and femininity. As the title suggests, rather than discussing these texts in historical progression, I see myself as making a “crossing” of sorts, and I try to create a story “arc” with my own story, while also analyzing a “cross-section” of Young Adult sport novels that progressively become, in my opinion, more aware of embodiment and seem to resist and re-imagine possibilities for new ways to translate bodies onto the page. These possibilities for change must include some idea of new writing and anti-writing, and my dissertation aims, by the end, to recognize texts within Young Adult sport fiction that reject outmoded ideas about how feminist critiques should operate.

I begin by discussing my beginnings with bodies in feminist theory, by no means surveying the field comprehensively, but providing exigence for the project by

describing the physical act of reading and surveying writers and theorists who tested the waters by writing and talking about bodies. Chapter Two focuses on a photograph of myself as a teenager and photographs of female athletes, and how these texts write the body in ways that reinforce an embodied compulsory femininity. Chapter Three focuses on the performance of the global body in the film *Bend It Like Beckham*. Chapter Four analyzes three of Chris Crutcher's Young Adult sport novels that depict misogynist attitudes toward young women and their bodies. Finally, Chapter Five focuses on the visual and textual elements of Tessa Duder's Young Adult sports novel *In Lane Three, Alex Archer*, to see how the main character is embodied in the fiction. My Conclusion shows how each of these chapters contributes to my vision for writing bodies in Young Adult sport literature, and on my continuing effort to write my own body.

Chapter One, "Views from the Starting Block: Reading Feminism and Bodies" briefly describes my experience reading several major figures in feminist theory – including De Beauvoir, Irigaray, Cixous and Rich -- including how these women talked about the female body, sex/gender connections, the body and mind duality, and whether the body is something that feminists should embrace or elide. This chapter provides the methodological framework of my project to write of my own body and experience. I argue that these women were pioneers in the field of "material feminism," a field that "focuses on the question of how feminist theory can rethink the materiality of human corporeality," (Alaimo and Hekman, 2007) though they might not even be aware of this themselves.

The next chapter, “Take Your Mark: Confronting the Feminine Athletic Body,” investigates photography as a material rhetoric and the way that I see culture “writing” women’s bodies through several photographs of female athletes, including myself, “on the field” and “off,” and looking for comparisons between them. Rosemarie Garland Thompson and Laura Mulvey help explain that this conflation of femininity with athletic strength reflects the pervasive cultural paradigm that teenage female athletes must be both strong and beautiful. In these photographs the construction of femininity and social standards of appropriate athletic behavior are inextricably bound up with body image, thus reinforcing the imposition of traditional, restrictive and prohibitive constraints on other young women athletes. This chapter examines the tension involved in negotiating contestations of gender in young female athletes and analyzes how the idea of compulsory femininity is linked to athletic authority and sexual desire.

In the third chapter, “The Hybrid Body: Babes, Balls and Bras in *Bend It Like Beckham*,” I examine the popular Young Adult film released in 2002 to see how the director, Gurinder Chadha, explores racial and global themes by using the female body and its garb. Drawing on an article by Michael D. Giardina, I argue that through montages of soccer action and conversations about breasts, sports bras and athletic clothing, she champions the power of women’s bodies and its movement in play, but also proves ambivalent about the “global woman’s body.” I posit that ultimately Chadha’s film argues for an idea of globalization that promotes empowered hybrid bodies – bodies that blur the lines of race, gender and sexuality in sport.

In the fourth chapter, “False Start: Or, What’s a Girl to Do About Chris Crutcher?”, I examine the treatment of both men and women’s bodies in the popular author Chris Crutcher’s novels, which are written for both young men and young women, to see what they say about teenage girls’ and boys’ attitudes toward their bodies and sports. In each of his novels, a male main character narrates most of the story, situating them within a male voice and body. I show how Crutcher has used his writing to explore serious, gritty subjects and to portray strong, athletic male role models, yet he continues to send messages about women and women’s bodies that are misleading, indecisive and out-dated. His novels serve as an example of popular YA books that reinforce sexist ideas and define the canon of YA novels in a way that is unreachable, unreadable, and unrealistic for teenage female athletes and readers in the 21st century.

Chapter Five, “Fit, Ready, Dangerous: Writing Female Mind-Body Potential,” examines the visual elements of Duder’s novel to see how the physical body is represented. Duder’s fiction is structured repeatedly around an oscillation between the main character Alex’s inner monologue, written in stream-of-consciousness excerpts while swimming the “big race,” and narrative, first-person flashbacks to the previous year. Duder’s concern for the way in which the mind and the body meet up is compelling, and the way the body is translated into text calls for further examination.

Drawing on other material theorists, those who propose exciting discussions of lived materiality in texts and who “take the physicality of the human body into account” (Alaimo and Hekman, 2007) including Deleuze and Guattari, Linda Birke, and Ladelle McWhorter, I argue that because Alex’s swimming body is “becoming” and is a

disciplined body, it resists its own representation. This serves to break down the mind/body dichotomy that the textual elements may, at first, seem to affirm.

Consequently, Alex's stream-of-consciousness thoughts while "performing," visually represented in italics, are ultimately helpful for her own maturation and for providing alternative discourses for contemporary feminist and material theories of embodiment by writing *from* the body.

My final thoughts and conclusions in Chapter 6 address the question of sport literature's relevance to feminist theory and individual ideologies. I draw conclusions about my return to swimming and argue here that when we can find new ways of seeing women athletes beyond "representations," when we can start to see them as moving, breathing, sweating and straining bodies, we will find new ways of writing young women athletes. For me and for these athletes, the body can be a source of self-knowledge and imaginative, corporeal possibilities in writing.

I had been thinking about getting back into the water, about swimming, for several years while I was studying at The University of Texas at Arlington. I had summoned the courage to attend the Lap Swim hours once during my first year there and was pestered by an older Chinese man who wanted me to teach him how to breathe without lifting his head in front of him. I have always loved the anonymity of swimming and the idea of having to teach during my precious swim time was unbearable, so I stopped going altogether. Now, I finally had the motivation to do it.

Two months earlier, my husband and I had learned that our 7-week old unborn baby didn't have a heartbeat, and that it had stopped growing at 6 weeks. I had the D & C performed a week later, on December 14. I had never felt so let down, so betrayed by my body before. The disappointment and grief that followed during the holiday season felt unbearable, but I knew that I had to find a way to deal with our loss. In the next few months, I was forced to reconsider all the academic work I had done on feminist theory, about women's bodies and sport literature, seminar papers I wrote on how strong these bodies can be, and how empowering they can be for feminist theorists. And here was my body, still looking and acting eight weeks pregnant, my plunging hormones making my face break out like a teenager, my body flabby and soft. I wanted an answer I would never get to the most cliched of all questions: why had this happened to me? Why had my body betrayed me? I felt a great responsibility within my body to nurture and support a baby for nine months. I had read feminists like Simone de Beauvoir and Adrienne Rich who felt ambivalent about

pregnancy, and the many women who described being pregnant as something they felt had “taken over their body.”

However, during the two months I was pregnant, I felt utterly me: after trying to conceive for a year-and-a-half, my body finally felt strong, the confidence I had in it similar to when I was a competitive swimmer. When I dove into the pool, it took over, racing onward to the next wall. I thought it would be the same way with having a baby. It would do what it was “supposed to do,” under the circumstances. Egg had met sperm, and now my body was going to keep the zygote-turned-fetus safe and secure for the next nine months, or so I thought. I did everything in my power to keep my body healthy during that time: I went on daily walks, took vitamins, quit smoking and stopped drinking everything from beer to caffeine. I even supplemented my body with progesterone cream to keep my levels high. There was no identifiable reason why this baby that my husband and I had wanted for so long did not thrive. Over and over the doctors, countless friends and family members said the same thing: “It’s not your fault.” But I would always counter, “Yes, but I feel like my body was responsible.” I still feel that way, as if whatever genetic flaw or chromosomal abnormality that kept our baby’s heart from beating could have been counter-balanced by something in my body to keep it alive. I had that much faith in my body. It was a different kind of strength, granted, but the truth was, when I was pregnant I felt as strong as I had been when I was at the height of my swimming career, which ultimately never amounted to much, either.

I wasn't an Olympic swimmer by any means, but I did swim competitively year-round for 10 years, from the time that my family and I moved to Houston, when I was in the third grade, to my senior year in high school. During middle school, I swam every evening for two hours with a club swim team, and my freshman year I didn't make Varsity but worked so hard that my coach moved me up because he knew I was determined to succeed. My summers were full of 6 a.m. practices and Saturday swim meets for the local subdivision swim team, and during high school I swam up to four hours a day, two in the morning and two again in the evening. My events in high school were the 200 and 500-yard freestyle, but I also excelled at the shorter distances on the summer league: the 50 backstroke, butterfly and 100 individual medley. After 10 years out of the water, I wasn't even sure whether or not I would be able to swim a 500 free. All I wanted was to find another way to grieve, and I thought maybe I would find that in swimming -- in the memory of my body in action, in repetitively pulling the water down past my body again and again and again, so that I could move on.

CHAPTER 1

VIEWS FROM THE STARTING BLOCK: READING FEMINISM AND BODIES

In this chapter, instead of diving into specific YA texts with my feminist concerns in tow, I think it's important to start with a consideration of where ideas of cultural contestation and reclamation of the body come from, and where we can go from here.

The advances that second and third wave feminism have helped achieve for women of all ages, but especially young women, are worthwhile to examine. With an increase in awareness of body image issues has come an increase in the ways that women's bodies have been written, not only in regards to sexuality, but in rethinking and rewriting the body in motion, the athletic body. The passage of Title IX gave females equal access to funding for sports in public schools, and this significant advancement for young women meant that young women's bodies were more likely to be seen, heard and written about in action on the page. However, only a small percentage of Young Adult books describe athletes, and even a smaller number tell female athletes' stories.

Feminist theorists have continued to find new ways to look, write and think about the female body. More recently, these "material" feminist theorists have incorporated poststructuralism and postmodernism into their arsenal of ways to think about the disciplining forces on the body, and how we can use them to resist cultural hegemony. As

Stacy Alaimo writes in “Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature,”

The most intriguing work is that which is informed by poststructuralism, social construction, and cultural studies, but that pushes against the edges of those very paradigms; those writers who have been immersed within the cosmos of the ‘linguistic turn,’ yet are turning toward the extra-discursive, or extra-linguistic realm. (Alaimo and Hekman, 2007)

She cites many theorists, such as Donna Haraway, Moira Gatens and Karen Barad who have all “extended their paradigms into the material realm.” For many feminists, there is not just one theory of the body, one way to look at it, but a plurality of voices and possibilities that have recently started to reclaim the body and redefine it in ways that are not smothering, degrading or essentializing. Although not all scholars will agree that the following feminists expose material concerns, I would argue that their reclamations of the significance of the corporeal body in puberty, pregnancy, sport and gender are worth noting.

Although all of the advances that have come about in the effort to write and reclaim the corporeal body are too numerous to list here, I would like to comment briefly on several feminist theorists on whom I have reflected throughout the past year as I churned out laps and moved through the water. These theorists contributed greatly to my understanding of the dilemmas involved in envisioning and writing their bodies, and through a description of the books themselves (in a more or less chronological fashion), this chapter attempts to show the discursiveness and interconnectedness of their ideas and insights. It’s important to lay out the tools I will be working with as I move on from here

to other Young Adult texts, and my return to these feminist classics was bound up in my return to swimming. At times they were difficult to read (especially when the women themselves described ambivalence about their healthy pregnancies), but they helped me feel and see the path in front of me a little more clearly. Sometimes I cried when I read them because they knew what it was like to be pregnant, and I did not. I chose these books because they helped me think; I chose these books because they articulated bodies in ways that actively translated the flesh onto the page. In no way am I aiming to provide a complete history of feminism, or a comprehensive listing or progression of feminist ideas. I hope it will be enough to say: this is how I came to think about bodies.

De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*

One of the books I found of great comfort and interest in thinking about writing the body was *The Second Sex*, by Simone De Beauvoir. I found a used, paperback First Vintage Books edition, published in August 1974, at a Half-Price Books in Austin, and was immediately overwhelmed at the sheer size of the tome. The cover, seventies chic in gold, black and cream heralded it as “The classic manifesto of the liberated woman.” Manifesto. Liberation. 814 pages. De Beauvoir intimidated but also intrigued me. Having read bits and pieces of her work in graduate classes, I was giddy at the knowledge that this was it. I knew it was written in the 1950s, but I wanted to see her liberated body on the yellowing pages. When I opened the book to the Table of Contents, I was disappointed. “Patriarchal Times and Classical Antiquity”? “D.H. Lawrence or Phallic Pride”? I immediately felt doomed at ever being able to consider myself a feminist scholar. Book Two was considerably more interesting, however. The structure of the

second book breaks the categories of woman into chapters, from Childhood to Old Age, in a turn reminiscent of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*. I looked up the word "sports" in the glossary and found two page numbers; both were in Part Four titled "The Formative Years"; more specifically, the references were in Chapter 13, "The Young Girl." Again I saw that adolescence and sports were linked. On this chapter I concentrated my endeavor.

The Second Sex was published in 1953, and for most scholars, De Beauvoir is known for acknowledging the body in negative terms, as a "swamp" that women must muddle through, and her central theme is her desire for autonomy and independence in that body. Criticisms of her work include arguments that she accepts white, bourgeois women's experience as the norm. However, this criticism is understandable, given her place in 1950's culture – women of color were not yet considered "real" or included in examinations of gender construction. De Beauvoir is well known for writing that what signifies the situation of woman is that she is compelled by men to assume status as Other. Her trademark phrase, one that I had heard often in graduate school, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes, a woman" (301) speaks to cultural construction of gender. Women become "other" (301) because they start to believe they are by societal shaping, political pressure, and self-monitoring. Woman learns to submerge and renounce her subjectivity. Implicit in De Beauvoir's argument is also the idea that representation itself is a trap set out by men, for "... they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth" (161). In spite of all of this negative discussion of women's bodies located only within the patriarchal economy, De Beauvoir should be

recognized for her consideration of the corporeal body beyond her visual metaphors comparing women's ovaries to a prison.

In particular, Chapter 13, "The Young Girl" reclaims the young female body as a site of intense physical transformation. "With puberty, the future not only approaches: it takes residence in her body; it assumes the most concrete reality" (367). Girl's youth, much like pregnancy, "is consumed in waiting," though they might not realize it. Instead of awaiting freedom or newfound power, De Beauvoir argues, at this stage, "She is awaiting Man." The next paragraph captured my attention. De Beauvoir describes how puberty transforms the young girl's body in detailed, metaphorical and yet undeniably corporeal language that makes the reader remember what it was like to be a teenager, to envision, but more than that, to remember her own body as it was changing from girl to woman:

For the future, her muscular power, endurance, and agility will be inferior to those qualities in a man. The imbalance of her hormones creates nervous and vasomotor instability. Menstruation is painful: headaches, overfatigue, abdominal pains, make normal activities distressing or impossible; psychic difficulties often appear... circulatory difficulties and certain autointoxications make the body seem a screen interposed between the woman and the world, a fiery mist that settles over her, stifling her and cutting her off. Apprehended through this complaining and passive flesh, the whole universe seems a burden too heavy to bear. (369)

Even though a reader might initially be put off by the negative way De Beauvoir presents this transformation, I read this passage in an entirely positive sense; not because I enjoyed remembering what it was like to have menstrual cramps or irritability, but because her writing uses language meaningfully to write the body, language that I believe thoughtfully addresses this time in young girls' lives, a familiarity with flesh and a poetry of corporeal pain. She is actively translating a young girl's body onto the page.

The next section seems disappointingly out of touch (both literally and euphemistically) with bodies and with contemporary attitudes toward the healing properties of exercise and sport and with my own feelings of empowerment as a teenage athlete: "This awkward, painful existence of the body is not relieved by a game of soccer or a swim in the pool" (369). Again, the fact that this text is 50 years old is partly the reason it seems dated. We must acknowledge that De Beauvoir is still very much a product of her situated culture, even as she tries to think about women in new ways, and by doing so, opens doors for change. My own experience growing up 40 years later in a post-Title IX world was much different: as swimmers, we did feel strong in our muscular bodies and were empowered by the thrill of winning a race. Most of us who felt inclined to participate in sports were encouraged to do so and supported by family and friends. Though we may have felt awkward or clumsy, we all felt a sense of grace given to us by the water, for in shaping the water, it shaped us, gave us new bodies that were no longer controlled by the way we felt about our breast or hip size. We summed up each girl's potential in terms of strength, flexibility, speed and grace in motion.

In contrast, for young women in the first half of the 20th century, puberty was a time when the girl gives up “rough games” as well as organized sports. Without an urge toward sport, “... their bodies have to suffer things only in a passive manner; much more definitely than when younger, they must give up emerging beyond what is given and asserting themselves above other people” (370). De Beauvoir writes that competition, so important to young men, is “unknown to women.” She describes a tomboy who “was shown that brute force is on the side of the males”; this began the tomboy’s breakdown into passivity and dependency. For the adolescent girl, “her whole body is a source of embarrassment,” a “hysterical” body that causes great anxiety (372). But she ultimately champions the cause for girls to rage against the machine:

It is precisely the female athletes who, being positively interested in their own game, feel themselves least handicapped in comparison to the male. It remains true that her physical weakness does not permit woman to learn the lessons of violence: but if she could assert herself through her body and face the world in some other fashion, this deficiency would be easily compensated for. Let her swim, climb mountain peaks, pilot an airplane, battle against the elements, take risks, go out for adventure, and she will not feel before the world that timidity which I have referred to. (373)

The defeatism that results from the undermining of the body, in De Beauvoir’s point of view, is due to a lack of initiative in exercise, education and artistic pursuits. This is contingent on the fact that these girls do not see themselves as responsible for

their future, and thus the only other choice is femininity; and “to be feminine is to appear weak, futile, docile” (376). Chapter 13 ends with a bleak vision for girls. Through the loss of courage about their bodies, they become “the prey of men”; glorification of the body only happens through praise from men “to whom this body is destined” (379), and bodies drown under the depths of misogyny.

Maybe, however, the glimmer of hope that De Beauvoir quickly dispenses with at the beginning of the chapter merits further consideration. We must reclaim the future of girls’ bodies, at the crucial stage when they start to transition: puberty. *The Second Sex*, and in particular Chapter 13, not only speaks of women as “other,” as second in the hierarchy, but I would argue, of a “second” chance to reclaim bodies in “The Formative Years,” when female bodies move from Active to Other. De Beauvoir’s book encouraged me to remember and to embrace the empowerment I had as a young athlete when I felt my body to be Other. I still open it occasionally to find her luxurious and vexing descriptions of that changing flesh. De Beauvoir’s statement, “Not to have confidence in one’s body is to lose confidence in oneself” is a fitting warning to those who devalue the body in finding articulation of the self. Many contemporary Young Adult authors, writing 40-50 years later, still retain those cultural stereotypes of female bodies and female athletic bodies as “less than” male bodies. Finding ways to write and translate the female body in puberty as not just changing but becoming, in a way that empowers and embodies, is an important consideration for feminist concerns. Tessa Duder's *In Lane Three*, *Alex Archer*, is a Young Adult sport novel that writes the pubescent body in empowering ways, as I will explain in Chapter Five.

Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One*

With the second wave of feminism, and those who incorporated De Beauvoir's ideas about gender construction, theorists began trying to find ways to extricate bodies from the binary De Beauvoir was, in effect, setting up. This endeavor moved mostly into the realm of discourse, of finding ways of writing and thinking about the body that moved away from the actual leaky, weighty body that dragged down feminist desires, often using psychoanalysis to help them do this. Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One*, published in 1977, insists that "woman" must exist elsewhere, outside of the binary; otherwise she cannot exist. My 1990 fourth printing of Cornell Paperbacks (another Half-Price Books purchase) was thoroughly inscribed with notes from the previous owner. I fantasized that the elegant cursive, written in light gray pencil, was the musing of a woman also searching for her identity and power in her body; but when I returned home to read the marginalia, I was disappointed. They were merely notations of a reader interpreting the text for a graduate class: *the other as receptacle that knows everything except itself* was written on one page. Another question: *Critique of Lacan? Woman is the Sex which is what?* Her questions and comments were bland. I couldn't envision the author of the notes hunched over the book, nor the sea that may have existed outside her window, the pencil poised lightly against thumb, underlining Irigaray's words. Irigaray's body was clearer to me in the text itself, for her ideas are as invested in her flesh as they are in her words.

Irigaray's most compelling argument in *This Sex Which is Not One* is that, instead of "woman" being "womb" (Beauvoir xv), the multiple "lips" of woman's genitals allow

for multiple ways of speaking, creating a plurality of voices, and a plurality of sexuality. A plurality of sexuality points toward a plurality of bodies that exists outside of the binary. She writes that women resist definition and that the female “voice” may be able to speak on multiple levels, with multiple meanings. There were no handwritten notes in Chapter 11 – maybe the book’s owner didn’t make it to the end – which, to me, is the most transformative, corporeal section of the book. In “When Our Lips Speak Together,” Irigaray’s passage about writing the body through these lips, like “The Young Girl” in *The Second Sex*, spurs us on to bodily resurrection through movement, but she takes it one step further to talk about how to do this, in writing:

If we don’t invent a language, if we don’t find our body’s language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. We shall tire of the same ones, and leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized. Asleep again, unsatisfied, we shall fall back on the words of men – who, for their part, have “known” for a long time. But not our body. Seduced, attracted, fascinated, ecstatic with our becoming, we shall remain paralyzed. Deprived of our movements. Rigid, whereas we are made for endless change. Without leaps or falls, and without repetition.

Keep on going, without getting out of breath. Your body is not the same today as yesterday. Your body remembers. There’s no need for you to remember. No need to hold fast to yesterday, to store it up as capital in your head. Your memory? Your body expresses yesterday in what it wants today. If you think: yesterday I was, tomorrow I shall be, you are thinking:

I have died a little. Be what you are becoming, without clinging to what you might have been, what you might yet be... Our body, right here, right now, gives us a very different certainty. Truth is necessary for those who are so distanced from their body that they have forgotten it. (214)

Irigaray's quest for truth in "our body, right here, right now," for the reclamation of the body through an awareness of all that it knows, remembers and does, was central in my desire to know myself again. She writes the body as she writes to it and about it: "Always, I carry you with me everywhere" (216). For me, her idea of *l'écriture féminine*, a way of feminine writing that is subversive and reactive and that rejects the binary, is wrapped up in this awareness of bodily memory and its role in becoming. When I thought I would rather die, when I felt "out of breath," she inspired me to "continue," to revel in "the lips never opened or closed on a truth" (217). I felt disconnected from the writing filling up the margins of Irigaray's book, but her words connected me to my own skin again, if only for a little while. I started to see my body again as moving, changing and in the process of becoming. I had died a little after the miscarriage, and my body knew it. Quite literally, my body would never be the same. But when I swam, I felt the pathways of communication between my body and myself flowing as freely as the oxygen, adrenaline and lactic acid that traveled to and from my heart and lungs. I carried a new sense of my body as a truth I would never forget. This sense of the mutual identification of my body and hers resulted from the way I experienced the body in motion on the page and later, when I was in the water swimming laps. Even though we didn't even speak the same native language, I felt that the images she used of the body, and more specifically,

her body in movement and transition negotiated Grosz's "borderline" of both discourses of the body and materiality of specific bodies. In this passage, "the body is neither – while also being both" (280). Irigaray's writing articulates and mutually constitutes the interaction between mind and body working through the act of reading.

I must mention here that Helene Cixous' essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" also outlines a new vision of feminine writing, playing off of what Irigaray has set up. Cixous argues that by "writing herself," woman will return to the body that has been taken from her. She sees writing and the body as inseparable: censoring one would lead to censoring the other. In a move away from literal notions of the body, Cixous claims that by writing "in white ink" (339), women's milk -- the one fluid that a man cannot produce -- a woman's body will be heard. Woman must write individually, and by doing so, woman is able to put herself into the text, whereas for many feminists, writing is to take up the male position in language, which excludes female bodies. Cixous projects strategies for a new relation between female bodies and language (309). She acknowledges that "women are slippery," metaphorically and literally, and argues that women need a feminine writing for female bodies. She believes this reunion with the body will dissolve distinctions, dichotomies and lead to a new kind of writing. Since my project is to find and articulate a female embodied language in sport literature, Cixous' and Irigaray's concerns are important. How can we write in a way that a woman's body will be heard? How do we put women's bodies in the text? Through locating, translating and writing bodies. Young Adult sport literature is one crucial juncture at which writing and bodies can be articulated in insightful, subversive and destructive ways.

Rich's *Of Woman Born*

Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* was one of the most difficult books to read in the time following my miscarriage. Just looking at the cover of the hardback, with its stark cream, black and red writing, a 1976 first edition, was published the year before I was born. The title alone forced me to think about the loss of my child not born. On the first page of the foreword, her words stung like a slap to the face: "Woman's status as childbearer has been made into a major fact of life. Terms like 'barren' or 'childless' have been used to negate any further identity." I felt the force of those words in my empty womb. Her argument, "Women are controlled by lashing us to our bodies" (13) stuck out in deep contrast to what I had learned and praised from my reading of Irigaray. Her experience of the body through pregnancy was completely different to mine. Though she had measles during her first pregnancy, (which was later diagnosed as an "allergic reaction" to pregnancy itself), she had three healthy children. In Chapter One, "Anger and Tenderness," she writes of the ambivalence she felt about having her three boys, and the depression, anger and sense of entrapment she felt about not being able to read and work on her poetry while raising her children; it was a loss of her self, and she rebelled against the feeling that even women in the academic community, during that period, were "expected to fill both the part of the Victorian Lady of Leisure, the Angel in the House, and also the Victorian cook, scullery maid, laundress, governess, and nurse" (27). The body speaks clearly (and speaks truthfully to me) when she writes about the patriarchal system that leads to the "negative or suspect status of women who are not mothers" (34):

Throughout patriarchal mythology, dream-symbolism, theology, language, two ideas flow side by side: one, that the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, “the devil’s gateway.” On the other hand, as mother the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing; and the physical potential for motherhood – that same body with its bleedings and mysteries – is her single destiny and justification in life. Those two ideas have become deeply internalized in women, even in the most independent of us, those who seem to lead the freest lives. (34)

In this passage, Rich verbalized the fear and disappointment that raged inside me. I felt I was a double loser: my body was all the more corrupt because I had failed at motherhood. I felt barren, infertile, stripped of even the chance to despise and complain about the demands of motherhood. Later I put words to the feeling: I was jealous of her kind of suffering. She was still a woman; I was not. Writing “directly and overtly” out of her body made me experience my bodily loathing and discomfort more intensely. But at the same time, I rejoiced in the bond we shared, a suffering that came from artificial ideas about what women were and what they could and should do. After reading *Of Woman Born*, I felt we had crossed similarly choppy waters, and were both diving into the wreck that was the shared trauma of our lives. Like Rich,

What I carried away in the end was a determination to heal – insofar as an individual woman can, and as much as possible with other women – the separation between mind and body; never to lose myself psychically and

physically in that way. Slowly I came to understand the paradox contained in “my” experience of motherhood; that, although different from many other women’s experiences it was not unique; and that only in shedding the illusion of my uniqueness could I hope, as a woman, to have any authentic life at all. (40)

My return to swimming, to moving, feeling and questioning the agency of my body was the way I began to heal, to begin to lose my disappointment in my body. I started to see differently, to change my perspective of a dysfunctional, loathsome, failed body. I let these texts and bodies talk to me. When I swim, I feel I am part of their relay. I have seen them touch the wall in front of me, and now I must take up the next leg, as so many have done before. Rereading these texts further affirmed that the body, as Grosz writes, “serves at the locus for thinking differently about both feminist histories and feminist futures, and the political aims of feminist cultural criticism more broadly” (163).

The Postmodern Body

In the 1980s, after Irigaray and Rich cleared a path for a dissolution of patriarchal confines for women, feminist theorists incorporated Foucault and postmodern ideas into the discussion of fluidity of gender, and the confusion of boundaries and binaries. This led to new ways of thinking about feminist theory itself, and a freedom from the essentializing term itself of “woman.” This is slippery territory for reclamation of the body, however, especially when using postmodernism, an ideology that defines the self as discursive and constructed by society. Foucault, who probably never thought of himself as a feminist theorist, rethinks the regulation of sex and gender through discipline

and historical regimes of power. In *The History of Sexuality* and *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault links discipline to the “gaze,” the masculine domination of women, which will later be used in Laura Mulvey and John Berger’s analysis of films and photographs, of which I will comment on in Chapter Two. And later, in Chapter Five I will discuss Ladelle McWhorter’s bodily transformation through reading Foucault’s texts in *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* and Judith Butler’s attempt in *Bodies that Matter* to deal with performativity, identity, and resignification of gender in a way that still accounts for the materiality of the body. She writes that performativity, of troubling identity categories (for example, cross-dressing) has the potential to make new meanings for gender and sex. Foucault and Butler both liberate and problematize my work in reclaiming the body, and in particular, reclaiming *my* body. I will explain these theorists’ contributions to some detail in Chapter Five.

Bordo’s Unbearable Weight

Another more corporeal feminist, Susan Bordo contends in *Unbearable Weight* that most scholarship on the body is negative (dieting, cosmetic surgery, etc.), but there are other ways to think about the positive redefinitions of the body. For Bordo, however, the woman’s body can finally offer resistance to cultural norms. Following Foucault, she acknowledges that the body is the site of political control, but there are other ways and possibilities of developing alternative “body politics.” Bordo writes about the fear of fat and disgust that women have for our bodies; however, she dismisses her own personal narratives and embodied life practices. She mentions that she recently went on a national weight-loss diet and lost 30 pounds; she also says that it was “a choice that some of my

colleagues viewed as inconsistent and even hypocritical, given my work” (30); however, she never deals with how this shaped her ideology further than admonishing us that feminist cultural criticism “does not tell us what to do” (30). This is a valid point, but the inconsistency sends a divided message to readers: Why is her own experience not further explored? Do cultural messages about the body sabotage even those striving to break free of them? Bordo’s book explores the gendered nature of mind/body dualism and argues that “culture’s grip on the body is a constant, intimate fact of everyday life” (17), but she does not bring her own body into play. I felt that was important to consider in my own methodology.

Bordo argues that the body is the key to the self, even if she chooses not to write about her own. Women who write about bodies often forget about the power of their own bodies. One of the most frustrating aspects of bodies is the range of complex and conflicting positions and biases that feminist theorists bring to the table, from celebration of the athletic body to the dismissal of the weak or disabled body. *Unbearable Weight* gets at the central question of how purely textual and representative analyses neglect the “body’s material locatedness in history, practice and culture. If the body is treated as pure text, subversive, destabilizing elements can be emphasized and freedom and self-determination celebrated; but one is left wondering, is there a body in this text?” (38). She advocates exploring bodies as concrete objects of materiality, and argues that we do have to open our eyes to limits and consequences of the body: “What, after all, is more personal than the life of the body?” (17). I will discuss the reproduction of femininity in bodies further in the next chapter as I look at photographs of female athletes.

Potentials and Possibilities: Writing the Body

There have been other feminist authors and other books that have radically shifted the way matter and bodies are translated onto the page, but the most interesting, and I think, most potent reclamations of the body are those feminists who deal with the very real, flesh and blood, corporeal body of women and the ways that women move, think about, discipline and celebrate their bodies. Theorists like De Beauvoir, Irigaray, Rich and Bordo look at a variety of issues, but they are all grounded in the body itself, the practices and possibilities of the flesh. Sometimes this is successful, and sometimes the discursive nature of writing itself elides the body. It is important that these theorists want to restore the body as a material site of feminist struggle. However, several questions naturally arise. How do we put material feminist theory to use? How do we come to know our bodies? How do we find materiality *beyond* discourse? Material feminists continue to attempt to answer these questions by rereading theorists that seem counter-intuitive and counter-traditional to feminist cultural studies. For example, in *Material Feminisms*, by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (2007), material theorists such as Donna Haraway, Ladelle McWorter and Moira Gatens reread the works of Spinoza, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault and Butler in an attempt to “radically recast the very foundations of essentialism.”

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that even though materiality is not the same for De Beauvoir, Irigaray, Rich and Bordo, and though they all enter the discussion differently, what I came to understand is that they all write bodies in ways that intersect at the matrix of discourse and materialism. What I also learned from reading DeBeauvoir,

Irigaray and Rich was that in order to make the body really matter, we must deal with all of its messiness, strengths, flaws and unpredictability. We must grapple with questions we have no answers to, and we must look at women's bodies, the *real* bodies that are out in the world: hitting a ball, making love, giving birth, stripping, and selling insurance. New spaces of possibility open up when we see and write about these bodies; these spaces include young adult sport literature and other genres that involve changing, moving and static bodies. Feminist theorists are also now starting to look at the body and sports as places of feminist bodily possibility. Feminist theorists will try to reclaim the body, but the key, I think, is in deciding that we don't really want to claim it or define it at all. What women must do is take up our writing in our body, from our body, to our body, and these women did so -- De Beauvoir's body as "other"; Irigaray and Cixous' bodies outside of the binary; Rich's, a body dissatisfied and oppressed; and Bordo's body lighter and yet still silent. I take from them and leave on my own down the lane, hoping that my kicking and breathing will be heard. I will try to write my body, to resist the urge to stop, yet understanding that there are voices that have come before me that have been muffled, that haven't been able to breathe.

These books were not only important to my healing but to this project and to the way contemporary writers, photographers and filmmakers write the female athlete's body. Finding these books has given me a sense of purpose, a place to articulate what and where I see the future for women's bodies. More importantly than personal epiphany, my return to these books highlights a need for rethinking the way that women write about and from their bodies. This analysis also highlights the larger debate in material feminism

whether some feminist texts fit into already established categories of materiality or discourse. I would argue that the body can be a ballast between the two teetering categories and that we must find balance between individual acts of subversion and resistance, and find ways for women to form affinities and bonds with other women based on the common potentials and possibilities for all.

The State Meet

My husband Nathan and I went to the UIL 5A State Swim meet in Austin, Texas, during a weekend in February, a couple of months after the miscarriage, to get away from our sadness. I wanted to see if I could connect with that part of my life, if I could feel the same excitement of my youth, cheering for someone racing fast into the wall. On the way to the swim meet, my husband asked me how long I wanted to stay (he was looking forward to going to the UT basketball game against Kansas that night). I said a couple of hours, and that I was sure I would be ready to leave. I was excited about seeing the Kingwood team and knew that there was a good chance that my old coaches would be there. I wanted to find the rest of the parents and supporters in navy and white, our school colors. However, most of the seats at the Jamail Natatorium were filled long before the doors opened, and there were no open seats in the Kingwood section. Nathan thought it would be important to see the end of each race (the fingers actually hitting the touch pad at the end of the lane), so we sat at the top of the middle section next to some rival Houston Cy-Fair fans, whom I immediately disliked. I felt a surge of protectiveness towards the Kingwood swimmers and their families, as if I still belonged in their clique, and cheered quietly, although inside I was ecstatic whenever a Kingwood swimmer took a medal. The chlorine stank and the air was warm and muggy. It felt like home.

Popular rap music played loudly as we found our seats, and the lanes were full in all three pools (the 50-meter pool was divided into three 25-yard pools). The

competitors swam in concentric circles, one almost on top of the other, and looking down on it from such a great height made me a little dizzy. I immediately felt a tightening in my chest, a pull towards the water as if a rope connected me down there. I felt nostalgia but also a very present sense of excitement, as if I were one of them and would be swimming a race in a couple of hours.

After we squashed ourselves into our white plastic chairs, I looked through the program to see where Kingwood's swimmers were seeded. How they had swam in the semifinals would automatically place them in their lanes for the final race – in descending order – lane 4 being the fastest, followed by 5, 3, 6, 2, 7, 1, and 8 being the slowest-seeded time). For each race there was a consolation heat and a final heat. I went through my program in excitement, checking all of the names and looking for pool records set by the Kingwood team in the past. At the top of the page, where the records were listed, I saw many names I recognized – Olympic gold medalist Natalie Coughlin from California, Dana Vollmer from Granbury, Texas, and even a Janet Evans record from the 1980s still stood in the 500 and 1500 free. I also found that the 200 free in the Boys section was still unbroken from 1993, during my years at Kingwood. I remembered those boys, their bodies lean and tan and smooth. One of them committed suicide a couple of years ago. With that recollection, I suddenly felt like an impostor. I had never made it. I was never good enough to swim with the elite. I had gone to the State Meet in 1994, and it was the last thing I ever did in my swimming career, but the fact remained that I hadn't qualified. I just rode the bus with the team. My 200 free time was close but not good enough. I swam the best 200 free of my career

at the Regional meet at Humble High School, a 2:12. These swimmers were all qualifying in under two minutes. Not much had changed.

I looked down and saw my old coach, Lanny Landtroop, in the stands. I wanted to go talk to him, but I felt fat and insecure. What would I say to him? Would he remember me? I didn't want to go. I didn't want him to recognize me. He looked older; instead of a flat top of white blond hair, he was bald. His hands looked exactly the same, though – thick and white, with deep creases in the knuckles. I remembered his hands. I could imagine his feet, the light hairs crowning his toes. I felt nauseous. I had to get out of there.

On my way to the bathroom, I saw a girl I recognized from high school who swam on the Kingwood team with me. I remembered her name immediately -- Tanya. She was standing with a bunch of high school swimmers under the stairs. Maybe she was a coach. She looked exactly the same, too: permed hair, glasses, even the shape of her thighs – like Vienna sausages. I wondered if I looked very much the same, too. I felt a lot older. I wanted to be. Since we used to get ready for school in the locker room, I remembered that we used to make fun of her because she smelled up the toilets in the morning. I felt like I was back in high school again. I was old and then young, aging again and again. I remembered posing for our Varsity team picture my junior year. We wore men's dress shirts and ties over our Speedos, creating three rows of magician's assistants, smiling strangely and cut in half.

As I reminisced, I watched the bodies on deck as much as the swimming. I yearned to feel in shape again, to take the strength of my body for granted. These are

the images that stay with me: a girl whipping her arms back and forth, shoulder blades swinging like a seesaw. A boy in a Speedo and white cap hunched over an I-Pod. Four girls with wet hair on a podium, smiling into the flash of light.

Sideshow

*Remember when Ann used to walk on her hands
around the pool's cold deck,
fingers spread wide?*

*Her body looked like a diver
suspended in mid-air*

*undulating ripples
from breasts to abs to thighs;
smooth muscle sheathed
in a gray,
sausage-like casing.*

*I didn't mean
to think of her body as pork
but weren't they squeezing
us into a mold*

*wouldn't we do acrobatics
wouldn't we tumble
headfirst into the looming foam
upon request*

*one tweet of the whistle
one bark of the horn
and we were off to the races*

*Maybe Ann was the clown
who upset the ordered void
turning everything upside down.*

CHAPTER 2

TAKE YOUR MARK: CONFRONTING THE FEMININE ATHLETIC BODY

I don't have many pictures of myself in the pool, racing, or in my swimsuits. My family was never really the shutterbug type. Although my dad did enjoy photography, his slides from vacation would always include pictures of hydrangeas, doorways, and the occasional blurry hand covering the foreheads of my twin brother and me. I'm not sure why there aren't many photographs during my athletic years – I didn't think my parents were uninvolved. But it was Houston, and it was hot. Swim meets are long and boring: two to three days of back-to-back races, lasting sometimes eight hours a day. Often my mom would take a nap in the car, sometimes missing my swim. I didn't mind.

Swimming, for me, was never about the competition, about the picture of me up on the winner's circle. Don't get me wrong -- I loved to win -- but I always felt that the cost was more than the reward. I was too nervous to really focus on much during the meet. My favorite part of going to meets was watching people, much the same as it is now. I loved to compare shapes – one swimmer's calves made the shape of an upside-down heart, another's like a block of wood. Shoulder blades met muscle at fascinating angles. And I enjoyed it being over, the satisfaction of having gotten through another meet, and having the rest of the weekend to relax, read and watch television.

I was shy and awkward, and like many other teenage girls, spent hours in front of the mirror, obsessing about the way I looked. Addicted to fashion magazines, I loved experimenting with the latest makeup trends and hairstyles. I was also chained to makeup, eye makeup anyway, because like many teenagers, I was prone to having great levels of anxiety over things, like competing, which I eased by pulling out my eyelashes. Later, when I was in college, it was diagnosed as a common form of Obsessive-compulsive disorder; but when I was young, I felt like a freak. In order to hide the great bare parts of my eyelids, I would carefully line my eyes every morning before practice with black eyeliner. Permanent Sharpie black markers also did the trick. I was self-conscious about feeling different from any of the other girl swimmers, whom I thought were loads more confident and beautiful than I was. Feeling self-conscious about my appearance, I over-compensated for my lack of self-confidence by striving to look perfect, and yet I felt guilty for caring so much about what I looked like. In the water, with my goggles on, no one knew that I was a monstrous creature with missing eyelashes. But the rest of the time, I would do my best to be the most feminine, beautiful swimmer on the team.

After I started swimming again in my late twenties, I asked my mom to look for photographs of myself in the pool or in a swim suit, and she sent me back a thin envelope containing four or five tiny, out-of-focus pictures, saying, “more of them are probably in your dad’s slide collection.” A particularly interesting photograph for me is the one taken during the summer of my junior year in high school, posing on the diving board.



Figure 2.1 Look at Me, and Smile!

I am wearing big, silver earrings in the shape of an anchor, earrings that flash in the sun. I must have been fourteen or fifteen then, because we had recently moved to a subdivision called Sand Creek, where the swimsuits were black and red, and we were Sea Lions. I broke a pool record in the 100 IM that year -- I still have the little blue ribbon with the time printed neatly on the back in black ink. Physically, I was fairly strong, lithe and graceful; it seems inconsistent looking back on it now that I am wearing such bright red lipstick, crossing my legs and pointing my toes in a playful, model-like pose. No one else in the team picture is wearing earrings as big as mine or as much makeup.

I am hoping -- no -- I am sure that I am not alone in being posed for that photograph. Many girls on the swim team, or basketball team, or any sports team for that matter, remember picture day. That day we girls primped in the bleach-soaked bathroom while the guys shot the breeze. The photographer placed each of the girls in her pose on the diving board, giving instructions: "Hand on your leg, straight back, that's a girl. Cross one leg over the other... now, look at me and smile!" In posing for that photograph, I was doing my best to be both feminine and athletic. They were qualities I always assumed that were expected of all women.

This posed photograph is different from pictures of female athletes in my husband's *Sports Illustrated* "Leading Off" section. I enjoy looking at action shots like these, photographs which show the professional female athlete as determined, muscular, strong and powerful: smashing a tennis ball with gritted teeth, standing with hands on hips on the golf green, racing toward the finish line. Sometimes in the same photo spread there may be another portrait that is similar to the photograph of me shown above. It is this type of portrait that perplexes and intrigues me. This photograph goes one step further and places the female athlete in some sort of overtly feminine attire: lingerie, prom dress or evening gown (depending on the athlete's age) and looking flirty, sultry or playful. Like the photographer who posed me for the shot on the diving board as a Sea Lion, some photographers construct and shoot a portrait of the athlete to emphasize that she is still "woman" in several ways: clothing her in feminine attire; emphasizing youth, femininity and reproduction with makeup, hair or accessories; or arranging her in a suggestive or youthful pose that often reflects nostalgia for the "woman" of decades past.

My central question in this chapter is how athletic bodies are being “written” in these photographs, and why this combination of femininity and athleticism both disturbs and excites me in terms of usefulness for material feminists. Can femininity and athleticism co-exist peacefully? I believe so. However, photographs of female athletes speak to our dilemma about accepting female athletes as “women” by appropriating the feminine into sport photographs in an effort to negotiate the boundary between female and athlete. Many athletes are beautiful, and they often use this fact to their advantage. To be easily accepted into the world of sports by men and women alike, female athletes must be successful, strong *and* attractive. Many earn endorsements with a little makeup and a teddy bear. This can backfire, however; if the athlete cannot prove that she is successful athletically, the admiration fades away.

My goal in this chapter is to use feminist ideology to try to see more clearly the motivations that we as a culture (and I in particular) have for emphasizing the femininity of the athletic female body and how that writes the female athlete’s body. I argue that the impetus for the popularity of female athletes posing in the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition* and my need to wear earrings and makeup at a swim team photo are linked. In this next section, I will analyze the negotiation between femininity and athleticism that takes place in writing and photographing female athletic bodies.

Serena Williams is an example of an athlete who often poses in overtly feminine photographs, and in many she is sporting handbags and jewelry from her own designer line. An action shot, published in the December 29, 2004 issue of *Sports Illustrated*, shows her grimacing as she slices the tennis ball over the net. Her muscles are flexed, and

a fierce determination is seen on the Wimbledon champion's face. The next set of portraits, taken in the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Editions* of Winter 2003 and 2004, show a very different Serena posing in white bathing suits. In one picture, she is standing, hands on hips, by the side of the pool; in the next, she is leaping into the air like a child and smiling, her blonde hair waving like ribbons behind her. She looks more like a high school cheerleader than like the tennis champion who has won several majors. What motivates athletes to pose for *Swimsuit Edition* photographs? It's not enough to say that money is the only factor at stake. Williams flaunts her femininity and sexuality because our culture drives her need to contest not only for her place on the court, but also for acceptance as a woman.

“Strange and Familiar”: Photography as Truth or Representation

In “Seeing the Disabled,” Rosemarie Garland Thompson looks at disability photographs because she feels that, as a form of representation, photography carries more “truth value” than other images. She states, “In other words, we think of photographs as being closer to reality, as more reliable sources of truth, than say, drawings or even verbal representations” (335). Although photographs may seem to be transparent windows into reality, in fact, like all representations, they construct the object they represent as they depict it, shaping it through the conventions of presentation and through cultural ideas and expectations about such pictures. Perhaps the most characteristic aspect of photography is that it obscures its mediation between the viewer and the viewed.

Photographs, according to Garland Thomson, organize our perceptions of what we see without announcing to us what they are doing. Even though photographic images

appear to capture the genuine, “at the same time this representational medium arrests time, freezes motion, and prunes away space, which are the coordinates and the context of ‘real’ life.” Photographs of female athletes enter into this “dialectic of strange and familiar, of astonishment mingling with recognition” that Alan Trachtenberg in *Reading American Photographs* finds is at the heart of the photographic effect, in much the same way that photographs of persons with disabilities do because they recapitulate cultural ideas about femininity at the same time that they perpetuate those beliefs (4). “Strange and familiar” seems a provocative description for this dilemma; these photographs are “strange,” because culturally we are not yet at ease with the female athletic body, and yet we are familiar with gender roles, what the female body should look like, and what sports women should be involved in at all.

At the most fundamental level, Pamela Creedon argues in *Women, Media and Sport*, gender even influences which games or activities are defined as “real” sports. Synchronized swimming, for example, is too “feminine” -- it has peripheral status in the U.S. sports world because it involves values such as grace and patience, not often associated with “real” (that is, male) sports (5). Even in the game of golf, we find a close connection between femininity and athletics, as in the case of Michelle Wie. An Asian-American golfer, Wie, is featured in the May 3, 2004 edition of *Sports Illustrated* in a white sequined dress and white flower in her hair, golf club in hand. The dress has a fitted, “u”-shaped, sleeveless bodice over a flared tulip-shaped skirt covered in large sequins. She is casually leaning over the golf club with its lower half hidden behind her white skirt. The caption above the photograph reads, “For Michelle the transformations to

pro golfer and young woman are simultaneous.” This caption poses an interesting theory, for it argues that her femininity and athletic ability are traits that have naturally emerged simultaneously over time. However, the photograph camouflages her athleticism behind her overt femininity. For many athletes, including myself, at the same time that we found meaning and identity as athletes (and indeed, were at the height of our careers), we found adolescence changing us physically and emotionally. As I mentioned in Chapter One, these were in De Beauvoir’s terms, “The Formative Years,” both in terms of strength and sexuality. We had two new roles to take on, roles that were woven together, inextricably linked. And for a swimmer like me, the bodily changes and flaws were obvious because we had to quickly learn how to disguise our menstruation by using tampons, and because the swimsuits clearly showed our developing breasts.



Figure 2.2 Off to the Races

If for girls in the 21st century, sports and womanhood are often simultaneous endeavors, why does the tension remain? In the article “The Media’s Role in Accommodating and Resisting Stereotypes Images of Women in Sport” by Mary Jo Kane and Susan L. Greendorfer in *Women, Media and Sport*, the authors assert,

When we speak of ‘gender roles and values,’ we are focusing on the social definitions of female and male that have traditionally represented two mutually exclusive, dichotomous polar opposites. Whereas male and female are biological terms that represent differences in size, structure and reproductive capacity, feminine and masculine correspond to social, historical and cultural meanings. (29)

In looking at photographs of female athletes, feminine and masculine are no longer polar opposites. They demand to be reconciled. However, “the gaze” often gets in the way: we must take into account deeply held cultural notions that women are only to be looked at by men, that women’s bodies and photographs of those bodies are “for” men.

The Beautiful Body

As Michael Forrester writes in *Psychology of the Image*, images of women in both men’s and women’s magazines are still portrayed as passive, conforming, sexualized and subordinated people/objects. Further developing these ideas, and citing Efrat Tseelon in *The Masque of Femininity*, published in 1995, Forrester emphasizes the stigmatized nature of beauty that remains for women. Even the most cursory comparison of the ways in which men and women are represented in the media highlights the fact that

we have very different expectations regarding appearance. Forrester claims that women are stigmatized by the very expectation to be beautiful, or at least to try their best to present themselves in the “best possible light”: in other words, there is little conventional pressure on men to portray themselves in line with an endemic discourse of beauty, attractiveness and all that surrounds being an object of pleasure (that is, men’s pleasure). The whole idea of physical attractiveness, as Forrester notes, situates the woman as spectacle, the man as spectator, and “naturalizes” all that comes with gendered image production by making it seem as if it’s simply obvious, inevitable and common sense. Ideological forces are at their most powerful and insidious when they become as if invisible, Forrester writes (109). Interestingly, notions of identity and the self are also closely bound up with posture, display and performance of those bodies in photographs (168).

The Gendered Body

Through the viewer of these photographs, athletes are forced to negotiate the terms for their expression as a woman, and more significantly, as a female athlete. In photographs, female athletes must “do gender,” as Alexandra Howson describes it in *Body in Society: An Introduction*, in ways we are not yet culturally comfortable with yet, ways that disturb rather than “reinforce assumptions about gender differences” (53).

Howson cites R.W. Connell in *Gender and Power* and *Masculinities* as pointing towards particular ways in which masculinity and femininity are displayed by any one individual will vary a considerable range of gender displays is discernible in Western culture. Connell suggests that the term gender is not a description of attributes or traits

possessed by individuals but is indicative of social relations and cultural norms that shape processes of interaction and bodily conduct. Nonetheless, Connell identifies dominant versions of masculinity and femininity that inform how people “do” gender. Howson asserts that hegemonic masculinity is the dominant version of masculinity in Western culture and is associated with three main characteristics: emphasizing heterosexuality and subordinating homosexuality, emphasizing femininity and subordinating masculinity, and privileging a particular kind of male, muscular body. For an example of this, look at the set of photographs of fast-pitch softball player Lisa Fernandez, featured in Christina Lessa’s photography book *Stories of Triumph: Women Who Win in Sport and Life*, published in 1998. Fernandez’ article includes several pictures of her standing on the mound, in the dugout and smashing the ball into oblivion (45-49). We must not miss the second extreme close-up of Fernandez and her baby daughter holding hands, faces side by side, with a delicate rose placed in between (50). The rose and Fernandez’ daughter can be seen as symbols of nature, femininity and reproduction. Fernandez, as one of the older women featured in the book, gains her femininity from this first characteristic of hegemonic masculinity: the need to be heterosexual in a sport, softball, which is stereotyped to be attractive to homosexuals.

The second characteristic of hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity, can be seen in the photographs of Lucia Rijker, a professional boxer, in the same book. The first photograph shows Rijker in a very serious, masculine pose, hands on hips, and is taken from below, a photographic strategy that is thought to inspire subconscious worship (30). The eye is drawn to the massive boxing belt that Rijker wears, etched with a map of

the world, angel's wings and the acronym WIBF (Women's International Boxing Federation), which effectively suggests that she is a superhero when in the ring. The next picture shows Rijker in a sexy pose, leaning against the ropes, shoulders forward, eyes toward the camera (36). She is wearing an extremely low-cut, sequined dress that pools on the floor. The femininity of her breasts and hips is overtly emphasized by the dress, as her muscular legs are hidden, whereas in the first picture, her calves and thighs take second only to the shiny belt.

Third, according to Howson, hegemonic masculinity privileges a particular kind of male, muscular body. The muscular nature of the body in female athletes partially creates the ambivalence we have about them in contemporary culture. Rochelle Ballard, a professional surfer, displays a muscular body in the action shots published in *Women Who Win*. Her surfing body is stopped by the shot in mid-air, almost upside-down, legs braced on the surfboard, arms outstretched behind her for balance. Her body is seemingly held up by the wave she is riding, the control she has over the surfboard, and the intensity on her profiled face (40). And yet the previous photograph places her standing, hands on hips, on top of a surfboard that three men are holding (38). She seems to be in a dominating position, but her full-cut zebra-striped bathing suit undermines any authority that the photograph might translate. The suit serves to emphasize her curves and reminds one of the 1960's television show *Gidget*, the surfing dudes taking her to the next luau, perhaps, and not a surfing competition. Analysis of these photographs demonstrates the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity as a cultural norm, and the point made by Howson is that such images influence self-identity and shape bodily conduct.

Howson also asserts that hegemonic masculinity emphasizes a physical sense of self and of being-in-the-world, which is presented and communicated to others by taking up and using physical space in particular ways. It also underscores how the social meanings become internalized in ways that influence not only conduct but also our sense of self. In addition, Howson outlines the concept of the “looking-glass self,” which is central to my desire to act and pose in familiarly feminine ways. In 1902, Charles Horton Cooley published *Human Nature and the Social Order*, which developed this concept to highlight the importance of visual information and perception in social life. Connell draws on the example of ball-throwing to illustrate this point. The boy who is unable to throw a ball “like a man,” and who knows this, must already understand what it means to throw a ball like a man and, moreover, that his bodily conduct does not conform to this norm. He is, therefore, in the process of throwing the ball, using his body but standing outside of his conduct, observing and judging on the basis of a dominant image of how a ball is thrown “properly.” Inhabiting a female body presents a different order (55). By posing for a more “feminine” photograph, female athletes know how a woman “should look,” and so they write their bodies in transgressive, performative ways.

The Troubled Body

However, another way to look at these bodies is not as progressive, transformative or “strange and familiar” but as “troubled bodies.” There is no doubt that these bodies can still be appropriated by men. Simone de Beauvoir observed that the female body is considered an object that is looked into and examined (56). The art critic John Berger has added to this in *Ways of Seeing*: “Men act and women appear. Men look at women.

Women watch themselves being looked at” (48). Berger made this observation in the context of examining the specific position that the female body occupies in the history of art. Its representation has been largely the province of male artists, whose practice has tended to objectify women for a male audience, render the female nude in idealized terms, and represent woman as alien Other and as “uncharted and peripheral wildness” (56). Yet the representation of the female body as “Other” is not confined to visual art but is indicative of a more problematic relation to women in Western culture.

These may be “troubled bodies,” looked at as spectacle or fantasy and fetishized within popular culture. The female body is a body that is encouraged to be on display, and women are obliged to produce their bodies as adequate and acceptable spectacle, as objects external to self. In this view, girls grow into women aware of being watched or objectified, and this profoundly influences their interactions with themselves and with others. This is especially so for black women, whose bodies have been objectified, sexualized and turned into spectacle for the white male gaze. Moreover, the self-presentation of black women in the public eye typically engages in the eradication of physiognomic difference in the pursuit of white ideals of femininity (Howson 56).

However, the female body is also the object of the male gaze in more mundane aspects of everyday life, not just in athletes, and feminist research demonstrates how the experience of being watched encourages women to be conscious of themselves and invest in their bodies as an expression of self. Joan Jacobs Brumberg states in *The Body Project* that this is a relatively modern phenomenon and consumes a great deal of time and energy. Moreover, though the contemporary period has gradually fostered new body

freedoms (and Title IX has given new freedom on the playing field), the acquisition of these freedoms entails a high degree of internal control and discipline. In my research through several centuries of these “second” photographs, I found that the first posed photographs of female swimmers in *Sports Illustrated* were exactly like my posed picture: an Esther Williams, “bathing beauty” type of portrait, usually posed against a diving board. This conventional, feminine pose has lingered from photography spreads in the 1960s to today.

In an interesting comment on this discipline, Howson asserts that women are not born but are taught to become feminine in ways that emphasize containment and control (58). Young suggests in *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays* that women are inhibited by lack of confidence about their bodies which comes from under-use, restricted access to opportunities for physical engagement and differences in the relative exposure of boys and girls to physical play and activity. Second, women are encouraged to become more aware of themselves as “objects” of others’ scrutiny. In public spaces where the female body is potentially transgressive, the “male gaze” described by Laura Mulvey operates as a disciplining mechanism that encourages docility. Awareness of being watched and of seeing oneself as an object has the potential to shape how women move and engage with the physical environment. For athletes, however, Howson’s hypotheses seem problematic because in contemporary American culture, girls are given ample opportunities for physical recreation. Even Aimee Mullins, who is a handicapped athlete with prosthetics on both legs, says she “didn’t grow up with any excuses” (77). Yet, she must be aware of others’ scrutiny, as a disabled person and as a woman. Her second photograph shows a

more serious, “docile” woman in a black fishnet jumpsuit, sexy and aware of the “male gaze,” as her artful makeup can attest. She is sitting backwards on an ornately carved chair, arms folded, her head delicately balanced between in a smoldering “Glamour Shots” way (76, 82). This pose strikes a rich contrast between the action shot of her running along a bridge, frozen in mid-stride, prosthetic legs like vertical skis carving up the space beneath her (81). Mullins’ pictures seem to take this argument one step further to bridge a cultural gap – now even girls with disabilities can be feminine and self-confident. The prominence of athletes like Aimee Mullins in photography books suggests that the media is now accepting female athletes more (even disabled female athletes), and this extends to advertisement campaigns that champion the right to play sport.

In an issue of *Sports Illustrated*, a Nike advertisement presents the face of a young girl, looking at us through the chains of a swing. The caption reads:

If you let me play: I will like myself more, I will have more self-confidence, I will suffer less depression, I will be 60% less likely to get breast cancer, I will be more likely to leave a man who beats me, I will be less likely to get pregnant before I want to, I will learn what it means to be strong. If you let me play sports.

The advertisement reinforces the idea that there is a connection between physical play and contact and the degree of confidence and awareness that young people, and girls in particular, possess. But how can athletes learn to truly be strong when everything around them says: be heterosexual, be feminine, be docile, be looked at, play sports, but most of all, continue to be a “woman”? The image of a girl looking through the chains is significant in this ad. She seems to be begging to be released from her “chains,” that she

deserves the “right to choose” to play sports, presumably by getting permission from her parents. However, she is also still contesting the right to play sports, and to have a body that plays sports, in contemporary American culture.

We must acknowledge that there is still an imaginary space that confines women. The awareness of being watched and of seeing oneself as an object because of the way the body looks shapes how women move through their physical environment. Men and women use and present their bodies in ways that guide perceptions of bodily appearance and performance and symbolize and reinforce gender distinctions. Gender (masculinity and femininity) can be viewed as a kind of performance these photographs can be articulated as a type of performance that contests gender boundaries.

The Idealized Body

Judith Butler complicates the discussion of performance in her article “Athletic Genders: Hyperbolic Instance and/or the Overcoming of Sexual Binarism.” She also observes that the athlete’s body is “usually thought as motionless, as a sculpted body, but it is rarely thought – or thinkable – in motion” (104). She uses the mental picture of a diver suspended in mid-air as an example of “the moment in which the athlete’s body is most fully idealized” (104). This idealization becomes implicit in our struggle to find ways to write female athletes’ bodies in empowering ways.

Being involved in sports unnecessarily demands that female athletes “cross-gender” by taking on the supra-feminine aspects in a photograph in order to “show the whole story.” Butler has argued that there is nothing self-evidently gendered about either bodily conduct or the sexed body. She asserts that gender is not only influenced by ideas,

assumptions and stereotypes (or discourses) but is actively produced or materialized through a “stylized repetition of acts” that come to be understood as natural over time. Therefore, cultural norms are not simply placed on an already formed body, but they “constitute part of what makes the formation of that body possible” (106). Her argument follows that our position as spectators to these photographs may seem to “suspend action,” but it also makes such action possible:

The athlete’s body, however, is always tenuous in this sense: it is always in the process of being made, it is never quite the ideal that it seeks to approximate, and so the reflection of itself that it receives through the visual form is precisely not the same as the kinesthetic movement that we think of as proper to athletic activity. (105)

Examining these discourses provides a way of looking at the frameworks that underpin social phenomena, such as the disciplined female body, either for sports or for the “male gaze.” Hence, the female body is a body that invites transformation, and women are encouraged to transform themselves and their bodies into historically and culturally specific ideals of beauty. This transformation occurs in a number of ways that focus on, for instance, the display of the body and the body as an ornamental surface. Bartky notes that contemporary Westernized ideals of femininity stress that the female body should be taut and firm; skin must be smooth, flawless and blemish-free; there should be no sign of wrinkles or lines, spots or hard skin. Moreover, hair must be removed from legs and underarms through shaving, waxing or depilation, and preparation of the skin requires regular use of cosmetics, creams, lotions, hair and nail products, etc.

Though ideals of feminine beauty change and are both historically and culturally specific, women are subtly coerced to embody beauty and men are encouraged to desire and possess beautiful women. This “beauty myth” has intensified to the point that women in public life also need to embody beauty norms. Howson (drawing on Foucault) calls this the “panoptic management” of the female body. Women place themselves or are placed under a form of self-surveillance by adopting male values of “ideal” female bodily form.

An especially interesting photograph in *Sports Illustrated* of tennis great Martina Hingis features her posing as Marilyn Monroe standing over the grate in *The Seven Year Itch*. One shapely leg is exposed by the satin skirt billowing up and around her like a butterfly’s wings, separated by her hands, which unsuccessfully attempt to keep her skirt down. Everything from the peroxide color of her hair to her pursed lips, shiny with lipstick, invites the erotic male gaze. For women athletes, using cosmetics and other accessories helps to make their gender “safe” and to maintain clear boundaries between masculinity and femininity.

Admittedly, the postmodern shape of woman includes a whole range of types. In one corner is the form of the denied and restrained female body, similar to the Playboy bunny. In the other corner is the competitive female body-builder with hypertrophied muscles, stamina, strength and power. The photographs of female athletes are somewhere in the middle. What crosscuts the variety of female physiques is the linkage of beauty with femininity.

American culture’s ideal woman incorporates two essential attributes that buttress beauty norms: youth and femininity. Where youth is not present, femininity is hyper-

emphasized in athletes. For example, the photograph of 74-year-old diver Pat McCormick in *Women Who Win* poses her wrapped in a terry bathrobe leaning over a diving board railing, as if she just stepped naked from the pool. Femininity is clearly connected to attractiveness, producing a gendered trait complex in which beauty and femininity intersect and are culturally constructed as incompatible with the traits of masculinity such as power, strength and adulthood. Women must be ever watchful about crossing the beauty barrier into the physical domain of men; muscularity and strength are associated with male athletic prowess. As Butler remarks,

Gendered ideals within women's sports can be understood to tyrannize – when, for instance, women recoil from building their own muscularity for fear of becoming perceived as masculine as a result, or when the requirement to stay under a certain weight in order to enter a given competition reinforces anorexic or bulimic behavior. In such cases, approximating gender ideals may well require a weakening or destruction of the body. (108).

Women athletes can and do push body and gender boundaries and yet are warned not to violate the essence of “femininity.” The athletic form coexists, however uneasily, with a representation of delicacy and voluptuous contours, heterosexuality and femininity. Increasingly, muscled women are starting to be regarded as “beautiful,” but muscles and femininity are still thought by many to be representationally exclusive categories. While athletic bodies have become increasingly popular in advertising and do display newfound muscularity, it is more within the confines of “toned” as opposed to

brawny physique. Women whose muscles reach a degree of size indicative of competitive bodybuilding are considered marginal. But even those athletes who are physically strong but not technically bodybuilders are marginalized and punished for the way their bodies look. As Jenny Thompson, a swimmer and five-time Olympic gold medalist, writes in *Women Who Win*,

Swimming has been accepted as a sport for women, but sometimes I feel unattractive because I don't look feminine enough. I once dated a guy who said he liked me, but my arms freaked him out. I was traumatized. Are my arms too big, too ugly? Then I thought, "My arms are what make me swim so fast and they're part of who I am." The body issue is one of the last hurdles for women. Being a strong woman and an athlete isn't entirely acceptable in society. I notice that in men's sports there are always cameras showing an athlete's wife or significant other. In women's sports they don't even ask about your boyfriend. It's as if they assume that since female athletes are strong, they must be asexual. We are strong, but that's what makes us beautiful. (75)

For young women athletes, posing for the "feminine" pictures and dressing up at the photo shoot, using cosmetics and other accessories help to make "safe" their gender, and to maintain clear boundaries between masculinity and femininity, which Thompson does, by posing in a white, 1920's Rita Hayworth-style bathing suit, complete with red lipstick and curled hair. She is propped sitting against a pool ladder, her legs crossed

much like mine, toes pointing downward but gazing dreamily upward into space as if waiting for her knight in shining armor (74).

The Disruptive Body

Until recently the athletic ideal was the antithesis of the feminine beauty ideal. Bolin in “Vandalized Vanity: Feminine Physiques Betrayed and Portrayed” states the athletic body gained momentum seemingly as a result of the dovetailing of two movements: that of feminism in the 1960s and the fitness movement of the 1980s (89). The fit female form is a toned one with low body fat indicative of diet and of exercise as well. The athletic ideal is indeed disruptive, and consequently cultural efforts at deactivating its potential threat constrain it. Because the body is regarded as natural, female athletic bodies challenge the Western gender schema and its biology of difference, a paradigm of patriarchy and inequality. Paradoxically, the athletic body conterminously embodies beauty yet endorses the acquisition of power in what remains a last bastion of male strength, the physical arena (89). Beauty in the female body is textualized in photographs as display, sexuality, youth, and even blondness. In the same way, I would argue that these photographs of strong female athletes are ultimately tamed and even canceled by “femininity” of the posed pictures.

We have questioned how our culture grants some promises of equality for men and women at the same time that athletic women are held to a double standard: they must be both strong (masculine) and beautiful (feminine). And is there anything wrong with that? The answer to that question is crucial to our understanding of gender in today’s culture. Contemporary feminist writers are particularly concerned with the subject of

femininity in film and photography, given the fact that athletic women have been so pressured to be beautiful, even since Title IX gave women more freedoms on the playing field. Female athletes also feel the pressure themselves to prove that they are beautiful, and so complicate the question. The photograph is essentially a site at which sport culture can speak for these women, and so these portraits pose a significant place to confront gender stereotypes in the way that we photograph and “write” these women. Visual representation of women ultimately is weighed down in complex negotiations of gender norms. The static athletic body continues to be a place of deep confusion and misinterpretation, a place where movement and corporeal empowerment are elided. Textual embodiment may be an alternative to disrupt and “free” athletic women from the cultural stereotyping and complex negotiation of gender that necessarily happens in visual forms.

Through this investigation, we see that the dominant hegemony of masculinity in our culture drives women to see a mandatory double-sided sense of self. When the male body, the muscular body is privileged, female athletes portray their muscular, “troubled bodies” as distinctly feminine in order to show that their gender is fully intact, and they are not in danger of resisting cultural norms. Like Butler, I acknowledge “there is an inevitable difficulty in moving from a perspective on the body as monstrous to the perspective of the body as ideal” (110). These pictures instead produce a type of visibility, but are distinctly framed by the dominant male hegemony, in order to negotiate some sort of peace at the fortified border between athlete and woman.

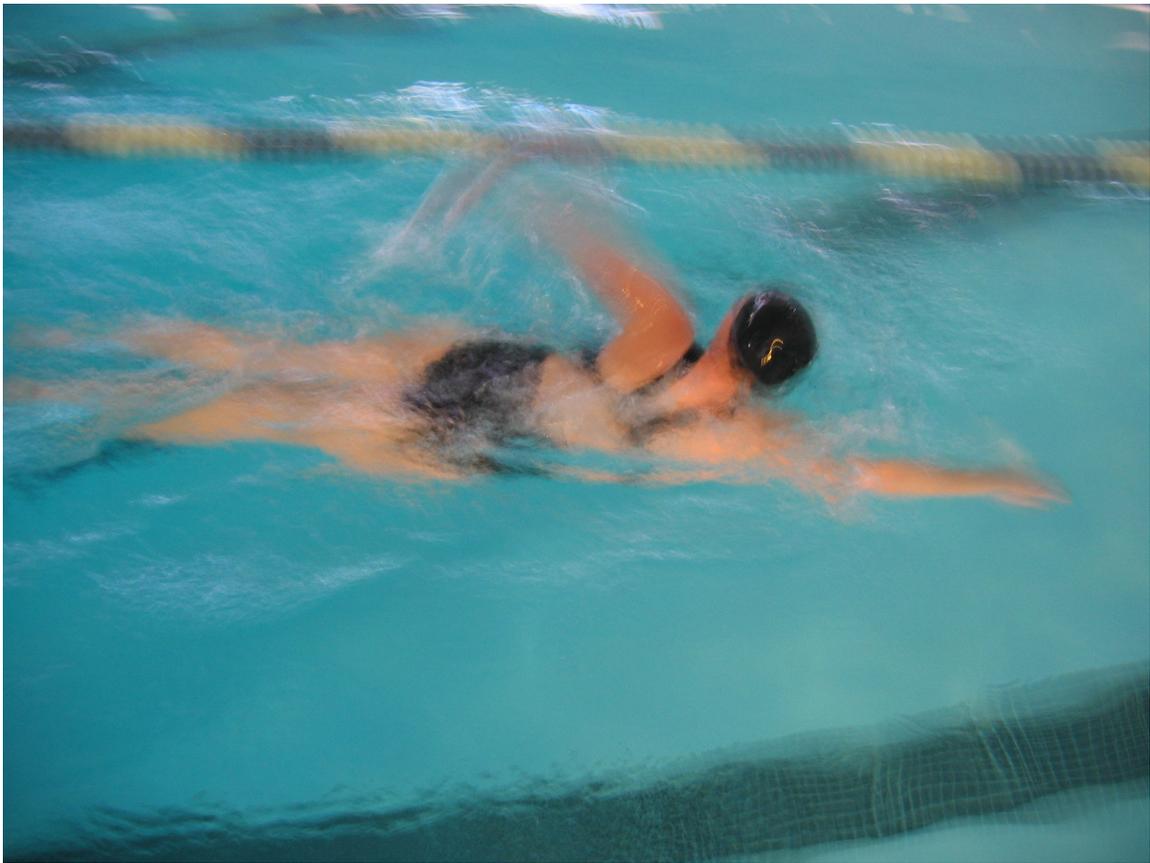


Figure 2.3 One Stroke at a Time

Tomorrow I'm going swimming again, and a kind of nervousness has already started to flood my body. It's been a couple of weeks since I last swam, and I know that it's harder to get back into my routine when I've been out of it for a couple of weeks. But I'm looking forward to going tomorrow. Really, I'm looking forward to the way my

body will feel in the water, and especially how my body will feel afterward – a kind of total relaxation that many people feel after yoga or a deep-tissue massage. Since swimmers use muscles through their whole body, many identify this sensation as being different from the afterglow of any other sport. Swimming leaves one feeling tingly from head to toe, plus a kind of weariness that sinks deep into the muscle.

It's been almost five months since the miscarriage and three months since I started swimming again, and although I haven't experienced any huge catharsis or total emotional healing, I'm glad that I've found swimming again. I do believe that my body is just as thankful: the back of my neck doesn't feel as if it would split in half with a karate chop. I think the desperateness, the feeling of hanging on the edge, of paranoia in my body is gone. Now I feel stronger even in my fingertips.

In swimming, I've found a kind of anonymity, a place where I can once again be the swimmer I used to be – naïve, nervous and confident that the future is before me. No one knows me in the water – unless I tell her who I am. I know that when I show up at the pool, and the lifeguards swing those heavy doors open, I will be just another swimmer showing up for Lap Swim hours. I won't be the girl who had the miscarriage. I will hardly remember it myself. I'll just be the girl in lane 1 or 8 or 4, reaching for the wall, looking over at the time clock to check the speed of my laps. Over and over and over, there and back I'll go, and the rhythm and repetition of my stroke will sound out a message to all of the other women out there who are suffering: you can always go there and come back again. It is the nature of swimming, the 50-yard

pattern of our lives. You can ask swimmers: they are always counting in twos to infinity and back again.

Chores

*My mother made me scrub the bathrooms
Friday nights before a meet.*

I hated her for it.

*Every time I think of cleaning,
I feel sick.*

*Whenever I see a bottle of Clorox,
a toilet brush
or a roll of paper towels,
I see the race I didn't swim.*

*After my 200 (placed seventh)
I leaned over the toilet seat
smelled bleach on my fingers
and shoved.*

*Later, I emerged from the stall,
victorious as the girl
who had just broken the record
in the 500 free.*

CHAPTER 3

THE HYBRID BODY: BABES, BALLS AND BRAS IN *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM*

If bodies affect the way that we shape both our gender and racial identity, this is especially the case for young adults who are “coming of age” in today’s globalizing postmodern world, where, according to Chris Barker in *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*, “cultural identity is not seen as a reflection of a fixed, natural, state of being but as a process of *becoming*... Cultural identity is not an essence but a continually shifting position and the points of difference around which cultural identities form are multiple and proliferating” (28). In this chapter, I will be focusing on identifications of gender and nationality, discursive positions that are themselves as unstable as the teenager going through puberty, to see how bodies are written in film. To do this, I can rely on Laclau’s concept of articulation, essentially temporary and connotative links that, according to Stuart Hall, “can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions” (Barker 29). In this case, I will be looking both racial and gender identifications in a contemporary sport film with young adult characters.

Globalization and “Stylish Hybridity”

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, a new movement began in mass media with the work of South Asian diasporic filmmakers in the West.

Asian films no longer lurk outside in the periphery but have entered the mainstream, with the great success of films like British Asian filmmaker Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham*, released in 2002. Chadha is one of the first Asian women to have made inroads into the mainstream public sphere of the West. *Bend It Like Beckham* considers notions of British Asian identity and conflict in contemporary London, and gives priority to class, race, and gender issues to focus on the position of marginalized outsiders. Chadha's movie mainly focuses on the working classes of the western metropolis, much of which is made up by people of color from Britain's former colonies in Asia and Africa. Grossing more than \$20 million in its first 12 weeks in theatres, *Bend It Like Beckham* won rave reviews from moviegoers and critics alike for its realistic portrayals of Asian culture.

Michael D. Giardina in "*Bending It Like Beckham* in the Global Popular: Stylish Hybridity, Performativity and the Politics of Representation" asserts that although often intentionally appropriated for positive, identity-affirming reasons, terms such as "hybridity, diaspora and post-coloniality" (Hutnyk 118) have increasingly been deployed within British popular culture as a means of politically and financially capitalizing on the multicultural fervor currently dominating mainstream discourse. He argues that the "popular deployment of these terms" has generated a growing trend of what he deems "stylish hybridity": "an influx of performative representations of hyphenated persons and cultures occupying leading spaces in mainstream media (television, film, and music)" (Giardina 67). In his essay, he argues that while purporting to be positive, progressive artifacts subverting the status quo, "the majority of these popular iterations commonly

wash over and efface harsh realities witnessed in the everyday interactions between and among diverse segments of a population” (67). He uses Chadha’s *Bend It Like Beckham* as an example of this “stylish hybridity.” Giardina posits, “although widely considered as a progressive, multicultural text, Chadha’s film both revels in and reveals its liminal positioning within and between the hyphenated special histories of British colonialism and Asian diaspora” (67). At the end of his article, he states that the movie is essentialist at heart and ultimately falls short of contributing to the promise of multiple subjectivities and diverse cultural traditions that a realistic global world offers.

In this chapter, I will keep Giardina’s assertions in mind as I analyze the movie *Bend It Like Beckham* to see how the female body is wrapped up in performativity of gender (specifically with clothing) and the global body. In the process, I work through Chadha’s overarching themes of sport, identity, and patriarchal hegemony, unmasking underlying themes of sexuality, body awareness, separation from parents, and parental notions of the acceptable body. In doing so, I attempt to show how women’s bodies in *Bend It Like Beckham* are indeed strong, empowered and global bodies, disagreeing with Giardina’s contention that for the main characters, this hybridity means leaving family and cultural traditions behind.

Borders and Boundaries: Young Adult Movies as Genre Fiction?

Movies can be seen as texts, sites for interrogation and understanding of historically specific messages. As integral members of the media, they send messages to other parts of the globe about what humans are and what they do. The construction of a

global identity in general is important to address because it is not just a fixed thing; it is constantly changing and flowing, moving and bending. In *Bend It Like Beckham*, the story reveals the interplay between traditional and modern culture and between Indian and foreign cultures that are prevalent features of contemporary Indian life.

In many ways, *Bend It Like Beckham* can be seen as catering towards young adults, because the protagonists are teenagers, and it deals with themes that are dealt with in Young Adult literature. In this chapter, I analyze this film as a sort of Young Adult novel, because it presents many of the same themes, to see what Chadha is arguing about the young adult female body, identity and globalization.

Why Cultural Studies Feminism?

As we saw in Chapter One, feminism is difficult to define concisely or definitively. There are many schools of feminist thought ranging from liberal, radical, cultural studies and post-structuralist feminism. The theories of women of color, queer theorists, and material feminists are also part of the landscape that contributes to feminism. With these feminist theories, new, different, and perhaps more complete understandings of the body and writing about the body can be found. A cultural studies feminist viewpoint is interested in the everyday life, ordinary people, and popular culture. Citing Turner in *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, Tamar Semerjian and Jennifer Waldron in “The Journey Through Feminism: Theory, Research, and Dilemmas From the Field” state that it is also concerned with how conceptualizations of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and religions, among other identities, intersect to form the ideologies that are the basis of oppression in our world. This perspective is attractive because people can

do feminist research that does not necessarily focus exclusively on women (Birrell and Cole). Cultural studies feminism is concerned not only with the ways that women experience gender, but also how men experience gender. Researchers like Messner and Sabo in *Sport, Men and the Gender Order* consider how masculinities are constructed in our culture. Another attractive feature of this type of feminism is that it allows us to move past looking at gender in a narrow way. Gender studies seem to be no longer a code word for women's studies but rather a more complete study of gender. Not only are both men's and women's experiences being studied, but the dichotomous category of gender is being called into question. The post-structuralist and post-modern ideas of theorists like Judith Butler have brought into question what gender really is and how it is constructed.

To say that gender is a performance is to take up Judith Butler's theorization of a politics of the performative, which understand identity to be "performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (25). Giardina's argument in the aforementioned article takes Butler one step further, drawing on Jonathan X. Inda in "Performativity, Materiality and the Racialized Body," to argue that "*race* resolutely does not refer to a pre-constituted body" (Inda 75). As Inda articulates, "it works performatively to constitute the body itself" (75). That the racialized body – like that of Butler's gendered body – is performative "suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (173). In *Bend It Like Beckham*, we will see that the racial, gendered, and sporting bodies are performed with varying degrees of success, much like female athletes perform femininity in some photographs, as I explained in Chapter Two.

With regard to the performance of identities constituted within a contextual, re-iterative field of representation, Stuart Hall suggests, “we need to understand them as produced within specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, and by specific enunciative strategies” (4). With the advent of post-structuralism and post-modernism, there comes a destabilization of meaning. In other words, there is no longer an absolute truth to be sought after, but rather a number of possible perspectives. Cultural studies feminism acknowledges that there are multiple perspectives and truths as well. Thus, there is more than one way to tell a story about what and how we observe the world. This can include the multiplicity of ways that authors tell stories for young women and men about how those young women and men play sports, and experience their bodies and body images.

Why *Bend It*?

Against the backdrop of the booming mainstream success of the Bollywood film industry, *Bend It Like Beckham* marks Gurinder Chadha’s movement from progressive BBC documentarist and filmmaker to the mainstream. Her two previous feature length films, *Bhaji on the Beach* (1992) and *What’s Cooking?* (2000), received positive reviews from film critics, but neither was a commercial hit (Giardina 71). Unlike her previous films, though, the low-budget *Bend It Like Beckham* was ready from the start to become an instant hit. Significantly, London’s *Daily Mail* called *Bend It Like Beckham* the next best British film after *Bridget Jones Diary* to come out in years, and more than 400 cinemas featured it on its opening weekend (Giardina 71). Moreover, it was strategically released a few weeks prior to the start of the 2002 FIFA World Cup. But football (or

soccer, as we call it in the US) is not a religion for all Asian fans, and definitely not for Americans, so why was this movie so popular with world-wide audiences, grossing \$31.9 million across the globe?

After all, Chadha was interviewed pre-release, and she stated from the beginning that Americans wouldn't know who David Beckham was. Americans are also thought to be clueless about the game, which rallies millions of fans all over Europe, Africa and South America. For this reason alone, the producers weren't sure that it would do well in America, even contemplating a name change to "Move It Like Mia," which may have further reinforced the idolization of female athletes that is a theme of the film. The reference was to Mia Hamm, whose poster adorns the wall of the movie's main character. Chadha explained in a 2003 interview with *People*, "But as time went on, Fox decided that they didn't want to change the title because it was already known around the world."

With the popularity of the movie, it seemed that teenagers were tapping into more than just the sport itself, instead identifying with the messages (however unrealistic) that Chadha is sending about gender and race, and how fluid they can be. Teenager's bodies, clothing, and parental control in the movie reveal striking clues about teenage girls' attitudes toward their bodies, sports and the world around them. Chadha explores racial and global themes by using the female body and its garb, specifically with bras and "trackies," or athletic clothes. Through these discussions of undergarments and clothing, she champions the power of women's bodies, but also proves to be ambivalent about the "global women's body," and argues more for an idea of globalization that is about leaving the cultural home and moving on to greener pastures.

Chadha's movie serves as an example of popular YA movies that address cosmopolitan ideas of globalization and yet serve to be very progressive for the feminist movement and progressive ideas of the place of women in sport. I will also use Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Michael D. Giardina's "*Bending It Like Beckham* in the Global Popular: Stylish Hybridity, Performativity and the Politics of Representation", and his idea of "stylish hybridity" to magnify what and how bodies are performed. I rely heavily on Giardina's articulate and compelling analysis, summary and transcription of some scenes in the movie, and I follow his moves closely, all the while calling for a quite different evaluation of the film's worth as an empowering embodiment of young female athletes through clothing.

Bend It Like Beckham

The film's title functions on several levels. On one hand, according to Giardina, it refers to soccer star David Beckham's physical skill of "bending" the ball around defenders on shots for a goal. This "connection to the game of football itself is important in establishing the film's mainstream appeal," writes Giardina: "it announces to the casual viewer that this is not a movie solely about Asians but rather one about football and those who play it" (72). At the same time, Giardina argues, the title turns in on itself, hailing the viewer to associate with Beckham's penchant for bending the rules (i.e., as read through his celebrity status). The title also metaphorically represents the challenges women face in male-dominated areas such as sports, often forced to bend the rules to achieve their goals. This theme of bending (but never outright breaking) rules and traditions underlies the film, as director Chadha attempts the dual task of weaving and

interlacing the struggles Jess faces at home and within her Punjabi community with that of Jules's struggle to gain acceptance as a female soccer player within the larger framework of male sporting hegemony. What may seem on the surface to be a "male" move, the decision of the title to reflect a popular male athlete, in my opinion, doesn't argue that women should be like men, but that they can be as skilled as men.

Chadha's plot weaves together seemingly divergent narratives of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality into one coherent story line. Eighteen-year-old Jesminder "Jess" Bhamra is an East African Sikh who lives in Southhall, west London. According to Giardina, Southhall is a predominantly Sikh community widely regarded as the epicenter of Britain's Punjabi culture (72). Jess's father works at nearby Heathrow Airport, whereas her mother tends to the family's needs at home. Together, they raise Jess and her older sister, Pinky, in a strict environment that stresses the importance of their conservative Punjabi culture and traditional values. The Anglicized Jess, however, dreams of playing alongside (at that time) Manchester United's David Beckham. Playing pick-up games in the park with neighborhood boys is the closest she can get to organized football, though, until she is "discovered" one day by Jules, the star soccer player who invites Jess to join the local women's club, the Hounslow Harriers (Giardina 72).

Jess is tortured by her body image at first. She has a huge scar on her leg from childhood which she thinks "looks awful," and it makes her parents that much more worried about her wearing shorts, but this interesting side-story is resolved on the first day of soccer practice with her Coach Joe's cajoling: "No one's gonna care once you're

out there.” At the beginning of the movie, Jess seems unsure of her femininity: she notices the team captain’s black lacy bra during a locker room scene at the beginning, and looks quickly away. She seems to be ashamed and self-conscious of her own body, uneasy with outward displays of femininity. However, after she meets Coach Joe, Jess starts wearing more makeup and leaving her hair down, as well as borrowing a teammates’ sexy black top to go clubbing.

Conversely, Chadha includes several 30 to 45-second montages to emphasize the capabilities of female athlete’s bodies. For example, while the Tom Jones’ song “She’s A Lady” plays, the Hounslow Harriers run through several training exercises where their bodies are filmed up close at eye level, which emphasizes their accessibility and strength. They are literally “on a level playing field” with the viewer. We see girls jumping over cones, dribbling, kicking and practicing their technique. We also see different types of bodies in matching red and white sports bras and shorts, all jumping over cones – one with a thin, firm stomach, another girl with large breasts and yet another with strong shoulders. Throughout these montages, the bodies in motion are emphasized more than gender. We don’t know whether these are boys or girls: then we see body parts mixed in – a calf here, a torso there -- in close-ups or at foot-level. The focus is on detailing their bodies, discipline and skill level. We see through Chadha’s directing that these women are strong, tough, feminine, and capable of playing professional soccer someday.

Jess’s parents have other ideas for her future, however: They want her to go to university, marry a proper Indian boy, and become a lawyer. Soccer is clearly not their version of Jess’s future. Her mother says that she “must start behaving like a proper

woman.” They view it as decidedly unladylike and see it as symptomatic of “a corrupt British modernity” (Giardina 72) that is, in this case, drawing their daughter’s attention away from learning how to make a proper Punjabi dinner (“Why can’t you just learn to cook chapatti or dahl?” her mother pleads at one point), searching for a husband, and respecting one’s elders. Once they learn of Jess playing for the Harriers, they ban her from playing, citing both its gendered and cultural “inappropriateness.” Conversely, Jules Paxton is encouraged by her father to play, and we are shown several scenes with him helping her work on her skills in the backyard of their house. Her mother, though, becomes frustrated with Jules’ “tomboy-ish” behavior, viewing her interest in soccer as improper for a teenage girl. “There’s a reason that Sporty Spice is the only one of ’em without a fella,” she tells Jules. Further complications are added when Jules’s mother suspects that Jess and Jules are romantically involved (Giardina 72).

In the end, the all-important match (a must in the sport literature genre) that will be watched by a scout for an American university coincides with Jess’s sister Pinky’s traditional Indian wedding. Pinky is the girly-girl daughter Mrs. Paxton wants, and the cultural submissive Mrs. Bahmra wants. She likes to shop for the latest style of traditional dress, experiment with hair and makeup, and seems to have a love-hate relationship with her more progressive friends who wear low-cut tops and lust after the half-naked boys playing soccer in the park. The last time we see Pinky in the film, she is still at home in Southall, pregnant, and looking at a picture of Jess playing football in America. In the end, Jess both plays in the final and attends the wedding, as her father finally acquiesces to his daughter’s wishes.

The theme of “coming of age” and eventual separation from parents is important here, as it is a theme in Young Adult novels and movies marketed towards them as audience. We often also see an agent of change pulling the characters away from their parents. Leading the way for Jess (along with Jules) as voice against her parents’ wishes and for England is her coach, Joe, who first visits the Bhamra household after Jess is told she will not be allowed to play for the Harriers. Seated in the living room under a large portrait of Guru Nanak (the leader of the Sikh religion), Mr. Bhamra informs the viewer that he was once a champion cricket player in Nairobi. However, when he immigrated to England, he was kicked out of cricket clubs and ridiculed for wearing a turban. Jess responds that Britain is moving beyond its history, telling her father, “It’s all changing now. Nasser Hussein is captain of the English cricket team, and he’s Asian.” Even though she points out that an “Asian” (he’s Muslim) is captain of the cricket team, including his ethnic and cultural identity under the umbrella term “Asian” has little effect on changing her parents’ minds – she will have to sneak out of the house in the upcoming scenes to continue playing anyway – it does bring the theme of eventual redemptive change and maturation into the open. As Joe leaves the house, he says to Jess, “I can see what you’re up against, but your parents don’t always know what’s best for you.” Joe will utter similar lines three more times during the remainder of the film. The first is after she quits the team on her parents’ discovery that she is still playing (“Whose life are you leading, Jess? If you try pleasing them forever, you’re going to end up blaming ’em”). Joe goes once more to the Bhamra household to inform Jess that an American scout will be at the final match of the tournament. However, when Jess tells him that she cannot skip her

sister's wedding, which takes place on the same day, Joe's reaction is one of disappointment: "Now that's a shame. I could have seen you play for England some day." This implies to Giardina that Jess's commitment to her traditional culture, and parents, is at odds with Chadha's idea of mainstream British society and Jess's "global body." Jess, however, seems more interested in the struggle over playing, saying to Joe at one point, "It's just culture, that's all."

This idea is also seen in Jess's fellow protagonist in the film – Jules – with her eventual maturation and separation from her parents. It is easier for Jules, however: she is the Mia Hamm of the Hounslow Harriers: She's not only the best player on the team (wearing Hamm's number 9, of course), but we learn that it was at her insistence that a women's team was organized in the first place. Her goal throughout the film is to play in America for the now-defunct Women's United Soccer Association. A talented player, with a supermodel body, Jules seems almost too skinny to be an athlete, but she does have muscles. Giardina writes, "She walks in a liminal space between stereotypes of tomboy and girly-girl but seems not to differentiate herself between the two..." (75). At the beginning of the movie, she is shown as being a complete tomboy, but later she too starts wearing more feminine attire. We are introduced to her in the film's second scene, going through one of the most loathed rites of passage for all teenaged girls: bra shopping with mom. We see that feminine bras are a symbol for teenage insecurity and opposition to sport that Chadha visually emphasizes throughout the entire movie. However, Jules negotiates the situation wisely, and her mother comes off as the stereotypically embarrassing mother.

[Scene opens with a tight-shot on a woman pumping up a bra]

Jules Paxton: You're mad, I wouldn't be seen dead in that!

Mrs. Paxton: They're all the rage, poppet. You blow 'em up, just like a lilo... and boom! Cleavage! And they're perfect while your still growing 'cause they lift you right *there* [cupping her daughter's breasts].

Jules Paxton: Mum! God, you're so embarrassing!

Mrs. Paxton: ...all the girls have bought one, for their daughters...

[moving over to a different bra rack]. Well look, there's the Fleur, that's pretty. And the gel bra: That's a clever one, no pumping. It's already in there. [moving to where Jules is looking at sports bras]. Oh no, sweetheart! Not the sports bra. They're so plain. They don't enhance!

Jules Paxton: What, no one's gonna see 'em.

Mrs. Paxton: It's not how they look, it's how they make you feel.

This initial exchange between Jules and her mother works to establish a theme that Jules struggles against for the rest of the movie: the fiction that being a strong, empowered, highly skilled female athlete is “in direct opposition to heteronormative constructions of femininity” (Giardina 75). In subsequent scenes, Mrs. Paxton “agonizes” over her daughter's choice of playing football, including yelling at her husband for encouraging her daughter to play. However, it is not so much that Jules is participating in a sport that gets her mother's goat, but Mrs. Paxton worries that because Jules spends so much time with soccer and has only female friends – and also does not have a boyfriend – she might

be a lesbian. Her homophobic paranoia is reinforced when she overhears Jules and Jess arguing, “You don’t know the meaning of love. You’ve really hurt me, Jess. That’s all there is to it. You’ve betrayed me!” However, their argument is borne out of Jules’s anger that Jess “kissed” their coach, Joe, whom Jules has a crush on. Later, when a tearful Mrs. Paxton confides in her husband about the “truth” of Jules’s relationship, she tells him,

No wonder she never showed any interest in that Kevin boy... I tried to get her nice clothes...but she never wants to go shopping with me... It was terrible what they did to that George Michael – going on about him and all his private business in the papers like that... Oh, no!

Her husband, stereotypically presented as the all-discerning male voice of reason, tells her she is jumping to conclusions but that, if it were true, that it would not be a big deal at all. The parents are trying to come to terms with Jules’s sexuality and her athletic desires, one of the major themes also found in YA sport novels. This is emphasized by the conversations and anxiety surrounding the clothing that their daughter chooses.

One of the most publicized scenes of the film – and one that both resolves and affirms Jules’s heterosexuality – involves a scene with her parents late in the film. Here, her father, who is completely supportive of his daughter’s athletic desires, attempts to explain the offside rule to his wife (Giardina 76). The scene turns on Jules’s entrance:

[Gathered around the backyard picnic table, Mr. Paxton is using bottled condiments as examples to illustrate where players would be offsides to be called or not called. Jules enters:]

Jules Paxton: What are you doin'?

Mrs. Paxton: Well, if the mountain won't come to Mohammed...

Jules Paxton: What?

Mr. Paxton: Don't laugh, I'm trying to teach your mother the offside rule.

Mrs. Paxton: Well, I've decided that I've got to take an interest or I'm going to lose you. And this way, we can all enjoy football as a family. Right. So, don't tell me. The offside rule is... when... the French mustard... has to be between the teriyaki sauce and the sea salt.

Mr. Paxton: She's got it. Wonderful.

Jules Paxton: [picking up a women's soccer magazine from the table]:

You've read all these as well?

Mrs. Paxton: Yeah. Oh, and do you know what? One of those England girls' players is a maths teacher as well. And she's happily married... with a baby.

Seemingly assured that being a football player does not automatically run counter to traditional notions of femininity, Mrs. Paxton comes to terms with Jules's participation with the Harriers (Giardina 76). However, left unresolved to her mother is whether Jules and Jess are involved in a relationship. Only when she confronts Jules about her relationship with Jess in the film's end – and learns of Jules's crush on Coach Joe – is everything ok.

Like many Young Adult novels, the film's ending is all about maturity, acceptance and approval. Unfortunately, in many YA novels and movies, these resolutions are too easy and reflect a worldview that sees everyone in the movie coming

to terms with their differences without further struggle. To a young adult, this gives them unrealistic ideas about how parents deal with maturation in the real world. After cutting between scenes of Pinky's wedding and the Harriers' tournament several times, we see Jess confronted by her father, who then decides to let her go, saying "play well, and make us proud." The body and its dressing comes into play once again, as her transformation continues on the way to the match, as she literally (and figuratively) strips off her traditional Indian wedding attire for her Harriers soccer shorts. Once in the game, she quickly assists on a goal by Jules. Then, in the final minutes of the game, she is fouled.

Instead of showing her anger or frustration – as in a previous instance when she was called a "Paki" by a German player – she calmly gets ready for a free kick. As the wall forms in front of her, blocking the goal, time slows and "Nessun Dorma" plays in the background. Instead of seeing a wall of players, she sees her sister, mother, grandmother, and aunts – all dressed in their colorful, silk wedding attire – blocking the goal. Bending the ball around the wall (of her past, of her gender, of her race) like Beckham completes her cultural transformation and freedom as a woman from all the barriers of and into the future, alone. What could again be argued a "male move" (learning to play like a "boy") is really more about standing up for what she wants and learning a skill she needs to compete. According to Giardina, it is also a move away from her global roots: "She returns to her sister's wedding having finally been subsumed into the main of British culture" (77). This is true to some extent, for when she goes back into the locker room, her teammates cannot seem to understand how to put back on her traditional dress. Again, clothing is a signifier of upcoming hybridity in the film: as she

takes off and puts on different types of clothes, Jess is herself transformed. There is a memorable scene when her English teammates dance around her in their soccer uniforms, laughing, and trying to put it back on for her. But it seems she feels comfortable in both the sari and in the slinky nightclub apparel she wears when she kisses the coach. By writing her body as changing and transformable, in terms of both dress and skill level, I would argue that Jess' body is able to be just the hybrid of race, gender and femininity/masculinity that Chadha envisions for a successful young female athlete in the new millennium.

In the end, both families agree to allow their daughters to go off to America to play at the University of California, Santa Clara (the scout being so impressed with both players that he offered them full scholarships, which seems very unlikely on the surface, but only mildly so given the conventions of juvenile sports stories). Apparently, according to Giardina, leaving the country altogether is the only way to fight against the status quo of gender, racial, and ethnic tensions in Britain. At first, Jess (still dressed in her traditional garb) tells Joe that it would be too much to ask of her parents to accept both her desire to play soccer in America and to bring home a non-Indian boyfriend. But on the day of their flight to America, Jess, dressed in trackpants at the airport, consents to seeing him and addressing her parents "at Christmas break." Her clothing seems fundamental to her attitude towards her future and her comfort in making decisions for herself. Being comfortable in both traditional dress and athletic apparel is a sign of the woman who is able to successfully negotiate the border between female and athlete.

Let's See It for the Girls

In conclusion, some scholars may agree that “*Bend It Like Beckham* erases political and ethical considerations that mark history as a site of struggle, producing what Henry Giroux has called, ‘a filmic version of popular culture,’ one that effaces the everyday hardships and struggles of daily life in favor of a reformulated, faux progressive New Labour version of race, gender, and class relations” (Giardina 78). However, it also fulfills many characteristics of the typical Young Adult paradigm by challenging long-standing patriarchal narratives of dominance and subordination, both within Britain and sport for women across the globe. We see an emphasis and reclamation of the body and sexuality through the physical sport of soccer itself, Jess’s acceptance of her shameful scars, her ambivalence towards her traditional Indian dress, and burgeoning sexual desires for her coach; we also see Mrs. Paxton’s bra obsession, homophobia and stereotypical notions of what Jules (as a woman) should do and say. These themes are all played out through traditional and athletic clothing, dressing and undressing, and bodily negotiations of femininity and athleticism.

In the end, we see both Jess’s and Jules’s maturation and separation emotionally and literally from their parents and cultural traditions, and their performance as physically strong “global bodies.” And we see, with Chadha’s directorial vision, a world, in her own words, “that shows immigration as a celebration” (McLean’s 2003) but that to scholars like Giardina might be essentialist at heart, “ultimately falling short of contributing to the promise of multiple subjectivities and diverse cultural traditions that a realistic global world offers” (84). However, that this film presents us with positive

portrayals of strong, empowered and successful young women seemingly beating the odds to attain their goals and come to terms with their athletic bodies is more than a “step in the right direction” (Giardina 78): it writes bodies that transform and transgress gender and racial stereotypes and, more importantly, writes young women’s bodies that move.

Conversations in Pools

In spite of my desire for the anonymity of the pool, of the chlorinated abyss and obscurity behind my cap and goggles, I find myself starting up conversations with other swimmers in my lane. It's a compulsion of sorts, the need to know what has driven other people to the pool, like me. Are they swimming away the pain too? I've met college students who swim at every chance, older professors who are back in the pool after months, Masters swimmers who are on teams for older adults and compete every weekend. I even swim with a co-worker of mine who had a stroke. I see all kinds of broken people in the pool – one girl swimming with a leg brace, and older man with arthritis. Pools and spas have always been thought to have healing properties. I remember a trip to Bath, England, being surprised at the size of the healing baths, of how many people would flock to be healed. In the Bible, the lame and the bleeding stayed by these pools, waiting and hoping to be the first one in after the angel stirred the water, and the first one to be healed. I am also hoping to be healed. When I swim, I breathe my frustrations into the water, and I kick and kick and kick.



Figure 3.4 Me, in a Swimsuit, Again

Recently I looked at the tag of my swimsuit to see what size I was: a 36. This means nothing to me now because I have forgotten how swimsuits are sized. All I know is, when I was in high school, my suit was a 28. That gap of numbers seems huge. What has happened to my body? I'm 28 years old, and I have no idea how I would describe my body right now. I don't like it particularly all that much, but I am tall and fairly muscular, and I can probably get away with a couple of extra pounds, although I should lose some. I still have the echoes of a swimmer's body – my shoulders are broad, and I have muscular thighs and calves. I love my back – well, I used to anyway. But I don't like my arms as much as I used to – unless I've been in the sun. I still look the best in a racing suit, as opposed to a bikini. Now that I try to do it, I realize how

hard it is to write your body, how to describe it in a way that other people will truly see it – it's almost easier seeing it in motion, describing it in motion.

I remember once when my stroke was very strong, a woman remarked to me, "You have the most beautiful stroke – like a Junebug skimming over the water." I can still see that, although it is more of a remembrance of what my body felt like swimming that quickly and strongly. I know what my arms and legs could do, what they would feel like in the water if they were very strong and disciplined, if I had the strength, flexibility and conditioning of four hours a day of swimming. I will never forget how my butterfly or breaststroke or freestyle or backstroke felt when I was swimming it the fastest. Perhaps I could have swum faster. Probably. Of course, now when I am swimming, it doesn't feel that way. I can barely do a lap of butterfly without my stroke breaking down, without noticing that my arms don't come very far out of the water and around, that I don't have enough push from my dolphin kick to rocket me up and out and forward. What feels exactly the same is that first lap of swimming, when I first get in the water and swim freestyle down and back very hard and fast. I hope I never lose that.

Rules in the Pool

My husband and I are having dinner and telling each other about our days. I mention that when I am swimming, I hate knowing the lifeguards are watching me. They distract me, their bodies lounging at the end of the pool on deck chairs. I told my husband that I feel like they are judging me. This is somewhat due to the fact that they are male. Even though I am swimming in the "FAST" lane, I feel self-conscious

because I am so much slower than I used to be. My husband, supportive though he is, says he feels this concern is a little silly. “You know what it was like to be a lifeguard,” he says. “I’m sure that’s not what you were thinking about.” But he’s confirmed my fears. When I was a lifeguard at a community pool in Houston, I would watch heavier, older women in sagging swimsuits do lap after lap of breaststroke (seen by many as the most energy-conserving stroke), and I would judge them for their flabby stomachs, their cellulite. Now, I’m the one who has fat on her stomach, cellulite on her thighs. I feel most insecure when I do a flip-turn, when I know my backside will be exposed as I flip my body over to push off the wall. I can feel their eyes on me, mentally judging myself along with them – you’re not bending your elbows enough, your stroke has gotten lazy, you’re barely moving along the lane line. Sometimes it motivates me to go faster, sometimes not.

Even though I have been swimming once or twice a week for the past couple of months, I haven’t built up the endurance or strength to swim for more than 40 minutes. That’s about all I can handle. It’s kind of nice to know that I have control, though. I don’t have a coach watching over me, assigning me fast sets on a ridiculous interval. I do the same workout pretty much every time I swim. It gives me comfort to know that I don’t have to push myself any harder than I want to. But it also lets me be lazy. So, I watch the lifeguards and they watch me. I wonder if they know how old I am, what they think about this 20-something woman coming every Friday to swim for a little while. I can’t shake the feeling that they’re judging my stroke, my stamina, and my speed.

Along with that, I think a lot about the other swimmers who join the pool with me, especially the ones in my lane. There is definitely etiquette that swimmers need to know when going to swim laps. The pool where I swim makes it a little easier by actually putting yellow plastic signs next to each lane that designate the lane for a certain level of swimmer. Lanes 3 and 4 are labeled “FAST”, lanes 5 and 2 labeled “MEDIUM” and lanes 1 and 6 labeled “SLOW.” It’s important to gauge yourself based on the other swimmers in the lanes. Everyone wants their own lane, that’s a given. As the “SLOW” lanes are always filled with people who are not actually swimming, but either walking, playing or dog paddling, I usually head to one of the “FAST” lanes. However, this is a lot of pressure. You must prove that you belong in the “FAST” lane. You’d better swim for at least a half an hour, and you’d better do flip turns. You have no business being in the “FAST” lane if you can’t do a flip turn.

I’m set to leave for my hour of swimming in about half an hour, and I’m already dreading seeing the nameless person whom I’m going to have to share a lane with. Swimming isn’t really like long distance running – unless you have the pool to yourself, there are a lot of other people that you are going to have to take into account when swimming. Is the person sharing your lane going to want to swim in circles, counterclockwise, or will you divide the territory and each swim on one side of the black line? Staying on one side of the lane takes some skill, especially when swimming backstroke. I’ve had some major collisions with people who don’t or can’t stay on their side of the lane. Also, if you are swimming on one side of the lane, there is always the possibility of touching someone or bumping into the person swimming in the lane next

to you. Either way, you are certain to touch someone else's almost naked flesh while swimming. That makes swimming a very intimate sport. Strangers might touch you in intimate places – places you might call second base when you were a teenager. Now, most of the time they don't mean to do it, but it's a bit disconcerting when an old man swimming next to you smacks his hand into your breast with an ill-timed stroke, or you slam into someone's arm coming off of a flip turn. I suppose it's thrilling, really -- the clashing of bodies in the splashing of waves.

CHAPTER 4

FALSE START: OR, WHAT'S A GIRL TO DO ABOUT CHRIS CRUTCHER?

As a teenager, I didn't read a lot of Young Adult literature marketed for girls my age. I certainly didn't read any Young Adult "sport books"; at the time, I really didn't even consider myself an "athlete" competing in a "sport." At my high school, swimmers were in a class just above gymnasts. No one came to our meets except for parents and a few curious significant others. We liked to think we swam under the radar, but we weren't even a blip on the surface. We barely caused a wave when the boys won state my senior year. When our football team won a single game, the whole school buzzed. Swimmers were thought of as the weirdos who shaved their legs, wore Speedos and came to class with their hair still wet, even in the middle of winter. We felt as misunderstood as the goths and stoners. And like most teenagers, I defined myself by what others said about me.

As I continue this journey back to swimming, I've remembered the book that made the biggest impact on me when I was a swimmer in high school: Bryce Courtenay's *The Power of One*, which was later made into a movie starring Stephen Dorff and Morgan Freeman. The novel is about an English boy named Peekay who grows up in WWII South Africa during apartheid, and who is abused by his fellow private school

Afrikaners. Peekay turns to boxing to gain courage and strength against his tormentors, and the sport ultimately provides a way for him to bridge racial divides. I distinctly remember being shamed by Frau Hermann, my German teacher, because I was reading under my desk when we were supposed to be watching her conjugate verbs on the board. I latched on to the discipline that Peekay had – getting up early in the morning, running down to the gym for morning boxing workouts – and somehow, I identified with and idolized this thirteen-year-old South African boy.

The cover of my first-edition copy a friend bought me displayed Peekay’s defiant stance at a Johannesburg railway station, wearing a white button-down shirt and khaki shorts. He stood with his hands at his hips, boxing gloves swinging behind him. I made an attempt to wear khaki and white until my mom put her foot down at buying me a new wardrobe. I probably didn’t know enough to know that there were such things as “sport books,” (if this could even be categorized as one), but I do know that there were books written about young people who used their bodies in ways that changed the world. For me, there wasn’t a place where Young Adult literature ended and adult literature began. There were no lines drawn in the library to tell me what to read and what not to. I was just looking for a voice I really heard, one thing that Patty Campbell argues in “Our Side of the Fence” is the most important quality that distinguishes YA from adult fiction. *The Power of One* had it. Peekay’s commitment to boxing and to winning was strangely relevant to my privileged, WASP-y high school swimmer’s life: in his body, I saw my own yearning to be the best. I woke up early to be the first one to practice. I did push-ups

at night on my floor. I challenged myself to work harder, to be smarter, for Peekay's boxing coach drilled him with the mantra, "First with the head, then with the heart."

On the surface, attracting YA readers seems simple: they want books to go where they go and do what they do. The majority of contemporary scholarship says that YA novels should focus on individual issues in growing up, such as potential career choices, parents and their expectations, relations with siblings and sex and developing sexual attractions. This means dealing with problems relevant to young adult life: death and dying; drugs, alcohol, and substance abuse; divorce, spousal and child abuse; race and class discrimination. All of these issues are full of moral and ethical questions, interesting fodder for developing minds. Typically, what teens want are books that speak to their experiences, books that talk to them in their own language, not down to them. But don't teenagers also respond to the way that bodies are talked about, moved and disciplined? Does it matter who is talking about these bodies? What if the dominant voice describing these lives is an adult man, to young men, about men's bodies, and the way they see women's bodies? Does that make a difference to young women? As a teenager, I was able to read Courtenay's book and see myself in the body of the emerging male narrator. But more recently, I have begun to read more Young Adult sport novels written by men about male and female athletes. I have been increasingly intrigued by the way that young women and men's bodies are explored in popular sport novels written by men. One popular author's novels I would like to discuss are Chris Crutcher's Young Adult sport novels and the ways bodies are presented therein.

Chris Crutcher

Chris Crutcher's Young Adult sport novels, while marketed to both genders, are written for boys, and say much about boys' attitudes toward their bodies. Indeed, the body is wrapped up in every decision that these boys make. Crutcher has used his writing to explore very serious, gritty subjects and portrays strong, athletic male role models, and yet he continues to send messages about women and women's bodies that are misleading and outdated. He seems to be championing the power of men's bodies, but also proves to be ambivalent about the power of women's bodies, whether or not they are athletes, in his writing. His novels serve as an example of popular YA novels that reinforce sexist ideas and define the canon of YA novels in a way that is unreachable, unreadable, and unrealistic for teenage female athletes in the 21st century.

Instead of attempting a full survey of his novels, I will mostly concentrate on comparing Crutcher's *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, *Stotan!*, and *Chinese Handcuffs*, some of his most popular books published between 1986 and 1993. These Young Adult novels are both praised and criticized for exploring adult themes and dealing with tough, unsolvable issues such as sexuality, abortion, death and racial tension, and Crutcher remains one of the most visible Young Adult fiction writers. These texts are also realistic novels that are full of interesting, humorous and compellingly serious situations. The principal questions I am asking in this chapter are what kinds of messages is Crutcher sending about what bodies mean to teen girls and guys and how are these meanings revealed to young adult readers, whether they be male or female? Do male and female athletes struggle with the internalization of dominant cultural values that pertain to the

body? Is there aggression where the male body is found and hatred of the female body and its sexuality in this literature? Does Crutcher show females and female athletes as being trapped in the old paradigms of vulnerability, pain and domination by men?

Additionally, I have noticed that in each of these novels, adults are usually portrayed as the enemy, and coaches as distant but loyal friends. Young women are portrayed as being alone, attractive and yet floundering under the oppression of their bodies by male adults, and young men are often aggressive and doomed. The body of each of the characters is described, highlighted, and found to be both the source of good, in the context of the sport, and, if sexual, evil. The aggression of teenage boys that Crutcher's novels play on is found at the site of the body, where all of the business of sport takes place. The body is frowned on in some, chiseled away in all, and found to be a place for sexuality and violence at all levels. In each of these books, there is a young woman who is being abused or controlled by an older man. The aggression, especially by adults, found in Crutcher's novels is overwhelmingly adult, and I would argue, too mature for the young adult reader. I will also be looking deeper into what it means for girls and boys to read these novels, and the messages Crutcher is sending about the body. I would like to identify major themes that are at work, as well as commenting on the author's tone and particular goals for the novel, and hypothesizing the reader's mood and response at the end of the work.

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes

The first place we see the importance of the body is in initial character descriptions. We see that the appearance of the body is central to the main conflict in

these novels. In Crutcher's *Staying Fat For Sarah Byrnes*, we meet the main character Eric Calhoun, also known as Moby, who has a delightful sense of humor about his obesity, and describes himself as "big and solid as twelve pounds of mashed potatoes in an eight-pound bag." Moby goes on to say that "If you dressed me up in an orange-and-red sweater, you could ride me around the world in eighty days" (3). Crutcher's body similes are certainly identifiable for 18-year-olds; Moby is described as having a "keg-like" body. Despite his weight, he is a natural swimmer, and wants to be good at his sport.

From the beginning, we see that Moby has conflicting feelings about his overweight body; indeed, even as he has been swimming more and more, he could be shedding the pounds, but he is overeating in order to remain obese for his friend, Sarah Byrnes. Moby tells us at the beginning of the novel that he "stayed fat a whole year for her" (7).

Sarah Byrnes has her own body issues to deal with. According to Moby's story at the beginning of the novel, when Sarah was three, she pulled a pot of boiling spaghetti off the stove onto herself, leaving horrible burn scars covering her face and hands. Crutcher introduces us at this early point to the evil adult male who seems to exist in many of his female character's lives. In *Staying Fat*, it is Sarah's father. Virgil Byrnes, who according to Moby is "maybe the cruelest and certainly the most insensitive man I have had the misfortune to know," allowed Sarah to get only basic medical attention for her burns (8). She was forbidden to get any reconstructive surgery. Crutcher goes a step further by emphasizing the father's evil nature by letting us know from Moby that "he said it would

serve as a good lesson to her in the future” (8). Hence, her body quickly becomes a “scarred” body, a visible, lasting symbol of her father’s evil.

In spite of this oppression, she seems to be a strong woman, mentally and physically, although not an athlete. Interestingly, her reason not to be involved with sports is quickly and unsatisfactorily (at least, for me) dealt with by Crutcher’s explanation that chlorine will wreak havoc on her facial scars (34). However, Moby says later that Sarah’s father “seems awful proud of how tough she is” (45). Sarah has gotten so sick of waiting for people to figure out the all-too-ironic connection between her name and her condition that she only answers to her full name, and she seems not to flinch at even the most stinging insults about her appearance.

There are other strong women in *Staying Fat*, however, who are physically and mentally attractive, but they are adults. One is Moby and Sarah’s Contemporary American Thought teacher, Ms. Lemry. Moby is thrilled because this will be a class in which “the prospect of talking about what we think in this class is exciting... Particularly when we’re going to do it with one of the most exquisite human beings alive, for my money” (20). Moby is ambivalent about how he should talk about Lemry’s body, and it is obvious that he doesn’t know how to be politically correct when describing her body. Moby goes on to say that Lemry is “something to look at”:

She’s petite and about as sexy as you can get without being a movie star or a belly dancer, with shoulder-length blond hair, dark brown eyes that look right through you, and big dangly earrings that push her face out at you. If you have impure thoughts about her, however, you better keep them to yourself, because

she'll flat cut you up if you get disrespectful. Lemry is the women's rights poster girl. I mean poster person. (20)

Moby's mother, another strong woman, is a writer, and she even writes a regular column in the local newspaper about women in sports and "has had three articles published in *Sports Illustrated*." One was even a "feature on a teenage girl who swam the English Channel" (70). Moby's mother's body does not escape a detailed description as a "fox" from the beginning of the novel: "She has dark brown hair and green eyes and this slinky, long, muscular body that she keeps in perfect working order, and I know for a fact half of the kids who come to my house hope to catch her in shorts and a tank top" (2). Crutcher seems to send mixed messages here about these women. On one hand, he objectifies them (especially Ms. Lemry) with surface descriptions, then later respects them for their feminist agendas.

The desire for Crutcher's male main characters to physically hurt other people is also another site for "body work," places where Crutcher emphasizes the body in a teenager's struggle for control. When in Ms. Lemry's class, Moby is confronted about Sarah Byrnes' depression by another student, Kathy Gould, who has, according to Moby, "the sense of humor of a brussels sprout." Moby responds by saying that he "feels instant anger that I don't completely understand, and I want to hurt her in some way" (22). To the female reader, this statement is quite aggressive, understandable for a pubescent male with raging hormones, but still the threat of Moby's anger lashing out at a young woman is fraught with ambivalence toward women, particularly toward violence to their bodies.

Sarah is an aggressive character who will stick up for herself, and she doesn't ask for Moby's protection. Moby tells us the story of when Dale Thornton, the student drunk, beats her up. This girl just can't get a break, but when Dale punches her "square in the nose, or what's left of it, because Sarah Byrnes's nose is mostly scar tissue" (25), she sprang back up "like a plastic Rocky Balboa punching bag, swinging to kill" (25). Crutcher seems to want to emphasize that Sarah's no-holds-barred approach to dealing with disability or hardship is admirable. Sarah "pushed her scars directly into our tormentors' faces, while I disappeared into my cottage cheese carcass like a scared turtle in a soft shell, watching her wage our war of the outcasts alone" (43). However, Sarah is later put in the hospital because she has voluntarily stopped talking and responding to those around her. Her tough exterior gives way to a frightened, needy teenager when confronted by her father. We come to find out that it was not, in fact, the pot of boiling spaghetti that scarred Sarah's face, but her Dad. When she was little, Mr. Byrnes got into an all-too-common fistfight with Sarah's mother, and Sarah got in the middle of the fight. Mr. Byrnes pushed her face on a hot stove to spite her mother.

Crutcher introduces another character, Jody, who is the real love interest for Moby, because she is physically attractive, whereas Sarah is not a real candidate for romance. But Jody also turns out to be doomed. After some heated abortion debates in Mrs. Lemry's class, Jody confides in Moby that she had an abortion after being pressured by the baby's father, the outspoken and reactionary Christian in the class. We will see that Crutcher has set up this cast of characters in several of his other novels as well -- the mentor, the friend in trouble, the love interest, the abused woman -- and he will continue

to work out body issues throughout the rest of the novel. Moby gets slimmer, stronger and more confident, Sarah, with Moby's urging and guidance, confronts her father and is adopted by the Lemrys (another save by Moby), and Jody makes her abortion known to the school after her ex-boyfriend confesses he left her alone to deal with the baby.

Through his emphasis on body appearance and control, ambivalence about women in sports, and male-dominated abusive relationships that can only be solved by the main character, Crutcher sends conflicting messages to young female and male readers about the place of women and bodies in sport and life.

Stotan!

Stotan! reveals some of the same conflicting messages through a group of high school swimmers; Walker, Nortie, Lion and Jeff put themselves through Stotan Week, a grueling four-hour-a-day swimming test of stamina designed by their coach, Max, to bring them to the outer edge of their capabilities. The narrator, Walker, is infatuated with a girl, Elaine, who "doesn't compete anymore" (9). Walker explains her decision to leave swimming by saying, "One thing about swimming: unless you're among the best in the country, there's a girl somewhere who can kick your butt – any stroke, any distance. Elaine was that girl for a lot of guys around here; she had her day, but no more. Elaine swims for fun" (9). Like Sarah in *Staying Fat*, the main female character is seen as strong, but ultimately not an athlete. Much is also made of the young women character's physical appearances. When Elaine is introduced, Walter describes her body: "I remember feeling a little self-conscious about watching her butt move toward the counter like the flanks of a thorough-bred racehorse. Old Elaine wears some fairly tight britches

and she's real muscular" (38). But Walter has a "supposed" girlfriend, Devnee, and is scared to break up with her. Devnee is described as being "pretty and she's smart and has a really nice body; small, with a tiny waist and great pecs; dark green eyes and short, almost black hair" (56). But he feels like "love has gone away" (56). He also feels that if he told Elaine about his feelings, "she'd punch me in the nose" (42).

Elaine is a strong character in the novel, but she ultimately begins to date a student teacher, and she is almost kicked out of school for it. Most of the novel is, admittedly, not about her at all, but she seems to be always involved in the major scenes – when one of the Stotans becomes deathly ill, at secret meetings and holiday gatherings, etc. – but she is not a fully realized character, and certainly not a fleshed-out character. Her description is limited mainly to the large amount of food she is able to put away while still looking good, and at the end, Walker realizes that he and Elaine will never be able to be together after all the group has gone through. Crutcher, while successfully illuminating the struggles of young male athletes, fails to compose a female who is embodied. Although it could be worse, Crutcher does nothing to break stereotypes or describe her movement at all.

Walter also has trouble keeping his bodily aggression at bay, just like Moby in *Staying Fat*, although it is not directed at a female. When Marty O'Brien, a baseball player, brings in some racist newsletters, and secretly distributes them at school, Walter wonders "if he can catch my foot before it gets to his ear at about that speed" (53).

And again, in *Stotan!*, Crutcher introduces an adult male character who is abusive to both men and women. The first crisis in the novel comes when Nortie, who is being

abused by his father, slaps a child at the child-care center and quits, saying, “I’m just like my dad,” (61). Nortie also reveals the fact that his brother killed himself at the age of thirteen. Nortie is like his own mom, as he realizes that “I still love my dad. I still try to please him... He hates me and I just keep going back” (64).

Stotan Week highlights the physical changing that goes on through the novel, like Eric’s transformation in *Staying Fat*. Four hours a day, Monday through Friday, Coach Max leads them through a hellish week of strength and endurance training. On the first day, the four boys are required to sign a statement that includes the line: “I understand that should my mind and/or body fail me and break down, I hold no person or institution responsible, save myself” (75): they are learning responsibility as well as courage.

Walker highlights the physical pain during this week: “physical pain that comes from the soul rather than the outside” (84). An interesting part that highlights the transforming of the body is when Lion says, “I think this is how you get *really* good at something,” to which Nortie replies, “Yeah, but these are our *bodies*. How much can they take?” (88).

One ambivalent message Crutcher relays about women through the character of Milika, Nortie’s girlfriend, whom Nortie deserts when his Dad beats him up. Milika is African-American, and neither of their dads would approve of a bi-racial relationship. When Milika shows up at Lion’s apartment (the four boys are staying there during Stotan Week), she slaps him on the ear because she is mad, then later says, “Next time I hit you, hit me back. You want to be my man, you don’t take that from nobody” (113). The guys tell stories of Stotan Week and make Elaine jealous; she laments that “there’s no place for women to have the experience we (the guys) were having” (114). “Sure there is,”

Nortie replies, “when they die and go to hell.” The young women’s role in the novel seems unclear even to the characters themselves, as they vacillate between being strong and confrontational, and shy and accepting of their place in the order of things.

Nortie puts all of his rage into swimming, according to Walter: “he pays the pool back for every time his old man ever laid a finger on him” (31). The climax of this situation reveals itself when, after his most recent beating, Walter and his friends decide that Nortie shouldn’t live with his parents anymore, and they all but break into Nortie’s house. Mr. Wheeler, Nortie’s dad, pulls out a pistol and threatens the boys. Mrs. Wheeler makes a last stand, screaming, “No! You’re not shooting anyone! You can beat me and you can lock me in the basement and you can do anything you want, but you’re not killing anyone! You’ll have to kill me first! You’re not shooting anyone...” (147). Nortie moves in with Walter, and Mrs. Wheeler goes to a friend’s house. She has apparently been saved by almost certain death by these teenage boys, as Sarah is similarly saved by Moby in *Staying Fat*.

At the end of the novel, right before the State Meet, the reader finds out that Jeff, one of the most intense, gung-ho Stotans, has been diagnosed with terminal leukemia.

Walker realizes that:

I think if I ever make to adulthood, and if I decide to turn back and help someone grow up, either as a parent or a teacher or a coach, I’m going to spend most of my time dispelling myths, clearing up unreal expectations. For instance, we’re brought up to think that the good guys are rewarded and the bad guys are punished; but upon close scrutiny, that assumption

vanishes into thin air. Nortie certainly never did anything to warrant the horror of his life, and Jeff sure isn't one of the bad guys. Look what he gets to give up. (259)

Crutcher shows here that for young men, there are mostly questions; no answers. But we also have questions for Crutcher, like, isn't anyone good anymore? Is this really what the world is like, or is this just Crutcher's world as a psychiatrist to teens? Again, as in *Staying Fat*, we see through examples of broken, diseased and dying bodies an emphasis on body appearance and control (or lack thereof), ambivalence about women and their place in boys' lives and in the home, and male-dominated abusive relationships with women who can only be saved by the main character (and his best buddies).

Chinese Handcuffs

Chinese Handcuffs highlights the body progress of Dillon Hemingway, a triathlete who, like Nortie in *Stotan!*, has a brother who has killed himself. Crutcher interweaves the narrative with Dillon's letters to his dead brother, Preston. Writing is an outlet for him to deal with his grief and confront his brother about his drug abuse. Preston's body is "scarred" like Sarah Byrnes' body, which is rare for male bodies in Crutcher's novels, but he lost his legs in a motorcycle accident, a stereotypically masculine pursuit.

Dillon's physical tendency for abuse comes early in the novel when we find out that, at ten and twelve years of age, Dillon and Preston beat their next-door neighbor's cat, Charlie, to death with a tire iron. He is haunted by the memory throughout the novel, until he is able to apologize to the neighbor at the end of the story.

In *Chinese Handcuffs*, there is, like Mrs. Lemry in *Staying Fat* and Elaine in *Stotan!*, a female character who is an untouchable, an oracle of sorts to the main character. This time, her name is Stacy. We find out early on in a letter to Preston that Dillon tells Stacy about the cat incident. Dillon writes, "... she said it was a leak, a wrinkle where the coordinates of our individual time and circumstance come together at an odd angle and a crack appears in the structure we've built to keep us decent, and our own personal evil seeps out," (20). Stacy always seems to know just what to say to comfort Dillon.

However, unlike *Staying Fat* and *Stotan!*, in *Chinese Handcuffs*, Jen, Dillon's romantic interest, is a powerful athletic woman. According to Dillon, Jen is "probably the best athlete at her sport, male or female, at Chief Joe, and that's coming from *me*, easily the best male athlete..." (23). A young girl reading this book is presumably excited to read Crutcher's description of this female athlete who in interesting ways steps outside of his ambivalence about sports in his other books. Jen is one tough, athletic girl, and so are the other girls who play basketball at St. Joe's. Chapter Two begins at basketball practice, and Jen "owned every inch of hardwood invisibly marked off to be hers" (24). There is an emphasis on bodily appearance, however, that seems once again almost humorous and over the top. One player's body is described as "the sinewy whippet of a second-string point guard" and Jen's body, seen through Dillon's eyes, "approached like a racehorse following a tough workout, shoulder-length blond hair clinging to her neck like a wet mane, her long, sinewy legs glistened with sweat" (25).

Kathy Sherman, the women's basketball coach, is also a strong female character, though her body is not described; she lobbies hard to get coverage of her team in the local paper. But she also worries that she "couldn't coach Jennifer to protect herself better – put her hands up at least" (28). And here readers familiar with Crutcher's books, and his theme of the doomed woman, will know that something is very wrong with Jen. Savvy readers may not be surprised to find out when Jen gets a concussion during a basketball game that she doesn't want to stay in the hospital because "there's no one to take care of my sister" (43). There are the makings of a male-dominated abusive relationship in the works; by now a seasoned Crutcher reader can smell it on the pages. We learn from a series of flashbacks about her childhood, one of her grandfather dying, that in her past, Jen's father is always a shadow on the horizon, one that "is a pathetic shadow, but also giant somehow, one that fills her from inside, chokes her" (52). Jen's father, and now her stepfather, T.B., has been sexually abusing her several nights a week since she was a little girl. The title of the novel, *Chinese Handcuffs*, refers to the straw-barreled toy that Stacy once puts on Dillon's fingers, a toy that is almost impossible to get out of "unless you know the secret" (65). This will come to stand for the situation that Jen is in with her stepfather. She is ultimately doomed in her athletic prowess because of the terrible secret that she must carry on her back like a barbell.

Crutcher goes into graphic detail when describing Jen's sexual abuse, how when she tries to run away, "He slaps her hard on the face." During the abuse, Jen

does what she learned to do when her father came into her room years ago:

She leaves her body there, but takes her head away... It's harder to stay

gone, because T.B. is rough, but she manages out of sheer will, and when he is finished, she lies with her face pressed into the crack between the bed and the wall, no tears, no sound, no feelings. (107)

T.B. is so evil, he says if Jen tells anyone, he will kill her dog. Jen's sister is the next in line for T.B.'s abuse, and she has to protect her.

At the end of the novel, when Dillon finally discovers that Jen is being sexually abused, and after he can get nowhere with authority, he sets up a hidden video camera in Jen's room to tape T.B. molesting Jen, then blackmails T.B. with the evidence so he will leave town. His plan works amazingly well, and the bad man is banished; however, Dillon knows his relationship with Jen is doomed. He somehow understands that after watching the tape of her sexual molestation, he could never be with her in a healthy, sexual relationship.

Messages and Motivations

In *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo argues that the definition and shaping of the body is “the focal point for struggles over the shape of power.” In her book, she refers to the fear of fat that pervades our contemporary culture and our disgust for our bodies. In terms of the body, however, Chris Crutcher's novels portray bodies as “unbearable weight,” and are themselves “unbearable weight” to the field of feminism and sport literature. By examining bodies in Crutcher's Young Adult novels, we can see some important recurring themes: in *Staying Fat*, *Stotan!* and *Chinese Handcuffs*, there is an emphasis on bodily appearance and control, marked ambivalence about women and their place in sports and as objects of sexual desire, and an alarming prevalence of male-

dominated abusive relationships, which the main character must physically act on in order to save the abused. We also see recurring patterns of characters that coincide with the Young Adult genre and send important messages to young girls: the coach/oracle characters who are confidants to the main character; the love interest who is doomed and/or not available in some way; the troubled character who is either dead, dying, or in serious bodily danger; and there is at least one tortured/abused woman. Additionally, we see that body issues are at play here in very specific ways. These books deal with serious issues, mostly abuse to the body and how those abused can rarely be physically or emotionally healed. Scars and wounds are deep, and they often last longer than we think.

As a speaker to the YA masses, Crutcher gets a lot of things right. He realistically portrays strong women who are dealing with immeasurable pain, whether physical or psychological. He tackles tough issues with a fine knack for dialogue and humor, leaving the reader at once mortified and tickled. As Chris Crowe writes in *More Than a Game: Sports Literature for Young Adults*,

Crutcher's heroes reflect the honest and realistic trend in sports fiction that began with John R. Tunis: sports stories do not have to be about winning. For writers more concerned with story than sports action, it is important that sports stories focus on character and the lessons characters learn from their involvement with athletics and other people. (41)

But feminists are still left scratching their heads, perplexed by remaining questions like: Why are the lessons learned about abuse always done at the hands of a male? And why does it happen in *every* book? Granted, studies show that in the real

world, men *are* statistically the abusers, women the abused. But, what kinds of messages does this persistence of violence by those in power send to young men? And if a girl gets her hands on these novels, which is likely, because there is not much else to choose from, then what is she learning? We remember, after all, that Crutcher's audience is not just boys (although all the covers of his paperbacks showcase the muscled male body); he makes it known that his audience is young women as well as men. These novels repeat phrases young women hear in other areas of their lives: physical beauty equals romance, boys are stronger than girls, and bodies are the object of the male gaze, to be consumed, owned and commodified. As Andrea Dworkin writes in *Woman Hating*, "In our culture, not one part of a woman's body is left untouched, unaltered," (113) and in Crutcher's novels, this is a corporeal reality.

So what's a girl to do? Along with Kathy Davis in "Embodied Practice: Feminist Perspectives on the Body," I would argue that we need to find ways to develop modes of embodied feminist theory grounded in the particulars of women's (and men's) everyday lives and embodied experiences, perhaps by exploring new forms of Cixious' *l'écriture feminine*, feminine writing. Cixious and other feminists like Adrienne Rich might argue that woman must write herself, must discover for herself what her body feels like, and how to write about that body in language. Women must find their own sexuality and find ways to write about that pleasure. When women speak or write their own bodies, language takes on new metaphorical and textual possibilities.

I haven't been swimming in a couple of weeks, and I'm starting to feel guilty about it. My car has broken down, so the only way I can get to a pool is if I get a ride over to my father-in-law's house and swim in the pool in their backyard. I don't have to swim in an Olympic-sized pool to feel the freedom of swimming – I only need to be able to put my head under water, to feel as if I am exploring a new continent. These past few months have been a travel adventure of sorts – an exploration into a new underwater world, learning the customs and language. I'm going back again. Even though I haven't been able to swim as much as I want to, it has been enough to get me going. And I'm not only swimming again, but I've started walking and jogging as well. I've thought a lot about whether or not I would think about myself as an "athlete," and my general consensus is that I'm not one (I don't know if I ever really will be again), but I've re-connected with a part of my past that I'd forgotten about. Looking back over pictures of myself as a swimmer has empowered me in a way that I'd never imagined. Seeing myself grinning into the camera, totally unashamed and unaware that parts of my body are exposed – parts that I would now be self-conscious about -- is really freeing. I like to see other people's reactions to photographs of myself as a swimmer. They usually say something like, "Wow, you were really skinny!" It's flattering and a bit depressing. My feet look like canoes, my legs like long planks of timber. No wonder I could swim so fast.

And even though swimming is thought of as a solitary sport, I take pleasure in the memory of what it was like to be on a team, to feel a part of a group effort, to feel

like something I was doing made some difference in the end, whether I placed last or first.

Mary Morris writes in her travel memoir Nothing to Declare about her travels to San Miguel, Mexico, and how she found enlightenment in everyday practices:

When the children came to my door, when the tortilla lady or the flower lady or the avocado man or whoever came to my door, or when I was simply alone, on the roof, staring for hours, daydreaming, doing nothing at all, I felt a kind of peace come over me. I have felt this elsewhere – in Tibet and Machu Picchu – but those were special places, holy places. This was just a dusty old place, but for me it had become everything. I was simply enjoying the experience of being, of living without goal or expectation, without longing or desire. I was happy when I was there – happy just to be. (138)

For me, swimming has become my holy place, a place where I'm "happy just to be." To dive into a pool under the stars and slice through glowing water with dark arms is as close as I've been to forgiveness, to forgetting what has been and reaching for what is ahead.

CHAPTER 5

“FIT, READY, DANGEROUS”: WRITING FEMALE MIND-BODY POTENTIAL

I'm cold, so cold... appalled at what I have to do. I stand tall, center stage, on the first rung of the starting-block. Under the night sky, I feel almost naked. Just me, the body Alex, fit, ready, dangerous.
Alex, in Tessa Duder's *In Lane Three*, Alex Archer

Thus I arrived at adulthood, the wary and protective owner of a body devoid of thought.
Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures*

Growing up during the 1980s, I was a voracious reader who swam competitively for almost 10 years. However, I do not remember reading a novel that spoke to my own needs, my own yearnings to connect with a female character who was strong, smart and also a competitive athlete – in swimming or any other sport, for that matter. I do know that I was also extremely shy, sensitive and insecure about my body and my ideas. I know what it is like to yearn for someone to relate to, to find a character who is in the throes of competition, who knows what it is like to feel sick before a meet, to have to stand up on the block by herself. I knew that other girls found community in their sport; they could rely on each other for support, on and off the playing field. I did not feel, however, that any of the girls in *The Babysitters Club* or in Judy Blume's novels understood the relationship that I had with my mind and body at that time. Boys my age could read

Cormier's *The Chocolate War* or *Sports Illustrated*. My husband admits he didn't read much when he was a kid, but he could turn on the television and see his sports heroes on the screen. I had to wait four years for the Olympics. I knew the names of the great ones - Janet Evans, Summer Sanders -- but they were distant, shadowy figures who sliced through the water with unbelievable speed. My mother bought me a magazine at some point (*Swimmer's Digest*, I think), but I was not impressed with the vague interviews about the athlete's favorite foods. I wanted to know what the athletes thought about their bodies. I remember poring over swimsuit catalogs, staring intently at the swimmers' bodies. It felt comforting to see bodies like my own: broad shoulders, muscled calves, much bigger and broader than the ones in *Teen People* or *Glamour*. Even at that age, I was obsessed with bodies. It seemed natural to me to be aware of the bodies around me. I could describe in detail the shape of each girl's body on my high school team. I could tell you what Lauren's biceps looked like, the way Anne's calf muscles split in the middle or how she could walk on her hands or swim three lengths of the pool without breathing.

Only in the past couple of years, by thoroughly searching the sport fiction databases, have I found sport novels about swimmers, written by women, which have helped me to understand the complexity of the female athlete: one of them is *In Lane Three, Alex Archer* by Tessa Duder. Duder's novel gave me a release, an understanding of my sport that I never had while I was competing in it. Even all these years later, when I only recently have I returned to swimming, do I understand what my body was really like. Of course, I still do not understand my body; in fact, I think that my relationship with this thing I inhabit has only become more complex. I often wish that I had been able

to embrace, to *embody* my body when I was that age, to understand the power that was within me, when my muscles were like rope and my shoulders were steel pistons. I remember telling my father one night at dinner, “My thighs are so fat.” Shocked, he looked back at me, exclaiming, “That’s all muscle!” My body was so strong, and yet in my mind it seemed so weak. I was learning, like many young girls in American culture, to hate my body.

The things I remember are these: drive, freedom, strength, fear. Drive that kept me up at night, doing bicep presses on my wobbly desk chair because my coach told me I had “a swimmer’s body,” if only I could build the muscle. Freedom was when I was “in the zone,” my mind creating an inner monologue that chastised and pushed my body harder. Strength was in pulling the water harder, faster, ahead of the girl in the lane beside me. And I also felt fear, that nauseating fear before every race, the fear that almost consumed me alive. I did not know the power of my body, was not aware of what it could do, of the possibilities and *potentialities* that lay dormant inside.

Unfortunately, there is not much critical commentary about Young Adult sport fiction. It’s not exactly regarded as a place to find complexity: it can be seen as juvenile, formulaic genre fiction (the underdog fights to eventually triumph in the big race at the end of the novel). And yet, I feel YA sport fiction has been overlooked for what these texts *can* do, regardless of the author’s intent. As Tim Morris argues in *You’re Only Young Twice: Children’s Literature and Film*,

Juvenilizing children’s books and genre fiction alike serves to repress concerns of great importance, relegating them to a land of children’s

literature where nothing is really taken seriously – and therefore where almost anything can be said, the privilege of both child and courtly fool.

(6)

Where else but “juvenile” fiction can we find such a rich site for exploration and excavation of women’s bodies, the bodies that dealing with acne, hormones, and their period and also plowing their way down lane number four in the freezing cold water? Where else are humans so out of control with their bodies one moment, and so in control in the next? It seems that it is only now, in the light of literary theory and the changes which have taken place in our understanding of literary texts and material bodies, that we can read authors such as Duder, telling stories of young women’s bodies in sports, to understand what this genre really has to offer, especially for those who are or have been athletes. Ultimately, I am interested in how these sport novels contribute to contemporary cultural discourse – “the manifestation of their potency” (McWhorter xvii).

What is the Body?

In the introduction to *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*, Gail Weiss asserts that “to write about the body or even the body image is a paradoxical project” because these expressions presume that the body and the body image can be separated for investigation. She then consults Merleau-Ponty in further revealing that we must remember that the body is never isolated in its activity but always already engaged with the world, and is always affected by gender, race, age and changing abilities of the body. Therefore, rather than “view the body image as a cohesive, coherent phenomenon that operates in a fairly uniform way,” I do want to follow in her footsteps by positing that a

multiplicity of body images are co-present in any given individual, and “are themselves constructed through a series of corporeal exchanges that take place both within and outside specific bodies” (2). Weiss advocates a “nondualistic understanding of corporeal agency which seeks to revalue women’s as well as men’s bodily capacities and possibilities” (4). I want to make clear that I am dealing with an ongoing process of body and body image-making when I refer to “the body” or “the body image,” even as it may seem like a paradox. Additionally, there may be a multiplicity of body images in one person, just as we acknowledge that bodies have the ability to perform many different roles: that of the athlete, mother, or friend.

Choreographing Difference: Sport and Shifting Representations

Ann Cooper Albright’s book *Choreographing Difference* can be very useful for looking at women’s bodies in contemporary sport literature. Albright analyzes dance as a crucial discourse of the 1990s and argues that dancers ask the audience to see the body as a source of cultural identity – a physical presence that moves with and through its gendered, racial, and social meanings. Through analysis of contemporary choreography, Albright shows how the dancing body shifts conventions of representation and provides a critical example of the dialectical relationship between cultures and the bodies that inhabit them. Albright looks at the material experience of bodies in dance, not just the body as a figure or metaphor, to understand how cultural representation becomes embedded in the body. I would like to take up where Albright has left off, and use some of the same tools she does to look at women’s bodies in Young Adult sport fiction. I would argue that, like dance, sport literature is also a site of interesting physical and

intellectual cultural discourse about the body. But first I would like to give a brief history of cultural and linguistic representations of the female body and why it has been so split from the mind.

Female Body / Mind

Albright cites Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* to explain the enduring legacy of Platonic idealism, which relegated bodies, particularly female bodies, to the realm of unformed matter. This material substance – “messy and excessive, refusing to be bound” – needs to be controlled by the mind and ruled over by reason. If Plato is one of the earliest proponents of this dualistic philosophy, Albright argues, Descartes is one of its most famous theoreticians, for he “not only distinguished mind from body and consciousness from the natural world, but he also considered the self as an exclusive function of the mind, pulling subjectivity completely away from any aspect of bodily existence” (6).

Ladelle McWhorter, in *Bodies and Pleasures*, also champions the use of the body in the “attack on Cartesian dualism, Lockean naturalism, or any other idea or institution or way of thinking” (148). This is not enough, however; we also have to “embody that attack, and we have to embody it starting with the very bodies those ways of thinking have given us” (148). She argues, using Foucault's ideas, that every aspect of a human being, including our bodies, is implicated in the powers and knowledges we want to critique. She asserts, “What is at stake in critique, then, is our very bodies, our very selves. These are what we have to change if we are to change the terms” (148).

Keeping McWhorter's exhortations in mind, however, we must acknowledge that in the 1980s and 1990s, feminists have provided us with a litany of examples documenting just how pervasive the separation of body and mind is in our culture. As they have aptly demonstrated, the foundational philosophies and religious ideologies of Western civilization first constructed and then sought categories such as body/mind, nature/culture, private/public, spirituality/corporeality, and experience/knowledge. These "schematic polarizations" (Albright 6) created, in turn, unavoidable hierarchies that positioned the body as the material "other" to the transcendence of the mind. Sidonie Smith, in her book *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body*, describes the misogynistic legacy of this disembodiment of the universal subject and shows how it developed into a gendered separation of self and other, where the "other" was essentialized as being nothing but her body, left with a material void as her identity. Judith Butler, Albright notes, makes a similar point when she claims that:

By defining women as "Other," men are able through the shortcut of definition to dispose of their bodies, to make themselves other than their bodies... From this belief that the body is Other, it is not a far leap to the conclusion that others are their bodies, while the masculine "I" is the noncorporeal soul. The body rendered as Other – the body repressed or denied, and then, projected – reemerges for this "I" as the view of others as essentially body. Hence, women become the other; they come to embody corporeality itself. (7)

Over the last decade the relationship between women's bodies and their sense of selfhood has become increasingly perplexing, according to Albright.

Albright argues that the "becoming" of women, then, is an enactment – a performance of sorts -- and as such resists both a biological teleology and a cultural ontology (8). However, Albright critiques Butler, insisting, "Butler's theory of gender as performance marks sexual identity as a shifting category (one that is consciously "played out"), but it never accounts for how the body receives, produces, and interacts with that very potent psychic instability" (10). So what does it mean to destabilize a cultural identity without denying the very real materiality of the body? We must recognize, according to Albright, how a shifting, "performative" identity is nonetheless experienced as variously, yet continuously, embodied (10). Albright argues that looking at dance helps us trace the interactiveness and discipline of an unstable body by foregrounding the significance of the bodily experience. She states,

We must be willing to talk about the body's sensations, kinesthetic impressions, emotional reactions, and physical comportment as well as its historically and culturally inflected signification. In order to theorize about bodies, we must be willing to engage with their physical as well as their meta-physical meanings. (11)

In Lane Three, Alex Archer

My intent for this chapter is to tie McWhorter, Grosz and Albright's discussions into an examination of the treatment and agency of a teenage woman's physical body in the novel *In Lane Three, Alex Archer*, written by Tessa Duder. Duder's fate has been

typical of that of the “woman sport fiction writer.” Her books were popular in Duder’s home country, New Zealand, earning a *Booklist* YA Editor’s Choice Award, a New Zealand Children’s Book of the Year Award, and *In Lane Three* was even an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults when it was published in 1989, when I was just entering puberty at age 13. The *School Library Journal* review in the blurbs on Amazon.com is indicative of the reaction when Duder’s novel was published: “Well-developed, realistic, three-dimensional characters flesh out this novel about competitive swimming and adolescence... Duder’s fresh writing style hooks readers from the outset.” Even though now out of print, Duder’s novel seems to be enjoyed by teenagers and is highly recommended as a sports book for female swimmers. Chris Crowe writes in *More Than a Game: Sports Literature for Young Adults* that it “is the sort of well-written young adult sports novel that critics have been calling for” (69). The cover of my 1991 Bantam reprint, an Amazon.com purchase, displays a waist-up torso of Alex in a navy blue suit. Her expression is serious and a little sad, as if her thoughts consume her, though her shoulders are strong and square, her posture straight. Three swimmers fight for first in the freestyle at the bottom, their mouths open as they all breathe air to the right side. On the inside of the cover, someone had written “Withdrawn” with a black Sharpie pen in large cursive letters in black Sharpie pen. Strangely enough, this was the exact word used to describe my conduct on a report card in the third grade. I already felt a kinship with the novel.

In Lane Three, *Alex Archer* profiles a teenaged feminist who breaks the boundaries of her conservative society in 1959 New Zealand. Fifteen-year-old Alex

Archer is a multi-dimensional character whose dedication to sports does not preclude a wide variety of other interests, concerns and ambitions. Qualifying for the New Zealand Olympic team is only one of the pressures Alex endures. She must also contend with slanderous gossip, the failing health of her beloved grandmother and then the death of her boyfriend, Andy. Even in the darkest moments, Alex's spirit remains undaunted.

In this analysis, I will look primarily at the visual elements of Duder's novel *In Lane Three, Alex Archer* to see how the physical body is represented. Duder's fiction is structured repeatedly around an oscillation between the main character Alex's inner monologue, written in a stream stream-of-consciousness excerpts while swimming the "big race," and narrative, first-person flashbacks to the previous year. Alex's inner monologue begins every chapter of the novel, and is denoted with italics. One example of Alex's interior monologue follows:

Breathing is uphill and every arm stroke a circle of pain. My legs, shaved so carefully in the shower tonight, are tingling, almost as though being massaged by the water. It's a feeling I've not had often; a signal that my body is about to go into another gear. (105)

So, how are we to read these vacillations? After the first chapter, it is easy to follow the flip-flopping back and forth between italics and normal text. A typical reader might say that the italics designate the portion where we are "inside Alex's mind" and the other where she is mind *and* body. This is actually not true: in fact, it could be argued that we are more fully embodied in the italicized portions of the novel, because her body is at this point *so* active, swimming as if on autopilot. She does not have to consciously "tell

her body” what to do; her body knows what to do through years of discipline: “...*my body is about to go into another gear*”. Yes, she does call upon it to work harder, but there does seem to be an interesting disconnect there. How is her body able to work without her mind telling it to? Is her body in total control? Or is her mind? Or is it more complicated than this? How, exactly, are Alex’s body and mind represented in the text, and how do they interact with each other? Also, do the italicized sections of the novel “work” to separate or combine the body and mind in a way that is helpful for feminism and material theorists, by deconstructing the mind/body dichotomies still lingering from humanism – the one that relegates woman to nothing but a body that is irrational and needs to be presided over?

Duder’s concern for the way in which the mind and the body meet up is compelling, and the visual elements of the text call for further examination. By reading Duder’s novel alongside that of material feminists, including, Linda Birke’s *Feminism and the Biological Body*, and Ladelle McWhorter’s *Bodies and Pleasures*, I argue that because Alex’s swimming body is a disciplined body and is in a state of becoming, it resists its own representation, which serves to break down the mind/body dichotomy the textual elements may, at first, seem to affirm. Consequently, Alex’s stream-of-consciousness thoughts while “performing,” visually represented in italics, are ultimately helpful for contemporary feminist and material theories.

According to Linda Birke, most scholarship on disciplining the body is negative: “to achieve or maintain thinness, moreover, requires disciplining the body through dieting or through eating disorders” (33). Birke mentions other ways of disciplining the

female body: body piercing, bodybuilding and cosmetic surgery, for example, as well as the disciplining that comes through classification of “other bodies” (through race and skin color, for example).

Following this line of argument, I would argue that sport novels such as *In Lane Three*, *Alex Archer* can offer us possibilities of developing alternative “body politics” through accounts of athlete’s bodily experiences. It may not be the performative model Judith Butler argues for in *Gender Troubles* or *Bodies That Matter*, but if we can at least see the body as “changing and changeable,” as transformable rather than as a “tedious universal machine” (Birke 44), then we can see Alex as an agent in resisting her own representation as a female athlete.

For Alex Archer, her “changing” body can be seen as both embarrassing and empowering. Alex admits, “Embarrassment was not an unfamiliar sensation even then. Something about me always seemed to invite attention” (16). She gives two examples of why her body may be the culprit: “I seem to be incapable of blending in with the landscape, even less with a crowd. It’s not just my tallness. I only have to look in a mirror to see that mine is not an especially pretty face, with my father’s rather larger nose, and a pointy chin” (16).

Later, she expresses that puberty is a frustrating aspect of growing up a female, for example, dealing with her period, and also her newfound breasts. Alex states, “I hated that loss of freedom. I went braless around the house, and even my togs (swimsuits), those awful limp cotton things we wore then, became something I enjoyed wearing. At the pool, in the water, I could be free” (30). So, Alex feels freedom in the water from the

restrictive aspects of society's demands for maturing women, because she doesn't have to wear a "training" bra.

Ironically, training also gives Alex freedom and power. After Alex breaks a pool record early on in her swimming career, her coach remarks, "Just shows what you can do after four months' solid training... Give me a year of your life, and the sky's the limit" (33). Alex is at first skeptical of the grueling training she must go through. Once, after a thousand lengths of sprints, she asks herself, "Why do I do it?" The most obvious answer from the reader would be, "So you can get on the Olympic team."

Ladelle McWhorter, also responding to Foucault's theory about power, might be able to answer Alex's question about why she should train so hard: to resist cultural norms. McWhorter, in *Bodies and Pleasures*, argues that even though "our bodies are functional organisms that are essentially temporal and developmental in nature" (150), we can find freedom through pleasurable discipline of our bodies, where we can find freedom from the oppressive structures of power in our society.

For McWhorter, "Dancing was sheer joy" (172). Therefore, even though mind/body dualisms are functional parts of current social practices, McWhorter argues, we have to "undermine the notion that we are minds distinct from the bodies we inhabit and supposedly control" (175). I would argue that Duder, through her use of italics to denote the interplay between mind and body interacting through discipline, is able to find a way for Alex to "live... as a developmental organism." This point is central to Alex's freedom from cultural prescriptions and lingering dualisms.

In *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics*, Sondra Horton Fraleigh writes, “Thus mastery in dance does not rest on willful domination of ourselves in movement but on discovery of the ideal effort in our embodiment of movement” (20). Fraleigh’s description of herself while dancing is helpful in looking at Alex’s swimming body and is a sentiment I identified with in my own swimming body. When Fraleigh dances, she finds herself as a woman returning to nature: “Those dances that become second nature return me to nature – to the spontaneous and graceful arising of my body through nature. Then I move freely” (21).

In the novel, Alex is also returned to nature through a recurring motif of dolphins – at one point in her final race, she hears Andy tell her, “*I’ve always loved watching you swim, Alex, the sheer power of you. I get the same feeling watching dolphins in the sea out from the beach*” (232). Also, before her last race, Alex says,

Slowly, with care, I shave armpits and legs, even thighs and arms below my elbows, which is something I’ve not done before. I must be sleek as a dolphin. Before the mirror I stand for just a moment: I see a lean female body, with small firm breasts, a flat stomach, wide shoulders, eyes a bit wild, cheeks a bit gaunt. I look fit, battle-scarred, prepared. (256)

Alex, for the first time, sees herself as a female body on her own terms, and more importantly, as “prepared.” She knows what she is capable of doing; she understands her own potential. She says, “My stomach is churning, my hands are even trembling a little as I comb my hair, but above all that, I feel tall, strong, invincible. I stand for a last moment, savouring the peace of being with myself” (257). We are witnesses to her

change in self-perception. She is able to see herself as both body and mind for the first time.

Alex is able to find Fraleigh's "whole-body consciousness" (27) through the actualization of her possible self, the self freely projected in its disciplined work and realized through it. When she dives in the water for the final race against Maggie, she is at once mind and body. That does not mean she is free from self-doubt. But her self-doubt and confidence are at once wrapped up in what her body can do and will do, without her thinking and ordering it to do so.

For Alex, she is the race; to follow Fraleigh, "its thinking is its doing and its doing is its thinking." She is the kicking and the pulling of water, the flip turn and the breathing from side to side. Her swim is her body as her body is herself, at its potential. Alex is becoming woman, becoming athlete, and becoming winner. The way that Duder plays with the visual elements of the novel further demonstrates the possibilities of imagining mind-body interplay by deconstructing binaries, so that embodiment and sexual identity can be figured as constituted through cultural prescriptions yet retain a site for resistance in the creative visualization. The taking apart of these binaries in the stream-of-conscious portions of the novel allows the resulting interplay to embody and empower Alex.

We might take this passage as an example:

I am! I can, Andy! I'm closing the gap.

Breathing each stroke now, because I've no breath left for anything else.

Too late? Thrown away at the turn, with that feeble push-off?

But I'm feeling good, strong. I'm riding up over my bow wave. One race in five, perhaps, comes this surge, this incredible sensation that I'm being pulled, propelled through the water by some invisible force, not just my own muscles.

I'm in overdrive, relentless. Pain has gone. I know I can do it now. I'm almost flying. (124)

Alex's thoughts have visually poetic elements, with each line separated, as if the thoughts are disjointed, and yet oddly connected by the movement of her body. The reader can visualize her arms churning, the kicks punctuating each thought. The italicized prose balances on the boundary between being strangely disembodied, and yet for Alex, these thoughts are most truly embodied. As she thinks, she is in "overdrive": the body has taken over. This alteration in mind and body connection, involving not a denial of the body or mind through swimming but a new communication despite it, is inextricably bound up with Alex's embodied self. And it is noteworthy that in this dissolution of the dichotomy of mind and body, Alex truly becomes powerful. She is able to "fly."

In a key scene near the end of *In Lane Three, Alex Archer*, Duder describes how Alex, who is still grieving after her boyfriend's tragic death, convinces a pool manager to let her swim in the middle of the night. Duder brings together the motifs of the woman becoming and of the power of discipline, suggesting the ways in which teenagers' energies exceed and circumvent any arrangements that the adults wish to impose on them:

I've never swum in the dark before or since. But I knew as soon as I hit the water it was the right thing for me, that night. After two laps I felt cleaned out; the pounding of my heart and dreaded pictures in my head had gone. I thought only of my body and its power through the water, the rhythm of my stroke, which was so ingrained within every cell of me. Half of the pool was in shadow, the other in moonlight; I swam in and out of moonbeams. (240)

Alex's swimming – a talent that defines her existence as an athlete – is a manifestation of bodily flows and energies, which precede and resist social organization. Swimming, she represents a “line of flight,” to borrow Deleuze and Guattari's phrase, which can only be opposed to activities Alex does which exhaust her, like studying or acting in the school play. And after Andy is killed, Alex cannot return to little or teenage-girlhood. But the textual divisions allow for some interplay between present and past, for some renewed access to the complications inherent in coming of age.

Thereafter, Alex must face the consequences of Andy's death, and win the Olympic trials for a chance to make it to the Olympic games in Rome, but she must also enter the world of confusion, of grief, of “becoming.” She enters this world only when she enters the water for the last race. She has her moment of becoming, of potentiality, and speaks with her body through her tears and through the battle with herself to swim faster, to win.

The strongest impression that the novel leaves is that of Alex's freedom of mind and body through discipline. “Becoming” in the world of Duder's novel seems to be a

possible feat for her main character. An image worth pondering in this respect is that of Alex telling herself,

I've touched, with an arm I swear grew five inches. Later I'll find all my fingers are bruised... Gradually, I'm aware of a crowd on its feet, applause, cheering; thankfully, because my body is making most peculiar noises as I draw in great lungfuls of air. I am strangely uninterested in the result (258).

It is Alex's discipline that frees her body and lets her grieve and also become a woman. It is these overwhelming forces, which ensure that the mind and body's intersecting lines of flight, embarked on with passion for the sport, will ultimately succeed and be translated onto the page. Duder does not underestimate the forces of discipline and performance in the embodied character of Alex, which free the "becomings" so eloquently and intensely evoked in her fiction.

CHAPTER 6

GOING INTO THE TURN: A SWIMMER'S CONCLUSIONS

The body, as it were, must return from alienation in culture
in order to be livable as one's own body.
--Judith Butler, "Athletic Genders"

Young Adult sport literature as a field of study is being given increased attention and recognition as books that adolescents actually read. Examining and analyzing feminism and the Young Adult sport genre from a personal and literary perspective reinforced my theory that this field provides opportunities for writing women's bodies. Young Adult sport literature and film provides a unique and compelling place to find these bodies. These texts, more than any other genre, depict adolescent characters in a state of bodily formation and transition. Young Adult literature provides corporeal language and imagery where adolescents and adults can read about their bodies and themselves. In a culture that continues to view teenagers as marginalized beings, fiction about young people recognizes that adolescence is a time of turmoil and change, a place to rediscover profound political and cultural agency in this time of formation. As Alicia Ostriker noted in her account of the development of women's poetry in America, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*, authors and poets have

recently approached the body “with decreasing embarrassment and increasing enthusiasm” in literature that has been written since 1960 (92).

One finds a vast array of views concerning the body as Young Adult authors have struggled with the internalization of dominant, cultural values pertaining to the male or female body: a dualistic and hierarchical view of the superiority of mind over body, the association of the female with nature and therefore with the body; female hatred or dread of her body and her sexuality; and polarized views of gender. Authors and poets have been able to embrace the body as an active source of reality, power, joy, creativity, and liberation, while at the same time recognizing the body as having been a principal source of powerlessness, sadness, pain, confinement, and their own self-deceit and passivity. This is especially true during puberty, when bodies are changing, growing and reacting in ways out of a young adult’s control. As J.J. Brumberg writes in *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*, “Girls who do not feel good about themselves need the affirmation of others, and that need, unfortunately, almost always empowers male desire” (212). She argues that girls have come to define themselves progressively through their bodies. Whether or not we can see this body identification as a positive step is a fundamental question for feminist philosophy.

There are similar tendencies or parallels between Young Adult sport literature for both girl and boy characters in terms of centrality of the body to this literature, the complex and yet differing nature of the relationship that teenage boys and girls have with their bodies that is explored in this literature, and the vast arrays of attitudes toward the

body that are expressed as writers explore these experiences in sport. The prominence of the body in this literature can be attributed, in part, to the importance of the body in sport; in a practical sense, the body is the tool that the athlete uses in performance and with which and through which he or she experiences sport. In the artistic and creative sense, the body is the medium through which the athlete expresses her or himself, but is also for feminists, as Ladelle McWhorter asserts, “our primary object of conquest and battleground” (148).

Several feminist texts were important reminders of the community of feminist writers that I was responding to and taking off from the block in the hopes of following their lead onto the “battleground.” Rereading *The Second Sex*, *This Sex Which Is Not One* and *Of Woman Born* after my miscarriage began to change my perspective on my body. Instead of being consumed with my personal tragedy, I started to experience my body as just one of many bodies whose stories were being told. I knew that if I wanted to find empowerment through moving and writing my body, I would need to change the terms of subjugation that I felt were smothering my very effort to put words on the page. Rich understood the frustration that was inherent in the negation of the body with words like “barren” and “childless.” Even though we felt that we were both “lashed to our bodies” in different ways – hers in pregnancy, and mine in miscarriage – I heard and saw her body in the transformative, corporeal writing. Irigaray and Cixous’ concerns gave me hope and confidence that we held the power to speak within and from our flesh. Our bodies are capable of becoming, and of change. They taught me that we should embrace our bodies “right here, right now;” writing out of a woman’s body and experience presents the

material body as a powerful alternative discourse to the privileging of the mind in contemporary theory.

Another place that seemed important in understanding how bodies were written were contestations of gender in photographs of female athletes. The construction of femininity is present in techniques used by both photographer and subject in emphasizing heterosexuality, femininity and the undermining of the muscular female body. These portrayals further emphasize our culture's belief that in the more "masculine" action shots of female athletes, the athletic body is unacceptable or strange, so a second photograph must be taken in order to make clear and "docile" the gender of these females. Underlying these portraits is an embedded critique of gender fluidity: by depicting female athletes as gender-crossing, these portraits reinforce hegemonic masculinity and Mulvey's idea of the male "gaze." Looking at photographs of myself reminded me of the pressure I felt as an adolescent to be beautiful, and this cultural tension encouraged my efforts to be both athletic and feminine.

Globalization has an impact on bodies, too, and in an increasingly global world, women's bodies learn how to not only negotiate genders, but also learn how to present themselves as hybrid in terms of race, class and sport. Despite Michael D. Giardina's assertions that *Bend It Like Beckham* is a sport film that ultimately leaves families and cultural traditions behind, the ways that bodies, bras and clothing are talked about and moved herald the arrival of an empowered woman in the film: one who is ultimately able to bend the ball, wear traditional dress and date a foreigner. Presenting the main character and other women's bodies moving on the field as strong, capable soccer players reveals

that these girls are good examples to millennial young women in the process of growing up.

Chris Crutcher's novels write young men's bodies fluently, but reposition women's bodies away from empowering spaces in young women's lives and place them in subordinate positions, revealing that young women are most often to be consumed and abused by older men, and then saved by younger ones. For example, books such as *Stotan!* and *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* expose parents as monsters and punish females more severely and more often than males. His novels are outdated, misleading and indecisive – negative characteristics in these popular sport novels that weigh down the female body, and they damage the genre for female readers.

Tessa Duder's *In Lane Three, Alex Archer* exemplifies my vision for feminine writing of bodies. In her novel, the female body, slippery as it may be, is heard through the active translation of the main character while in motion. Although Irigaray and Cixous may have had poetry in mind when they wrote about *l'écriture féminine*, Duder's novel presents an example of feminine writing by emancipating women in its structure, style and description of a body that is recuperative and resistant to patriarchal oppression. Alex finds a place of corporeal liberation through the movement of her body, a place where there is no past, no present, and no future: only the becoming of a body in motion.

Feminist material theory and criticism helped me illuminate how Young Adult sport literature participated in the construction of my changing identity, and how it participates in the ongoing transformation of young girls' bodies. Sharing these books and photographs has helped me to feel that my body and mind are a part of the vital

history that feminism has in valuing and appreciating marginalized works and “shameful” women’s experiences, like miscarriage. I hope that this dissertation will encourage other women to use and write their bodies. I hope that it will bring women to the water.

Down and Back Again: A Swimmer’s Body Moves Through Feminism, Young Adult Sport Literature and Film combines the political with the personal in the hopes that the body will return from culture, in Judith Butler’s words, “to be livable as one’s own body.”

One Empty Lane and Me

*All day long I carry around the child I did not have.
When I wake in the morning, I bring my knees to my chest
and hold her close to my breast, in the space between my knees and chin,
and I sing to her in slow tuneless moans, and my heart sounds the metronome.*

*I tell her about the dream I just had, the one where my dog's leash
got wrapped around a young boy's neck, and when I finally unwound it,
layer by layer of thin black cord, I knew that I could revive the child.*

*He wore a red and white striped shirt and blue dungarees,
a child from another era of black and white television and slicked-back cowlicks.*

*When I pressed on the child's chest, three short, quick palms to his ribcage,
the movement expanded his lungs like a fan girls used at the turn of the century
to feed the fire in their brick chimneys while their beaus watched by.*

*That boy in my dreams came alive, and although he couldn't remember how
to get back to the playground, I knew that he would be okay.
I felt guilty in my dream, as I feel guilty now.*

*I knew it had been my fault that little boy had been strangled by my dog's leash.
I tell this dream to my little ghost girl curled in the absence of my form,
and think about how the fetal position is the question mark of my life.*

*When I get up and go to the university to teach, I watch my child compulsively
in the backseat the way a mother does in the rearview mirror,
to make sure she is still there, breath filling alveoli filling lungs.*

*I don't know whether she cries or smiles or laughs, because when I look again,
she is gone, and there is only the gray fabric of the car's interior, seat belts splayed
like starfish arms reaching out towards an open sea, repeating deep sideways Vs.*

*The pressure is building in my chest now, and I know I will have to let go of my child
today, will have to say goodbye as I do every hour, every second of the day.
The two syllables echo as the car's tires read the seams in the pavement –
good-bye good-bye good-bye good-bye good-bye.*

*It is only at night, when I swim, that I can let her go.
I bring her into the pool, carefully wrapped in a towel,
and as the other swimmers breathe and kick and splash,
I lay her in a reed basket, and I am Moses' mother.*

*I watch her drift away towards a better, richer life at the king's court without me,
spinning smaller and smaller until all I can see
is the end of the pool and water in between
and she is gone.*

*I put my goggles on and jump in, pulling the water down past my knees as I breathe.
There is nothing but me and the knowledge
of one empty lane ahead and me,
day after day after day.*

This is not the story of someone who started swimming again in the hopes of stepping up on the block and bending down in anticipation of the starter's gun. This is not the story of someone who started swimming again in the hope of impressing my family, friends, or even the old guy in the next lane. This is not the story that young girls read about in glossy magazine, movies or romance novels when they start to "become a woman." There is no big finish, no climactic ending, and no comedic interlude.

This is the story of a girl who started swimming again because there was no other way but hard and fast through the water. It was a way to feel strong again, to feel as if she had something under control. It was a way to find her body again, that elusive body, which seemed so uncontrollable, so mysteriously frustrating, so out of sync, so unbelievably disappointing when it comes to getting pregnant, to producing just the right amount of hormone x and progesterone y. It was a way to relearn the language I had forgotten that my body and I shared. And in some ways, it was successful, and in some ways I am right back at the starting block, crouching in furious anticipation of another loss.

Some days, all day long, all I think about is whether or not this month is going to be the month. I try to listen to what my body tells me, each cramp and distant pang. I listen carefully, so closely, trying to discern when it is telling me to pay attention, that this is the time. I am learning to keep time again both in the water and out. It all seems ridiculously connected. When I am in the water, everything makes sense. If I close my fingers together like a paddle and cup my palm just a bit, then I know how the rest of

my body will respond. I know how to make myself faster, more efficient. I know if I kick a little harder coming off the turn, then I will accelerate off the wall, picking up precious hundredths of a second to make up for taking one too many breaths on the way down. I know that if I keep my head up, my goggles level with the skin of water at the surface, my body will skim across the top like a kayak. And if I bury my head to conserve air and watch the black brushstroke that follows to the T, I will conserve air but ultimately slow down.

Everything about my body makes sense in the water – the way I throw myself over, grunting as my stomach muscles contract, into a flip turn at the wall. And the way that I pull more water along my sides is dependent on how I scull my hands and bend my elbows – like the backwards question mark of the backstroke. There is an equal and opposite reaction to every action. Those minutes in the water are the only time during the day when I can truly let go of my failure, of the sickening fear that wakes me up before the alarm clock and forces its way down my throat like seawater. I cannot seem to find a book about finding strength in a woman’s body that does not refer to the childbirthing process. Next month, my husband consoles me. Write your dissertation, everyone says: focus on your students, on your new house. “Would it be so bad if it were just Nathan and you and your dog?” My mother asks. Meanwhile, my sister-in-law has her second child. A boy, Benjamin. We are so blessed, they say. And I cannot argue against blessings.

I am chained to my own silence, to my frustratingly elusive and stubborn body that will not do as I tell it, except in the water. In the water I find my body again; it’s

me, that curly-haired girl with the missing eyelashes and the cap holding it all in. I push off the wall, and I am reborn to myself, in the warm amniotic chlorine at the private Christian university where I teach now.

It's been a year since I was pregnant, a long year, and I've started to get to know the other faculty who come to swim here, where there are no FAST or SLOW lanes: the tall man with blonde hair who swims in the lane next to me and who is also in our Sunday school class at church – his wife just had twins. He tells me, rubbing his hands over his wet hair, "You are a machine." I laugh and say, "It's been 10 years. I used to be so good." The lifeguard tells me one day after I've been out for a week with the flu, "Now they will have someone to try to keep up with." I get more compliments in a week than I have in years. My confidence soars. I think, I will never miss a swim, but my youthful discipline sometimes succumbs to the busy professor's schedule. I write poems about the miscarriage and others about memories of high school swimming and my teammates. I feel reconnected with my past and yet agonizingly adult.

I remember a time when I was much the same as I am now – shy, self-conscious. I remember my coach telling me, "You should smile more." I am afraid I always have and will always be sad. And still, I swim. I think fleetingly of seeking out a Masters program, thinking this will make a better book, but my heart isn't in it. I have no desire to compete. I am always already in a constant competition – the jostling and bragging of our late 20s. I think of honing my talent, of getting in shape, really getting in shape, but there is always the fear, the dependence on the hypothetical. What if I get

pregnant? The thought stifles me. A good friend tells me to book round-trip tickets to Europe – she says if I make a commitment to something else, surely then I'll get pregnant. I am always on the lookout for signs, promises from God and doctors that I will be pregnant again, that someone will not let the sadness of a miscarriage be the rest of my life. I know the swimming must hold some answer to this mystery.

What I've learned is that everything is always the same as when you were little. I still fight with my body, my hormones, my depression, my faith. I read. I write. I teach – I listen to my students and they listen to me. Sometimes I act as if I have no answers to their questions, and sometimes I have them all. I think about what it means to be a woman and I read about women, from the feminist philosophers to the mother who started rowing again to escape a failed marriage. I talk to women about their children; I force a smile and sympathy for their families and their lives. And I swim. I swim the backstroke and look up at the ceiling tiles, those tiles that are exactly the same as those in my high school – white and square and dingy -- and I churn and spit water out of my mouth, and then I flip over and do it again. My husband says, "At least running in basketball has a purpose – you put the ball in the basket, you count up the points at the end of the game, and you know who has won." I am not interested in winning, I say. I am interested in what I am becoming.

I suppose to many my swimming has no real purpose – I do much the same workout each time, I hardly look to the left and right anymore. It's a solitary, frustrating, exhausting workout that is much like how my dog chases her tail in circles. But there is something going on within me – a burgeoning awareness of my own

strengths and weaknesses, a simultaneous knowing and not-yet-knowing of myself and my character I never found 10 years ago. I can do this, I cannot do that. I can swim 10 50s on a minute. I can do a 100-yard butterfly. I cannot get pregnant. Or, I cannot be who I am not. But I can do what I know best, and that is to swim down and back again. And just maybe, you can see me on the page as I turn my head to breathe, going into the turn.

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