Elite athletes' experiences of psychological distress: A discursive analysis of athlete identity in contexts in which athletes are vulnerable to experiencing psychopathology

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Table of Contents

Summary

Elite athletes have been reported to experience higher rates of various psychopathology, with the stress of competing at elite levels reported to exacerbate existing pathology (Brewer & Petrie, 1996). In particular, athletes have been noted to be susceptible to experiencing anxiety and depression during the transition out of elite level sport (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; W. M. Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004), as well as being vulnerable to anxiety and stress during other transitions that they may encounter throughout their careers (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009). Additionally, elite athletes have been shown to be at risk in relation to their bodies, with athletes reported to have a higher prevalence of eating disorders, sub-clinical disordered eating (Johnson, Powers, & Dick, 1999; Milligan & Pritchard, 2006; Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004), and the Female Athlete Triad – a combination of disordered eating, amenorrhea and osteoporosis or osteopenia (Mendelsohn & Warren, 2010; Schtscherbyna, Soares, & de Oliveira, 2009; Yeager, Agostini, Nattiv, & Drinkwater, 1993), than non-athlete populations, as well as being more susceptible to Social Physique Anxiety (Haase, 2009).

Within the sport psychology literature that examines the incidence of psychopathology in athletes, the theoretical construct of 'athlete identity' has frequently been positively associated with athletes' experiences of distress, including in relation to transition difficulties (e.g., Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; Lally, 2007; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Lotysz & Short, 2004), and the development of disordered eating (Jones, Glintmeyer, & McKenzie, 2005; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Thus, within sport psychology athlete identity is considered to be a theoretically and practically important construct for understanding athletes' experiences (Brewer, 1993; Brewer, Van Raatle, & Linder, 1993). However, within the extant sport psychology literature, identity has typically been conceptualised as athletes' level of identification with the athlete role and has traditionally been researched via questionnaire methods or content analyses of interview data. Such methodological approaches have been critiqued for being reductionist and overlooking complexity and detail (Finlay & Faulkner, 2003;

Locke, 2004; Wilkinson, 2000), while role theory approaches have been criticised for treating identity as stable and unchanging, and located within the individual (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b). Thus, rather than treat identity as an inner identification or essence which then guides subsequent action and behaviour, the present research adopts a discursive psychological approach to exploring identity. From this perspective, identity is instead viewed as located within discursive practices and as produced, ascribed and accomplished within language (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b; Davies & Harré, 1990; Edley, 2001). The aim of adopting an alternate approach is to build on the existing sport psychology literature exploring athlete identity and to offer new insights into athletes' identities and the regulatory work that such identity constructions might accomplish.

Discursive psychological approaches to research in sport psychology remain novel, with few previous studies having adopted such an approach. Discursive psychology has previously been utilised to reconceptualise and shed new light on other well researched areas within sport and exercise psychology, including attributions (Finlay & Faulkner, 2003; Locke, 2004), emotions (Locke, 2003), performing in 'the zone' (Locke, 2008) and exercise adherence (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010). The present research, likewise, aims to reconceptualise the concept of athlete identity in order to challenge existing theoretical assumptions in sport psychology and offer new insights into athletes' experiences and implications for clinical practice in working with athletes.

Given that identity has been linked with athletes' vulnerability to psychopathology and psychological distress, the concept of identity will be explored in arenas in which athletes are most saliently vulnerable to experiencing distress. Accordingly, in this thesis, identity is explored within the context of transition, particularly the transition out of elite sport, and in the context of body regulation, in which athletes may be vulnerable to experiencing distress about their bodies (Jones, et al., 2005; Malina, 1992; Yeager, et al., 1993).

Two different data types – media and institutional interactions – were explored in order to offer a broad insight into how identities are constructed and ascribed at a societal level and how such versions are reproduced by athletes and sport staff within the local interactional context. Thus, this

exploration also builds on debates about the value of conversation analytic approaches for exploring talk-in-interaction versus the use of eclectic and synthetic approaches to analysis of talk and text in order to explore the social world (see Schegloff, 1997; Wetherell, 1998). Study One of this thesis (reported in this thesis in manuscripts as two analytic chapters) examines media accounts of high profile athletes' retirements and comebacks to sport (subsequent to retirement), in order to explore how athlete identities are constructed and reproduced within accounts of transition. Within the media representations, athletes were constructed as necessarily driven by emotion and passion to compete in sport, yet retiring around sport was constrained by dominant versions of appropriate and inappropriate choices and actions for athletes. Accordingly, the regulatory work that dominant identity constructions accomplish was highlighted. Study Two (also reported in manuscripts as two analytic chapters) explores interactions occurring between athletes and exercise physiologists during routine practices of body regulation that took place within an elite sport setting. Within these interactions, dominant discourses, which constitute athletes' identities, were reproduced, with athletes and physiologists co-producing athletes as necessarily engaging in self-surveillance of their bodies and working to achieve ongoing improvement in body composition.

Thus, insight was gained into the social contexts in which athletes are vulnerable to experiencing distress. With identity constructions, come prescriptions for choices and actions and so identity can constrain and regulate behaviour (Burr, 1995). Thus, the regulatory work that identity constructions accomplish and the implications these then have for athletes' psychological and physical well-being was also examined. This thesis also offers contributions for clinical practice to promote athletes' psychological well-being. Broadly, too, this research contributes to the fields of sport psychology and the sociology of sport in informing research around athlete identity. Theoretical contributions to qualitative research are also offered and discussed.

Declaration

I, Suzanne Cosh, certify that this submission is my own work and that it contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. All work contained in the submission was initiated, undertaken, and prepared within the period of candidature. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I also acknowledge that copyright of published works contained in this thesis (as listed below*) resides with the copyright holder of this work. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library catalogue, the Australasian Digital Theses Program (ADTP) and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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Signed: _____   Date: _____

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Overview

Outline Of Candidature

The current dissertation was undertaken to fulfil the requirements of a combined Master of Clinical Psychology with Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Adelaide, South Australia, Australia. The program combines a Clinical Masters coursework load (nine subjects) and 1,000 hours of clinical internship (equivalent to a two year degree fulltime) and a full research program for a Doctor of Philosophy (equivalent three years fulltime) within four years of candidature. The program rules stipulate that the research undertaken has to adopt a clinical psychology focus. All coursework and internship requirements of the Masters component of the program were completed successfully. The following thesis is submitted to fulfil the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy.

Outline Of Thesis

The aim of this research was a) to explore the construct of athlete identity from an alternate, discursive psychological approach and b) to explore the social and discursive contexts in which athletes may experience psychopathology and psychological distress. This thesis explores constructions of identity within two arenas in which athletes have been noted to be vulnerable to experiencing psychopathology (career transition and body regulation). In doing so, the goal was to add to existing knowledge of athlete identity and the relationship between identity and psychopathology, as well as to offer implications for practice when working with athletes. Two data sources – newsprint media accounts and interactions occurring during body regulation testing in a sport institute setting – were examined to explore how identity was constructed, made relevant, ascribed and resisted, and the regulatory work that such identity constructions accomplished. The findings from the research are reported in the form of four papers (two papers reporting on each data source) presented herein as chapters, with introductory and concluding chapters offered to outline the existing literature, the

rationale of the studies, and to discuss the conclusions and implications from the whole research program.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a review of the sport psychology and sociology literature pertaining to the prevalence of psychopathology in athlete populations. Research exploring athlete identity and relationships between identity and psychological distress is also reviewed. Discursive psychological literature providing alternate conceptualisations of, and approaches to exploring, identity from the traditional research literature are outlined. Discursive psychological and conversation analytic approaches to exploring psychological distress in athlete populations and in the general population are also provided in Chapter One. Chapter Two provides an overview of the analytic chapters, as well as outlining the methodology and the link between each study. In Chapters Three and Four, analyses from an exploration of newsprint media are presented. Chapter Three explores how athlete identities are constructed in media reports of retirements of high-profile elite athletes. Chapter Four aims to provide an insight into the rare career transition of returning to compete in elite level sport following an earlier retirement and examines how versions of athlete identity are reproduced within such media accounts. The following chapters explore how identity is negotiated in interactions occurring during practices of body regulation. Chapter Five examines how discourses of regulation around athletes' bodies that have currency in the elite sport setting and in which athletes' identities are constituted are reproduced by athletes and sport staff in interaction during practices of body regulation. Chapter Six further develops this exploration of interactions occurring during body regulation testing by exploring how identity is managed, negotiated and co-produced by both athletes and sport staff within this interactional context. The concluding chapter (Chapter Seven) summarises and synthesises the findings from the studies, as well as discusses implications for psychology, sociology and clinical practice when working with athletes.

Chapter One
Introduction

1.1 Overview

Elite athletes are typically the subject of much societal interest and receive frequent attention in the popular media, as well as considerable research attention in academic writing. In recent decades, there has been dramatic growth in the commercialisation of sport (Hudson, 2001; Slack, 1998), enabled largely by globalised media coverage (Hickey & Kelly, 2005). Given this growth, athletes are increasingly in the 'public eye', even assuming the position of societal 'role models' (Gerdy, 2000). Thus, athletes are often under considerable public scrutiny and experience pressure to look, act and behave in certain ways. Additionally, the pressure of competing at an elite level is, in and of itself, stressful, with athletes encountering a number of intense physical and psychological stressors due to the demands associated with elite success (e.g., Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005; Puente-Diaz & Anshel, 2005; Smith & Christensen, 1995).

Consequently, athletes have been reported to have increased susceptibility to various psychopathology and, in addition, the stress of competing in elite sport has been shown to exacerbate existing pathology (Brewer & Petrie, 1996). That athletes, as a unique social group, experience higher levels of certain psychopathology is, in itself, worthy of additional exploration. Indeed, the broad aim of this thesis is to contribute to understanding of such negative experiences of elite athletes. The literature exploring psychopathology and psychological distress amongst athlete populations has frequently suggested a relationship between the concept of athlete identity and experiences of distress (as will be further explored below). A positive relationship with identity has been reported for eating disorders, depression, and anxiety with those identifying more strongly as athletes reported to have a higher prevalence of psychopathology (Horton & Mack, 2000; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006).

Indeed, the concept of athlete identity has been well researched within the sport psychology literature and has been linked with a variety of (both positive and negative) experiences for athletes, such as performance outcomes, coping with injury, and ease of adjustment to retirement (Brewer, et al., 1993). The large body of research that has explored the concept of athlete identity, however, has typically been embedded within a realist epistemology. From a realist perspective, objects in the world are understood to exist independently of our beliefs about them and are able to be objectively assessed and understood. This thesis, on the other hand, adopts a constructionist epistemological approach – that of discursive psychology – with the goal being to contribute additional information to the existing athlete identity literature and the relationship between identity and experiences of psychological distress and psychopathology that have been noted in athlete populations. Accordingly, the focus of this thesis is, firstly, to explore the notion of athlete identity from a different theoretical perspective and, secondly, to explore identity in the social contexts around which distress and psychopathology may occur, in order to gain further insight into the negative experiences of athletes.

1.2 Identity

Within the field of sport psychology, the concept of athlete identity is considered to be of importance both in theory and application (Brewer, et al., 1993). An extensive sport psychology literature has explored the concept of athlete identity. From this research, athlete identity has been suggested to be positively associated with a wide range of athletes' experiences. These include: ease of adjustment to retirement, perceptions of physical self, emotional reactivity, mood disturbance following injury and self-efficacy for career decision making, as well as performance outcomes (Grove, et al., 1997). Accordingly, exploring the concept of athlete identity can aid in understanding the experiences of athletes, especially negative experiences such as psychopathology and psychological distress. The following section provides an overview of the sport psychology literature exploring athlete identity.

1.2.1 Athlete Identity Research

Predominantly, research exploring the concept of athlete identity has conceptualised identity within a role theory framework. That is, athlete identity has typically been understood as an individual's level of identification with the athlete role and has been operationalised as a trait-like predictor of other variables. A large body of athlete identity research has been conducted using the *Athlete Identity Measurement Scale* (AIMS; Brewer, et al., 1993). The AIMS is a 10-item self-report questionnaire assessing athlete identity, as distinct from (although related to) sporting ability, physical self-esteem, and perceived importance of strength and skill. Items on the questionnaire include: 'sport is the most important part of my life', 'most of my friends are athletes', 'I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else', 'I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport'. Individuals who receive high scores on the AIMS place a high level of importance on participation in sport and exercise, are more likely to interpret injury in terms of its implications for athletic functioning, and also tend to score highly on other measures of competitiveness, and goal- and win-orientation. The AIMS has been validated using student samples consisting of both athletes and non-athletes and has been shown to have good test-retest reliability and good internal consistency (for a full discussion of validation of the AIMS, see Brewer, et al., 1993). In addition to the AIMS, some qualitative methods have also been employed to explore athlete identity, such as content analyses of interview data. Within these studies, athlete identity has, likewise, been conceptualised as identification with the athlete role.

In the body of literature conceptualising athlete identity as level of identification with the athlete role (using the AIMS and qualitative interview studies), identity has been shown to be related to a range of variables and concepts (as will be explored throughout this chapter). Athlete identity has been suggested to have some positive impacts on athletes' performance and experiences. Athletes with a strong athlete identity (i.e., the individual shows a high level of identification with the athlete role) have been shown to achieve better performance outcomes and have higher levels of commitment to, and enjoyment of, sport than those who were less invested in the athlete role (Horton

& Mack, 2000). Similarly, higher levels of athlete identity have been linked with greater motivation for sport (Brewer, et al., 1993).

However, athlete identity has also been linked with potentially problematic outcomes for athletes. Over-commitment to the athlete role has been reported to be associated with overtraining and the experience of anxiety when not training (Horton & Mack, 2000; Stephan & Brewer, 2007). Forming an identity exclusively in terms of the athlete role, especially when this occurs from a young age, has also been suggested to limit opportunities for the development of other aspects of life (Horton & Mack, 2000; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). Indeed, those strongly identifying as athletes may be less likely to explore other possible roles and career options, leading to career immaturity and delayed alternate career development (Brewer, et al., 1993; Murphy, et al., 1996). This can be of particular concern upon retirement from sport, when athletes are ill-equipped to pursue alternate careers, often lacking appropriate skills or experiencing feelings of incompetence in activities other than sport (McGillivray, Fearn, & McIntosch, 2005; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Moreover, it has been argued that for those athletes with a strong athlete identity, self-esteem can come to be overly dependent upon sporting performance and coaches' opinions (Jones, et al., 2005). This dependence can be potentially problematic because negative evaluations and poor performance may then lead to a vulnerable sense of self and diminished self-efficacy, which have well documented relationships with depression (as will be explored further in section 1.3 below).

Levels of athlete identity have also been found to vary in accordance with athletes' level of success. Brewer, Selby, Linder and Petitpas (1999) showed that athletes who experience performance slumps or chronic competitive failures tend to divest their athlete identities. That is, over the course of a poor season, athletes' scores on the AIMS typically decrease. Brewer et al. (1999) suggested that such decreases in athlete identity may serve as a functional means of decreasing the relative importance of performance failures, thereby protecting self-esteem. Similarly, AIMS scores have been shown to vary in accordance with non-selection. In an Australian study of athletes trialling for state teams in hockey, basketball and volleyball, it was found that for those athletes missing

selection, AIMS scores decreased significantly over time (although AIMS scores remained constant for those who were selected; Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004).

Specifically how or why some athletes become particularly invested in the athlete role and develop a strong athlete identity, is not entirely clear. In an interview study with 10 retired Olympians, Stephan and Brewer (2007) identified a number of possible determinants of athletes' level of investment with the athlete role. They suggested that organisational, social and personal factors all contribute to conceptions of being an elite athlete. Organisational factors, for example, may include policies of sporting bodies and the emphasis placed on athletes' lifestyles. Social factors include the influence of coaches and other sport staff, the decreased importance placed on other aspects of their lives, contact with teammates, and social recognition as an athlete. Personal factors include the meaning that sport gives their lives and the self-affirmation experienced through performance successes. An additional personal factor was the extent to which athletes' lives are highly organised around sport (i.e., organised around training and travel).

1.2.2. Alternate Approaches to Exploring Athlete Identity

1.2.2.1 Discursive Psychology versus Realist Approaches

The research reviewed above has typically been embedded within a realist epistemology. Inherent in such an approach is the assumption that language is a tool through which internal psychological constructs can be accurately accessed and described (Locke, 2004). This thesis, however, adopts a discursive psychological perspective - using a constructionist epistemology, whereby talk and language are viewed as socially performative rather than merely descriptive or informative (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996). Rather, a discursive approach holds that it is in and through language that versions of the world, people, objects and events are built up and constructed, and it is these constructed versions that constitute the reality of our lived experience (Hepburn & Potter, 2003). As such, psychological constructs cannot be viewed as independent of

language or as measureable, as traditional approaches assume but, instead, psychological notions should be explored within the discursive practices that construct and create them. Accordingly, analysis in this thesis will explore the ways in which particular versions or descriptions of athletes and their identities are constructed.

A discursive psychological approach can be seen as advantageous because, rather than coding and quantifying content (as questionnaires and content-analyses do), discursive analyses focus on the fine-grained detail of talk and the broader functions that such detail might serve (Wilkinson, 2000). Hence, an alternate theoretical and analytic approach is offered with the goal of providing additional insights and understandings of athlete identity and the social contexts in which athletes experience psychological distress.

The application of a discursive psychological approach to research in sports psychology is relatively new (for discussion on the use of Discursive Psychology in sport psychology see Locke, 2004). Several studies have employed a discursive approach to explore traditionally researched concepts such as attributions (Finlay & Faulkner, 2003; Locke, 2004) and emotion (Locke, 2003) in sport. Rather than quantifying emotions, Locke (2003), for example, looked at how athletes used emotion terms in accounting for performance. She reported that athletes typically talked of 'anxiety' and 'nervousness' when discussing successful performances, whereas, in accounting for poor performances, there tended to be an absence of emotion. Rather than viewing attributions as linked to athletes' mental processes, discursive analyses have provided additional insight into how attributions are occasioned to manage accountability and negotiate blame in accounts of sporting success and failure (Finlay & Faulkner, 2003; Locke, 2004). Locke (2008) has further demonstrated how the concept of 'the zone' (understood in traditional sport psychology as a state of optimal and effortless performance) can be understood as a discursive resource that can be used in accounting for success and to manage agency around performance. She demonstrated how athletes invoke notions of being in 'the zone' in order to a) perform modesty by softening accounts of successful performances, or b) to downplay arrogance in claiming probable success in the event of injury (i.e. claim that they would

have won the race had they not become injured). Discursive psychology has also been used in the field of exercise psychology to reconceptualise and understand the concept of adherence to participation in exercise (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010). Following from these investigations, it can be argued that other psychological phenomena often researched within sport psychology can, likewise, be viewed as constructed in and through language.

The concept of identity, then, can be viewed through an alternate discursive psychological framework. Realist approaches, such as role theory and Social Identity Theory (SIT), conceptualise identity as an inner essence or trait inherent to the individual. From a discursive psychological perspective, identity is understood as something that is constructed in and through language and, thus, is socially accomplished (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). That is, identity is seen as performative; as something people 'do' rather than something that they possess. Identity is viewed as fluid and context-dependent, as actively worked up and flexibly deployed to achieve goals in the local interactional context (Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Accordingly, who we are, and what form our identities take, is always in relation to the language - both talk and text - that constitutes and shapes us (Edley, 2001). Thus, whereas a SIT approach posits that identity shifts depending on the social context as individuals identify themselves with varying social groups (Turner, 1982), a discursive psychological approach suggests that identity shifts in and through the discursive practices in which they are created and constituted. That is, as people accomplish different social actions through discourse, so the identities ascribed to themselves and others evolve and vary. Thus, identity is not viewed as dependent on a person's internal identification with a group, but as constituted and ascribed in and through language. Moreover, identity can be thought of as constituted and reconstituted through language through the creation of subject positions (Davies & Harré, 1990). Davies and Harré (1990, p. 48) define subject positions as 'the *discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another'*. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself. Thus, as descriptions and accounts

shift in differing contexts and are used flexibly to achieve actions in the social world (such as blaming, justifying, excusing, convincing etc.), so varied subject positions or identities are produced, shaped and taken up or resisted. With such identity constructions come prescriptions for behaviour, actions and choices, and these prescriptions ultimately shape and frame subsequent experience and constrain behaviour (Burr, 1995). Identity, then, can be understood in terms of a broader cultural framework, as what is deemed to be an appropriate self can be seen as governed by cultural and historical factors (Abell & Stokoe, 2001). As such, athlete identity need not be understood merely in terms of an internal adherence to a role, but as something that is interactionally produced and ascribed by athletes and others. Thus, investigation can move beyond the individual and, instead, the broader social and discursive context in which identities are worked up and understood can be explored along with associated actions that are culturally favoured, normalised or problematised.

1.2.2.2 The Individual as Informant

Not all research exploring athlete identity has adopted a realist role theory approach, however. A small amount of research, especially within the sociological literature has adopted alternate methodological and theoretical approaches to exploring athlete identity, which move away from questionnaire-based methods and from treating identity as identification with, and adherence to, a role. Tsang (2000), for example, employed a narrative approach to retrospectively exploring her own identity as an elite rower, suggesting that rather than remaining stable over time (as role-theory posits; Davies & Harré, 1990), her identity as an athlete was something she experienced to be shifting and flexible. Interpretive biographical analyses[1] (Jones, et al., 2005) and interpretative phenomenological analyses[2] (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007) have also been applied to interview data to gain insight into identity and the lived experiences of athletes. Jones et al. (2005) used a case study to highlight how

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[1] Interpretive Biographical Analysis is an approach which examines individual's life experiences and their 'turning point moments' to explore how they make sense of their world and the life experiences that they have had (Richardson, 2006).

[2] Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) examines how individuals in a given context interpret and make sense of a particular phenomenon (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005).

the development of a strong athlete identity can result in a vulnerable sense of self, such that athletes can come to understand criticism of sporting ability or performance as a criticism of self-worth. This vulnerable sense of self, within a context of prevailing discourses around body surveillance in sport, was argued to have led the athlete under study to develop an eating disorder. Lavallee and Robinson (2007) employed an interpretative phenomenological analytic approach to explore changes in identity experienced by female gymnasts retiring from competition. They showed how dedicating their whole lives to sport from an early age resulted in athletes developing identities based only on their athletic involvement and performance. Moreover, the gymnasts interviewed reported feeling lost and helpless after retirement as they did not know what else they wanted to do with their lives and had few other interests. Douglas and Carless (2009) adopted a narrative analysis to interviews conducted with two female professional golfers over a six-year period. They suggested that the sport culture, with its strong emphasis on performance and winning, shaped the athletes' identities to prioritise winning above all else. However, when this performance narrative ceased to fit their lives, upon illness and retirement, the athletes struggled with having no alternate narrative by which to guide their life stories. They suggested that this lack of appropriate life narrative caused significant personal trauma for both of the examined athletes and, likewise, can be potentially problematic for other athletes as they retire or suffer serious injury.

These alternate approaches to exploring athlete identity have added novel understandings of identity and athletes' experiences to the literature. They also build on the traditional role theory approaches to exploring identity and offer new theoretical perspectives of identity. However, these approaches continue to rely heavily on the notion of individuals making sense of, and explaining, their own experience and identity in the context of research interviews. Yet it has been argued by scholars taking constructionist approaches to the investigation of psychological issues that individuals cannot be treated as informants on their own identity and what such identities lead them to think, feel and do (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b). Rather, identity needs to be looked at and explored within the discursive practices through which it is created and constructed. In this thesis, the aim is to explore

identity constructions within naturally occurring data, thereby exploring identity within the discursive practices in which identities are constructed and ascribed. Such an exploration aims to add to knowledge of athlete identity gained from interview studies, such as those reviewed above, as well as further building on knowledge gained from traditional role-theory driven and questionnaire-based research.

The remainder of this chapter will outline further research exploring sources of potential psychological distress and pathology for athletes, as well as research outlining relationships between athlete identity and distress. Discursive psychological and conversation analytic explorations of such psychopathology will also be outlined.

1.3 Overview of Psychopathology in Athlete Populations

As has been highlighted previously, athletes are subject to multiple stressors during their sporting careers (and into retirement) which may exacerbate, or leave athletes at a higher risk of developing, psychological distress and psychopathology (Brewer & Petrie, 1996). Indeed, within athlete populations, incidence of psychopathology, such as depression, anxiety, substance-related disorders, and adjustment reactions, arising from the pressure of elite competition have been noted (Brewer & Petrie, 1996; B. E. Miller, Miller, Verhegge, Linville, & Pumariega, 2002). Most notably, athletes have been reported to experience depression and anxiety during (and into) the retirement from sport (as will be discussed further below, Brewer, 1993; Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Wylleman, et al., 2004). Other career transitions, such as the transition into elite level sport, have also been identified as potentially distressing for athletes (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008; Stambulova, 2000; Stambulova, et al., 2009). Many athletes are also thought to be particularly vulnerable to experiencing depressive symptomatology upon becoming injured or de-selected (Brewer, et al., 1993; Schwenk, Gorenflo, Dopp, & Hipple, 2007). Athletes are, additionally, vulnerable to experiencing chronic pain resulting from sporting injuries, which further places them at an increased risk of depression in later

life (Schwenk, et al., 2007). Furthermore, athletes are reported to be vulnerable to developing eating disorders (Brewer, 1993; Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Wylleman, et al., 2004).

The concept of athlete identity has been explored in relation to athletes' experiences of distress and psychopathology. Athlete identity has been shown to have strong and independent links with athletes' experiences of psychological distress and the construct can be seen as crucial in understanding the varied experiences of athletes. Brewer (1993), for example, reported that athlete identity (as measured by the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale) has a relationship with emotional difficulties and even depression following injury.

1.3.1 Discursive and Conversation Analytic Explorations of Psychological Distress

The body of research exploring athletes' experiences of psychological distress has predominantly adopted a realist perspective, with discursive psychological approaches not previously utilised to explore psychopathology amongst athlete populations. A body of research has, however, adopted constructionist perspectives to explore the broader social and discursive contexts in which mental illness in the general population, primarily depression, is constructed. Constructionist and discursive approaches to exploring depression are outlined below to illustrate how discursive psychology can be employed to research psychological distress.

It has been argued that a biomedical model of depression, which constructs depression as a brain disorder, dominates public discourse and understanding of depression (Gardiner, 2003). In a review of constructionist approaches exploring depression, Ussher (2010) argues that the dominance of the biomedical model of depression locates the problem within the individual, with symptoms of distress viewed as reflecting an underlying disorder. She argues that in locating the problem within the individual, socio-cultural and discursive practices are overlooked. As such, social and political inequalities and injustices, such as poverty and discriminatory employment policies, which may lead to distress, remain unnoticed and unchallenged. Furthermore, she argues that within the biomedical

model, there is a shift towards positioning what might otherwise be considered normative reactions to life events as psychiatric illnesses. Diagnosis then warrants the use of pharmacological and psychological intervention.

Discursive psychological approaches have explored constructions of depression in a range of contexts, including examinations of the popular media (e.g., Blum & Stracuzzi, 2004; Rowe, Tilbury, Rapley, & O'Ferrall, 2003), depression manuals (Gardner, 2003), interviews with people diagnosed with depression (Lafrance, 2007) and the talk of people while completing a widely used depression screening tool, the Beck Depression Inventory (Galasinski, 2008). Blum and Stracuzzi (2004), for example, highlighted how the popular media recurrently reproduce constructions of depression as an individual problem that is isolated and decontextualised from the social world. In interview research it has been shown how, in producing accounts of their depression, interviewees constructed depression as a medical condition, while simultaneously orienting to an uneasy fit between this construction and their own lived experiences of depression (Lafrance, 2007). Lafrance (2007) further argued that this tension between the subjective experience of depression and the dominant biomedical discourse, ultimately results in delegitimising and stigmatising an individual's experience. Moreover, in the talk of 'healthy' people asked to 'think aloud' while completing the Beck Depression Inventory, participants rejected the positions made available by the questionnaire by either reformulating, recontextualising, or explicitly challenging the categories offered (Galasinski, 2008). Accordingly, it was argued that the use of standardised psychiatric assessment tools, and the biomedical context in which they exist, act to silence people's voices of their own experiences of distress.

In addition, there is a substantial field of conversation analytic approaches to exploring psychological distress in talk. Numerous studies have explored clinical therapy interactions in a range of contexts including couples' therapy, group therapy, psychiatric interviews, counselling with children, and self-help groups, exploring how both therapists and clients perform social actions in the interactions (see Peräkylä, Antaki, Vehviläinen, & Leudar, 2008). These explorations have examined how problems are described in couples' therapy in order to ascribe or avoid blame (Edwards, 1995),

14

how therapists' formulations are used to shape clients' accounts towards therapeutic goals (Antaki, Barnes, & Leudar, 2005; Antaki, Peräkylä, Vehviläinen, & Leudar, 2008), and how mental health practitioners use idiomatic expressions in order either to close down a topic, or to problematise it and make it relevant for therapy (Antaki, 2007). There is also a body of literature in which HIV/AIDs counselling interactions have been explored (e.g., Maynard, 2003; G. Miller & Silverman, 1995; Silverman, 1994, 1997). For example, how counsellors use certain conversational strategies in order to enhance patient engagement when discussing safe sex has been highlighted (Silverman, Perakyla, & Bor, 1992). Silverman et al (1992) showed that HIV counsellors can provide information to clients in an interview format, thereby maximising patient participation and engagement. Analysis has also examined how both counsellors and patients demonstrate and attend to the delicacy of discussing patient's partners in the counselling interactions (Silverman & Bor, 1991). Group therapy sessions with sex offenders have also been explored. Analysis has highlighted how group members used the rhetorical device termed 'narrative reflexivity' – shifting the focus of story-telling of past events into the current context - to discount cognitive distortions that may be attributed to them (Auburn, 2005). Practices through which sex offender group members produced accounts in order to minimise agency and present themselves as more or less responsible for past events have also been examined (Auburn, 2010; Auburn & Lea, 2003). However, discursive and conversation analytic approaches to exploring psychopathology amongst athletes and the social contexts in which athletes potentially experience distress have not previously been explored. Moreover, although the extant literature suggests a relationship between athlete identity and psychopathology, how identity is constructed, managed and negotiated, and ascribed and resisted, in talk and text concerned with psychological distress has not been a focus of study with athletes.

The following sections of this thesis will provide an overview of the research literature that explores experiences of psychopathology within athlete populations, followed by a review of the research that demonstrates a relationship between negative experiences and the construct of athlete identity. As will be evident, the extant research has typically adopted a mainstream perspective,

generally exploring links between incidence of pathology and identity by correlating AIMS scores with other factors and outcomes. Discursive psychological studies exploring instances of psychological distress will also be outlined.

1.4 Career Transition

Lifespan models of career development have identified a number of stages through which athletes transition during their sporting careers. These stages include: a) the initiation stage when athletes first begin to play sport, b) the development stage, in which athletes begin to be identified as talented athletes, c) the mastery stage during which athletes are competing in the highest level of competition, and d) the discontinuation phase, when athletes transition out of competitive sport (Wylleman & Reints, 2010). Transitions occurring throughout athletes' careers can be sources of stress and (potentially) resultant psychological distress. Ineffectively coping with career transitions can result in a 'transition crisis', which may slow an athletes' development and career progress (Wylleman & Reints, 2010). Moreover, failure to cope with sporting career transitions has been reported to have negative consequences including depression, anxiety, and alcohol and substance abuse (Stambulova, et al., 2009). Within sport psychology, athletes' career transitions have received widespread research attention, however, this body of literature has largely focused on the transition out of elite sport (retirement), with the transition into elite sport, only more recently, receiving some research attention. The transitions into and out of competing in sport at an elite level are reviewed in more depth below.

1.4.1 Transition into Competing at an Elite Level

The transition into elite sport has been suggested to be an important period in an athlete's development (Bloom, 1985; Bruner, et al., 2008) and athletes are reported to consider the transition from junior to senior elite sport to be the most difficult (Stambulova, et al., 2009). Bloom (1985)

suggests that during this transition, athletes may experience difficulties balancing the requisite level of training with the personal and familial sacrifices required to achieve the intensity and commitment necessary for success at elite level. During this transition, athletes experience new psychological and psychosocial challenges and new demands associated with increased training and expected performance outcomes, making this transition potentially highly stressful (Stambulova, et al., 2009).

Despite some recent research attention (see Bruner, et al., 2008; MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010a, 2010b; Pummell, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008), research into the transition into elite level sport remains minimal. This transition has been described from a holistic lifespan model of development (see Wylleman, et al., 2004; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman & Reints, 2010). Additionally, in an interview study, Bruner et al. (2008) explored the experiences of eight Canadian ice hockey players, focusing on their experiences of transitioning into an elite amateur league. The athletes all reported experiencing difficulties related to the transition both on and off the ice, particularly in relation to performance stress and changes in psychosocial support. Moreover, interview research with equestrian riders indicated that riders sacrificed success in other pursuits (such as in academia), as well as sacrificing social activities, in order to transition successfully into an elite level (Pummell, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008). However, despite these studies, research exploring the experiences of transitioning athletes, including the nature of difficulties they encounter, what mediates such difficulty, and the decision making that accompanies the move into competing at an elite level remains scant.

1.4.1.1 The Transition into Elite Sport and Athlete Identity

Given that the literature exploring the transition into elite sport is minimal, links between identity and this transition have not yet been examined. However, exploring identity may be central to understanding the experiences of athletes during this transition. Indeed, characteristics typically held by athletes who transition successfully into elite sport have been shown to be related to identity. The

transition into elite sport, for example, is characterised by athletes becoming more dedicated and committed to sport (Bloom, 1985) and it has been suggested that athletes who are more committed to sport typically have identities that are formulated largely, or even exclusively, in terms of their role as an athlete (Horton & Mack, 2000). Additionally, in validating the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), Brewer et al. (1993) indicated that athletes with stronger athlete identities have a greater motivation for sport than other athletes. Survey research examining marathon runners has also suggested that those who identify strongly as athletes typically achieve better performance outcomes and enjoy participating in sport more (Horton & Mack, 2000). Accordingly, the notion of athlete identity may be crucial in understanding the experiences of athletes during the transition into elite sport and the choices they make around competing.

1.4.2 Retirement: Transitioning Out of Elite Sport

Transitioning out of sport is a salient event in athletes' lives and constitutes a disruption to what have become self-defining activities. Subsequently, many athletes are reported to struggle in adjusting to these substantial life changes (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Lotysz & Short, 2004; McGillivray, et al., 2005; W. M. Webb, et al., 1998; Wylleman, et al., 2004). Indeed, in survey research with Olympic-level athletes, almost half reported struggling with the loss of the social aspect of their sport, increased job/education pressures, financial pressure, the loss of status as an athlete, and feelings of incompetence in activities other than sport (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). Accordingly, a large number of athletes experience clinically significant adjustment difficulties when retiring from sport (Brewer, 1993). In a review of the literature, Wylleman et al. (2004) reported that some athletes experience depression (with suicide attempts being reported), identity crises, alcohol/substance abuse, decreased self-confidence and eating disorders following retirement. Frequently, athletes pursue sporting careers to the detriment of their engagement in education and other pursuits, leaving them often ill-prepared for life after sport (McGillivray, et al., 2005). As such, many retired athletes experience anxiety, especially pertaining to an ambiguous future including uncertain alternate career

options (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; W. M. Webb, et al., 1998). Additionally, qualitative and quantitative studies suggest that athletes often experience decreased self-esteem and self-worth due to their changing bodies (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Schwenk, et al., 2007; Stephan, Torregrosa, & Sanchez, 2007), and depression associated with long-term chronic pain resulting from injuries sustained during sporting careers (Schwenk, et al., 2007). For high-profile athletes, the loss of their public role can be further distressing and difficult to adjust to (W. M. Webb, et al., 1998).

Of course, not all athletes experience the same difficulties (if any at all) upon retiring. Indeed, there are multiple factors that are thought to influence the ease with which athletes transition out of sport. A factor suggested to moderate adjustment is the athletes' level of preparedness or planning for retirement, with gradual transitions allowing for better adjustment than those that are sudden (Grove, et al., 1997; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Wylleman, et al., 2004). For example, Lally (2007) followed six Canadian student-athletes as they gradually prepared for career termination, engaging in pre-retirement planning over the course of their final seasons, and found that for these athletes, career transition was largely unproblematic.

However, preparing for, and gradually transitioning out of, sport is not always possible. Some retirements are unexpected and sudden and these may be more problematic. Indeed, the conditions under which retirement occurs have been identified as a strong predictor of adjustment (W. M. Webb, et al., 1998). When retirements are involuntary (e.g., due to injury or de-selection), athletes typically struggle more with the transition (both in the short- and long-term); especially if these terminations are also sudden and unexpected (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Wylleman, et al., 2004), with injury-forced retirement suggested to be the most distressing (Lotysz & Short, 2004; W. M. Webb, et al., 1998). A lack of control over the decision to retire has been shown to correlate with retirement difficulties and to have a negative relationship with life satisfaction (W. M. Webb, et al., 1998).

1.4.2.1 Difficulties Adjusting to Retirement and Athlete Identity

A further factor that is thought to moderate the ease of transitioning out of elite sport is the athletes' level of engagement with the athletic role, or their athlete identity. Much research has suggested that athletes can become highly distressed due to the loss of their athletic identities, with retirement often sparking identity crises (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Lavallee, 2005; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Lotysz & Short, 2004). Identity crises experienced upon career termination due the loss of a sporting identity are particularly common when athletes fail to develop an identity outside of sport (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007).

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between athlete identity and ease of adjustment to retirement. For example, survey research with Australian athletes has shown that those with exclusive athlete identities were more vulnerable to transition difficulties, typically took longer to adjust to retirement and tended to have increased levels of stress and anxiety (Grove, et al., 1997). Additionally, athlete identity was shown to have a significant relationship with emotional and social adjustment, planning, anxiety about career decision making, and coping (with individuals reporting strong athlete identities typically also being more reliant on avoidance-oriented coping strategies such as denial and mental disengagement). A high investment in the athlete role (as measured using the AIMS) has also been linked to experiences of depression following retirement (Horton & Mack, 2000). However, student-athletes who focused specifically on diminishing their identification with the athlete role in preparation for retirement (with the aim being to prevent a major identity-crisis upon retirement), reported experiencing minimal difficulty and distress upon retiring (Lally, 2007). These athletes transitioned smoothly, whereas the one athlete who did not engage in this process continued to experience difficulties at one-year follow-up.

1.4.3 Discursive and Conversation Analytic Explorations of Athletes' Transitions

Although there has been some discursive psychological research within sport psychology, examination of athletes' career transitions has not been explored from this perspective. Retirement more broadly has also received limited exploration from a discursive psychological perspective, with some discursive research examining experiences of elderly people living in retirement homes (Graham & Tuffin, 2004; Simpson & Cheney, 2007) and the adjustment to moving into retirement homes (Williams & Guendouzi, 2000). However, peoples' experiences of retiring, especially those of athletes, have not been explored discursively. Likewise, how identity is constructed and negotiated during career transitions has not been systematically studied.

1.5 The Body of the Elite Athlete

Athletes' experiences of their own bodies have been shown to be a further source of potential distress and adverse psychological outcomes for them. For example, in survey research with French athletes, bodily changes that accompanied retirement were shown to cause significant distress for athletes, with self-worth often entwined with bodily appearance and perceived physical competence (Stephan, et al., 2007).

Athletes' bodies are also an integral part of their identity as athletes (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006). An athlete's body is the tool through which success is achieved and, moreover, athletes' bodies signify their physical fitness and ability to perform. Additionally, the bodies of athletes typically attract considerable societal and cultural interest and are also integral to societal understandings of how athletes are 'meant' to be (Johns & Johns, 2000). Likewise, within sporting contexts, athletes' bodily appearance is also a crucial element of how the athlete is viewed. For athletes competing in aesthetic sports, for instance, physical appearance and the extent to which the athlete's body conforms to appearance ideals can also influence the judges scores of the athlete's performance (Rodin & Larson, 1992).

1.5.1 Body Regulation

Within most elite sports, there is a strong focus on athletes' physique and body weight, with surveillance of athletes' bodies being commonplace (Wilmore, 1992). In particular, the body composition of athletes has increasingly become the focus of scrutiny within sporting environments. Body composition (as distinct from weight and physique) is the evaluation of the different tissues that comprise the body. That is, body composition is the assessment and quantification of the amount of body tissue that is muscle, bone, fat and viscera. Within elite sporting contexts, there is typically a strong focus on the quantification of athletes' body fat. A considerable research literature has explored the relationship between body fat and performance (see Malina, 1992; Wilmore, 1992). Body fat has consistently been found to be negatively related to performance, especially in sports that involve running, jumping, endurance, or transporting the body (e.g., swimming, rowing and cycling; Hawley & Burke, 1998; Ostojic, 2006; Wilmore, 1992). Low body fat percentages can improve performance through increasing power to mass ratios, enabling athletes to be faster and more agile, and reducing 'dead weight' that athletes must carry, which is especially valuable in sports where athletes must transport their own body weight such as rowing, cycling and athletics (Hawley & Burke, 1998). As a result, idealised standards of body composition have been devised for most sports and are widely used (Wilmore, 1992). However, studies highlighting the relationship between decreased body fat and improved performance have been critiqued, with such research typically conducted cross-sectionally rather than longitudinally. Accordingly, how changes in body composition influence individual athletes and their performance over time has not been explored (Hawley & Burke, 1998). Yet, pressure to reduce body fat to optimise performance and develop an ideal body for each sport is commonplace within the sporting environment.

Given the demands to reduce body fat and thereby improve body composition and performance, numerous tests have been devised to assess body composition and estimate percentages of body fat (see Bioanalogics, 2004). Body composition tests are used routinely within sporting environments to monitor, assess, and regulate athletes' bodies. Skinfold tests are one of the

most widely used techniques for estimating body composition. This technique requires folds of skin and the subcutaneous fat beneath to be pinched and measured (using callipers) at different sites around the body (including abdominal, iliac crest, sub scapular, quadriceps). Using one of several different devised equations, the total score from the skinfolds is converted to give an approximation of overall body fat percentage (see McArdle, Katch, & Katch, 2010; Otte, Hassler, Brogowski, Bowen, & Mayhew, 2000). Despite some issues with reliability and accuracy (see Ostojic, 2006), regular testing of skinfolds is commonplace within many elite sporting contexts.

Pressure within the sporting environment to reduce body fat can become problematic, however. The body requires certain levels of body fat to remain functional (the percentage of body fat for normal functioning is higher in females due to the body reserving fat to sustain potential pregnancy; McArdle, et al., 2010). When body fat becomes too low, performance deficits, fatigue, anaemia and increases in illness and injuries can ensue (McArdle, et al., 2010; Wilmore, 1992). Moreover, it has been suggested that strong pressure to continually reduce body fat can result in athletes becoming increasingly preoccupied and dissatisfied with their bodies (Hawley & Burke, 1998). This, in turn, can lead athletes to engage in unhealthy eating and exercise behaviours in order to attain an unnaturally low body fat percentage. Such unhealthy behaviours are often seen to be normal or necessary for elite sporting success (Shogan, 1999). Accordingly, it has been suggested that pressure from the sporting environment can lead to the development of eating disorders (as will be discussed in more depth in section 1.5.2 below, Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Jones, et al., 2005; Malina, 1992; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006; Wilmore, 1992; Yeager, et al., 1993).

The existing literature exploring body composition focuses on methods to improve body composition and to foster athletes' regulation of their own bodies. Practices around body regulation and surveillance, as they occur within the sporting context, have received little exploration. Within the sociological literature, several studies have examined discourses around body regulation in elite sport. Johns and Johns (2000), for example, used a Foucauldian discourse analysis of interviews conducted with 17 elite athletes to explore the dietary intake of athletes and body surveillance practices in elite

sport. They explored the surveillance of male and female athletes from a variety of sports and suggested that athletes learn, through the sporting environment, to be intensely aware of the importance of the ideal body and, accordingly, to adopt technologies to transform their own bodies. Yet, Johns and Johns (2000) argued that to achieve the ideal and acceptable body espoused by pervasive discourses concerning athletes' bodies, athletes are require to transcend bodily limits (through excess exercise and insufficient energy intake). They further suggested that coaches are afforded privileged positions in discourse around the body and, as such, they are able to expect athletes to make these sacrifices to achieve the ideal body. Jones et al. (2005), likewise, suggested that prevailing discourses within the sporting environment (which privilege coaches and coaching expertise) are potentially problematic. Using an interpretive biographical analysis of a case study, they argued that the power differential between coach and athlete, as well as the discourses around body surveillance and regulation that are typical of the sporting environment, led to the studied athlete developing an eating disorder.

1.5.1.1 Discursive Psychological and Conversation Analytic Explorations of Body Regulation

The existing literature provides insight into the practices of body surveillance and regulation that take place within the sporting context. However, how these practices are carried out in sporting environments has not yet been explored. Particularly, the ways in which athletes manage their identity and their need to monitor and self-regulate their bodies during body regulation has not been the subject of systematic study. Interactions taking place during practices of body regulation and monitoring have been examined in other contexts, such as interactions occurring during obesity consultations in health-settings (Pillet-Shore, 2006; H. Webb, 2009) and in the context of commercial weight-management groups (Mycroft, 2008). Drawing on literature exploring interactions taking place in alternate contexts of body regulation informs exploration of the body regulation practices occurring within the context of elite sport and, as such, these examinations will be explored below.

In an analysis of nurse-patient interactions during weighing, Pillet-Shore (2006) highlighted the ways in which patients pre-emptively oriented to changes in weight in order to (a) display themselves as patients who monitor their health and (b) save face in situations when weight had increased. The ways in which people produce accounts for failure to lose weight have also been explored in doctor-patient interactions (H. Webb, 2009) and in weight-loss groups (Mycroft, 2008). Webb (2009) showed how doctors used the opening questions of their consultation to elicit patient reports on their medical status. She further analysed how patients produced answers that implied success or lack of success in weight-loss, and how these answers were designed to assign or avoid agency.

Webb (2009) also showed how talk around weight management necessarily constructed weight and obesity as moral issues. That is, in invoking or avowing agency, patients oriented to the appropriateness or inappropriateness of their actions and as Drew (1998) argues, in designing talk to demonstrate the 'rightness' or' wrongness' of behaviours, such talk can be understood as doing moral work. Mycroft (2008) also highlighted how notions of morality, such as 'good' and 'bad' foods and eating behaviours, were recurrently drawn on in accounting for changes in weight in weight loss group interactions. Within this context, Mycroft (2007) also explored the sequence organisation of the news-delivery of weight and found that the way in which news was told and receipted differed depending on whether the news was of weight gain, loss or maintenance.

1.5.2 Psychopathology and the Body

Within this context of body regulation in elite sport, athletes have been reported to experience distress and pathology in relation to their bodies. It has been proposed that within sport and exercise contexts, athletes can become particularly concerned with interpersonal evaluation of their physique; and this has been labelled Social Physique Anxiety (SPA; Hart, Leary, & Rejeski, 1989). Athletes with SPA become concerned about their ability to ensure that the presentation of their body/physique matches socially acceptable ideals of athletic physiques. In cases when athletes experience SPA,

such anxiety is often managed in unhealthy ways, such as through excessive dieting or exercise behaviours (Martin Ginis & Leary, 2004). Although it has been suggested that SPA is particularly salient amongst athletes competing in aesthetic sports (i.e. sports with a heavy emphasis on physical appearance such as gymnastics and diving), it has been found that athletes in aesthetic and non-aesthetic sports reported similar levels of SPA (Haase, 2009). Those athletes competing in individual sports, however, were shown to report higher levels of SPA than team sport athletes.

Moreover, pressure from the sporting environment (including from parents, team mates, training partners, and coaches) as well as from the media (especially for high profile athletes who receive frequent media attention) to reduce body fat, in order to meet idealised body and physique standards, has been argued to render athletes at increased risk of developing eating disorders (Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Jones, et al., 2005; Malina, 1992; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006; Wilmore, 1992; Yeager, et al., 1993). Athletes have been shown to have a higher risk of developing eating disorders and sub-clinical disordered eating than non-athlete populations (Hawley & Burke, 1998; Milligan & Pritchard, 2006; Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004; Wilmore, 1992). Disordered eating refers to eating-related behaviours such as excess exercise and dieting that do not meet full DSM-IV TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) diagnostic criteria for Anorexia or Bulimia Nervosa (because they occur either less frequently or with less severity), yet are highly concerning and can lead to long-term health consequences.

Numerous studies have explored the prevalence of disordered eating amongst athlete populations. The most comprehensive study of prevalence explored the entire population of Norwegian elite athletes (both male and female) competing at international level; prevalence rates of clinical and subclinical eating disorders were estimated to be 13.5% in this athlete population compared with only 4.6% of age-matched controls (Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004). Within the US College system, studies have reported disordered eating prevalence rates of 26% among athletes (38% of females and 9% of males athletes; Milligan & Pritchard, 2006), whilst other studies have found 9% of female and 1% of male athletes having clinically diagnosable eating

disorders, and 58% of females and 38% of males display disordered eating behaviour (Johnson, et al., 1999). Differences in prevalence rates may reflect sample size, with Sundgot-Borgen and Klungland Torstveit (2004) using a much larger and more comprehensive sample than studies exploring US College students. Differences between the studies conducted in Norway and the US may also reflect different sporting systems, especially where US college students are often dependent on their sporting ability to receive college scholarships and, thus, complete their education.

Earlier research suggested that the prevalence of disordered eating and eating disorders was higher in sports with an emphasis on aesthetics (e.g. gymnastics, swimming and diving; Pasman & Thompson, 1988; Wilson & Eldredge, 1992). Sundgot-Borgen (1994) suggested that the prevalence of disordered eating is also more common in sports with weight restriction (e.g., wrestling and rowing) as well as in sports with an emphasis on leanness. However, other studies have shown that disordered eating remains problematic in non-lean and non-aesthetic sports as well (Haase, 2009; Milligan & Pritchard, 2006; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Milligan and Prichard (2006) suggested that, rather, it is the level of competition that is linked with eating disorder prevalence, with athletes competing at higher levels being at greater risk of developing disordered eating behaviour. In a survey study, Haase (2009) also suggested that athletes in individual sports, where each individual's physique is more open to public evaluation, were more susceptible to disordered eating than team sport athletes. As with the general population, there is agreement that a higher prevalence of disordered eating occurs amongst female, rather than male, athletes (Haase, 2009; Milligan & Pritchard, 2006; Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004).

In addition to the prevalence of eating disorders and disordered eating, some theorists have proposed the concept of Anorexia Athletica, defined as the sporting-related intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat when already underweight (as distinct from Anorexia Nervosa, see Sundgot-Borgen, 1994). It has been suggested that disordered eating within the sporting context be known as the specific Anorexia Athletica (Sundgot-Borgen, 1994).

Reduced energy intake from disordered eating (or Anorexia Athletica) can be further problematic for athletes. Reductions in energy intake in combination with large energy expenditure from intense training schedules, can lead to amenorrhea (the absence of three or more menstrual cycles, or delayed menarche) in female athletes. Although amenorrhea is a common symptom of Anorexia Nervosa, it occurs sooner and with lower levels of disordered eating amongst athletes due to the energy output required by their intense training schedules. Female bodies store a sufficient fat and energy reserve to sustain potential pregnancy and when these fat levels drop below what could sustain pregnancy, menstruation ceases (McArdle, et al., 2010). Once menstrual irregularity occurs, hormonal changes ensue. Such hormones influence bone development and bone mineral density. Accordingly, amenorrhea can lead to osteopaenia, a low level of bone density or the failure to gain optimal bone deposition, which is a precursor to osteoporosis (Hawley & Burke, 1998; McArdle, et al., 2010; Yeager, et al., 1993). If amenorrhea is sustained, this can lead to osteoporosis. The development of osteopaenia can leave athletes at a higher risk of developing osteoporosis in later life, as the rapid bone density loss is not necessarily reversible. Premature bone loss can also be particularly problematic during athletic careers as it leaves athletes at an increased risk of developing stress fractures and other injuries (McArdle, et al., 2010; Yeager, et al., 1993). This combination of disordered eating, amenorrhea and osteopaenia is known as the Female Athlete Triad, a sporting-specific health concern that can lead to long-term psychological and physical health consequences (Gottschlich, Young, & Barrow, 2008; Nichols, Rauh, Lawson, Ji, & Barkai, 2006). Although the triad most often affects female athletes, male athletes have also been shown to experience two of the triad conditions: disordered eating and osteopaenia.

Prevalence studies exploring the triad as a whole suggest that prevalence of all three triad conditions is low; however, many athletes experience at least one of the disorders. A study exploring prevalence among US collegiate athletes from a variety of sports suggested that only three of the 112 athletes met criteria for all three components of the triad, however, 18% of athletes studied met criteria for disordered eating, 24% had menstrual irregularity and 22% had low bone density (Fenichel

& Warren, 2007). In additional research evaluating Brazilian swimmers, it was found that only 35% of athletes did not meet criteria for at least one component of the triad (Schtscherbyna, et al., 2009).

1.5.2.1 Psychopathology, the Body and Athlete Identity

The concept of athlete identity has also been linked to the development of eating disorders and disordered eating amongst athletes. Based on an interpretive biographical analysis of interviews with a former elite swimmer, Jones et al. (2005) argued that a strong investment in athlete identity contributed to the development of the athlete's eating disorder. Further case study research using a life history analysis argued that having an exclusive identity as an athlete played a role in the development of Bulimia Nervosa, suggesting that those athletes with a more diverse self-identity would be less susceptible to disordered eating (Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Furthermore, scores on the AIMS have been shown to best predict the development of Social Physique Anxiety (Martin, 1999).

1.5.2.2 Constructionist and Discursive Approaches to Exploring Disordered Eating

Traditional psychological approaches to exploring athletes' experiences of disordered eating, which are rooted in an realist epistemology and locate pathology in the individual, have been critiqued (Busanich & McGannon, 2010). However, limited research has explored disordered eating (and other pathology experienced in relation to the body) within athlete populations from an alternate perspective. Specifically, disordered eating amongst athletes has not been explored from a discursive psychological perspective. Interpretive biographical (Jones, et al., 2005) and life history (Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006) approaches have offered some insights into athletes' experiences with disordered eating; however, the discursive practices within which such experiences are located and how athletes and their identities are constructed and made relevant in talk and text around disordered eating has not been explored.

Social constructionist approaches have explored the historical construction and production of eating and not eating amongst the general population. It has been argued that not eating has moved from being explained and located within religion to being located within medical, psychiatric and psychological discourses (e.g., Hepworth, 1999; Malson, 1998). Thus, not eating has come to be explained as psychopathology residing in the individual. Yet, in locating Anorexia Nervosa within a medical and psychiatric discourse and producing it as an individualised pathology, the body becomes isolated from the socio-cultural, political and discursive contexts in which it is located. In doing so, the Anorexic person becomes positioned as needing to be cured, with the need for change located within the individual. Constructionist theorists, however, argue that the body cannot be viewed as something that is separate from, or influenced by, the outside world but, rather, the body is a site of cultural inscription and represents the embodiment of dominant discourses (Malson, 1998). Accordingly, Anorexia Nervosa can be understood in terms of socially embedded discourses around food, the body, fatness and thinness, and eating and not eating. For example, historically, overeating was viewed as the sin of gluttony, representing indulgence and a lack of self-discipline and under eating, on the other hand, was viewed as an act of moral rectitude, self-discipline and control (Orbach, 1993). Through these historical constructions, the thin/anorexic body can be viewed, not as pathological, but as signifying a controlled body, (romantic) feminine beauty, or as representing an independent and powerful subjectivity (Hepworth, 1999).

The discursive production of Bulimia Nervosa has also received research attention. It has been argued that through psy discourses (the body of psychological and psychiatric knowledge, theories and practices), the bulimic subject is positioned and produced such that therapeutic intervention is made relevant and necessary (Guilfoyle, 2001). Guilfoyle (2001) argues that in therapy, clients are encouraged to construct a psychologised subjectivity, rather than locate themselves in alternate discourses, and this allows for a psychological account of the eating disorder while subjugating alternate accounts for the 'problem', such as socially located accounts. Moreover, Guilfoyle argues that the psy discourses surrounding the body obscure power relations and, in doing so, psy's

dominance in defining understanding of the bulimic subject is reinforced. Furthermore, slenderness and practices of carefully regulating energy intake and output were shown to be constructed and reified as healthy, both in interviews with women engaging in bulimic practices, and in health promotion material such as public health websites, health magazines and obesity prevention brochures (Burns & Gavey, 2004). 'Healthy' weight and physiques, then, cannot be separated from the cultural ideals of thinness in which they are embedded. That is, women's bodies are regulated by discourses - which promote engaging in body regulatory practices in order to achieve the slender body, while demonising body fat. As such, Burns and Gavey (2004) argued that the practices which promote health by promoting body regulation function to support, rationalise, and even normalise practices of regulation such as bingeing and purging that are characterised as 'bulimic'.

Within the field of discursive psychology, eating disorders, especially Anorexia Nervosa, have received considerable research attention; having been explored in the mass media (Ferris, 2003), popular magazines (Whitehead & Kurz, 2008), online forums (Giles, 2006; Hardin, 2003; Pollack, 2003), and interviews with people diagnosed as having an eating disorder (Hardin, 2003). The concept of identity in relation to disordered eating has received some discursive exploration. Using Membership Categorisation Analysis to analyse online forums from 'pro-ana' sites (websites that represent an on-line community of 'like-minded' individuals, consisting of forums and advice giving), Giles (2006) explored how 'ana' (anorexic), 'mia' (bulimic), 'wannabe' (identity ascribed to forum users who are perceived as not being 'truly' anorexic or not 'being good' at being anorexic) and 'hater' (identity ascribed to those who post messages that are abusive towards people with a 'pro-ana view') identities were constructed and drawn on in the forums. Differing discourses of Anorexia Nervosa, both as an illness and as a choice, were drawn on in constructing ana and mia identities. Ana identities were produced as superior, with mias constructed both as failed anas and as lacking in the discipline required to be ana by being susceptible to giving in to hunger. Mia was also drawn on as a temporary state, with ana constructed as the ideal. In defending against the inferior category ascription, people in the forums identifying as mia drew on either: a) a medicalised account,

constructing both mia and ana categories as disordered and medically ill, or b) constructed bulimia as, likewise, requiring high levels of self-control. Despite the body of discursive research exploring eating disorders, disordered eating amongst athlete populations and athlete identity within contexts of disordered eating have not been a focus of discursive psychological research.

1.6 Thesis Research Questions

In light of the aforediscussed literature around athlete identity and instances of psychopathology, the primary objective of this thesis is to explore the concept of athlete identity from a discursive psychological perspective, in order to develop the knowledge of this concept that has arisen from traditional sport psychology perspectives. The first question that this thesis endeavours to investigate is how the concept of athlete identity is constructed and reproduced - both at a broad cultural level and within athletes' everyday sporting environments. This question will be examined by exploring how versions of athlete identities are reproduced within media accounts and co-produced in interaction. The implications that such shared constructions of athletes may have in terms of identity, the choices made available to athletes, and the ways in which actions and behaviours are deemed acceptable or not, will also be explored.

Secondly, this thesis will explore the social contexts in which athletes are vulnerable to experiencing psychological distress and how constructions of athlete identities may relate to instances of psychopathology. The present research endeavours to explore two social contexts in which distress may occur. Exploration focuses on an examination of a) media accounts of athletes' career transitions and b) the ways in which athletes' bodies are monitored and regulated in practice within the sporting context. How identity is drawn on and understood within these contexts and the implications for athletes' mental and physical health will be considered.

The next chapter (Chapter Two) provides an overview of the studies undertaken in this thesis and the methodology employed. The following chapters (Chapters Three to Six) present four papers,

all of which have been accepted or submitted for publication. The exegesis presented in Chapter Two will provide the rationale for the studies undertaken as well as outlining the linkage between the papers presented.

Chapter Two
Exegesis

2.1 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the studies undertaken for this thesis and the manuscripts contained herein that report the findings from the studies. In this section, the aims, methodology, and theoretical framework will be described. As was discussed in Chapter One, this thesis aims, primarily, to explore the concept of athlete identity. As has been noted previously, there is a well established link in the sport psychology literature between the construct of athlete identity and the incidence of psychopathology in athlete populations (e.g., Brewer, et al., 1993; Grove, et al., 1997; Lally, 2007; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Within the extant sport psychology literature, athlete identity has been conceptualised predominantly using a role theory framework. However, this approach has been subject to some criticism, with role theory argued to treat identity as static, ritualistic and unchanging, rather than fluid and dynamic (Davies & Harré, 1990). Accordingly, a discursive psychological approach to exploring and understanding identity is adopted in this thesis. This approach conceptualises identity as flexible, shifting and socially and discursively accomplished (see Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998a; Davies & Harré, 1990).

2.2 Thesis Aims and Linkage Between the Studies

The aims of this thesis, therefore, are a) to add to existing literature on athlete identity and the link between identity and athletes' experiences of pathology by shedding new light on the concept, and b) to further explore athletes' experiences, particularly of psychological distress, and increase understandings of contexts in which athletes may experience distress. The studies presented in this thesis explore how athlete identity is constructed and reproduced within the social context of two arenas in which athletes routinely and most saliently experience psychological distress: Transition (primarily the transition out of elite sport, but also other transitions experienced by athletes throughout

their careers), and body regulation. These contexts were selected for analysis because of the ubiquity of such experiences for all athletes and because these are both contexts through which athletes are likely to be vulnerable to experiencing psychological distress. Moreover, the extant literature has established relationships between identity and the experiences of psychopathology in these contexts, which an alternate approach to identity may further elucidate.

During the transition out of elite sport, athletes are frequently reported to experience a range of pathology, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse/misuse (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Transitions taking place throughout athletes' careers also have the potential to be distressing, with the transition into elite sport, for example, also recognised as important in shaping athletes' careers (and, subsequently, their lives) and as being potentially highly stressful (Bruner, et al., 2008). Additionally, within elite sport, athletes' bodies are frequently a site of distress, with a high prevalence of disordered eating (Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004), Social Physique Anxiety (Haase, 2009; Hart, et al., 1989) and the sporting-specific health concern known as the Female Athlete Triad (McArdle, et al., 2010; Yeager, et al., 1993) present in athlete populations. Transitions, as well as body regulation, are arenas in which athletes' identities have been reported as integral to their experiences of distress: Identity is reported as a moderating factor of adjustment to retirement (Grove, et al., 1997; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007) and forming identity exclusively as an athlete has also been argued to lead to the development of eating disorders (Jones, et al., 2005; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Additionally, perceived (in)adequacy of one's body in relation to societal norms and values regarding what elite bodies should be like is pivotal in the aetiology of Social Physique Anxiety, which often results in pathological eating and exercising behaviours (Martin Ginis & Leary, 2004). As a result, the ways in which athlete identities are constructed and reproduced within these specific contexts of potential distress is the focus of study in this thesis.

2.3 Methodological Approach

Research within sport psychology has predominantly been conducted using questionnaire methods, an approach that has been critiqued for being reductionist (as discussed in Chapter One, see Locke, 2004). Qualitative research in sport psychology and the sociology of sport have predominantly relied on interviews. However, the use of interviews in qualitative research has also been critiqued (see Potter & Hepburn, 2005). For instance, given their typical focus on the responses of the interviewee, analyses of interview data have been argued to be limited because they usually overlook the role of the researcher in the interaction that occurs (Locke, 2004; Potter & Hepburn, 2007). Moreover, the social context in and for which the talk is produced also necessarily constrains what is said and the answers that are given by interviewees (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Naturally occurring data – that is, talk and text that occur without the researchers' input – are instead considered preferable for exploration of the social world (Potter & Hepburn, 2005, 2007). In naturalistic interactions, participants orient to issues that are relevant for themselves at any particular point in time, without being shaped by input from the researcher (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998).

Accordingly, this thesis draws on naturally occurring data to explore constructions of athlete identity within contexts of potential distress. Firstly, Australian newsprint media were examined to explore representations of identity and athletic career transitions. Chapters Three and Four report (in manuscript form) results from this media analysis. Secondly, interactions occurring during body regulation testing within an elite sport setting were also analysed, with results from these data reported in Chapters Five and Six (as manuscripts). As will be discussed in more depth below, the two different types of data (media and interactional) were selected to allow for an exploration both of the ways in which identities were constructed in broader patterns of collective-sense making (as reproduced by the media), and of the ways in which identities were worked up and constructed within a local interactional context by athletes and others. The goal was to provide a comprehensive insight into how athlete identities are constructed in the social contexts surrounding athletes' vulnerability to

experiences of psychological distress. Reflections on the use of these two data sources and analytic approaches will be presented in Chapter Seven.

Analysis drew on the principles of discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996), as informed by conversation analysis (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2006). Analysis of the media data was informed by Wetherell and Edley (1999), which looked to explore the broader patterns of collective-sense making, as well as examine the specific ways, and rhetorical strategies, through which versions of the world, objects and people were constructed. The interactional data were examined using a more fine-grained level of analysis, focussing on the detail of how interactional turns were designed and how the sequential organisation of the talk co-constructed and produced identity within the local interactional context.

2.4 Study One: Media Analysis

The aim of the media analysis presented in this thesis was primarily to understand the broader contemporary social and cultural understandings around athlete identity, with a specific focus on exploring identity constructions during career transition. From a discursive psychological approach, identity, or who one is, is understood as a matter that is always in relation to discursive practices. As such, understanding identity requires exploration of the contexts of language use in which identities are created and constructed, and the broader historical and socio-cultural context in which such talk and text occur (Abell & Stokoe, 2001). With certain identity positions, come prescriptions for behaviour, actions and even choices that are morally acceptable or unacceptable for individuals who are so positioned. As certain identities and positionings gain cultural currency, other identities (and associated actions, behaviours, and choices) become harder to occupy (Edley, 2001). For example, it has been argued that, historically, sport functioned to socialise young men into productive workers (Gerdy, 2000) and, consequently, appropriate athletes came to be understood as masculine, hardworking, tough and strong. As such, alternate versions of athletes (e.g. as skilful, graceful, having

finesse etc.) are minimised. To then not subscribe to these ideals can be problematic for male (and even for female) athletes as alternative ways of being are not consistent with dominant versions of being a 'good' or 'appropriate' athlete. Given that a discursive psychological approach has not previously been adopted within the athlete identity literature (and, indeed, few approaches not driven by role theory have been previously utilised), a goal of this study was to provide an overview of the benefits of such a theoretical perspective for exploring the topic of athlete identity within the sport psychology literature.

Media data were selected for analysis because through studying representations in the mass media, it is possible to gain insight into shared versions of people, the world and events (Lyons, 2000), as well as the cultural assumptions and ideas that have come to appear as 'common sense' knowledge of the world (Wachs & Dworkin, 1997). Exploration of this forum, then, allows for insight into dominant cultural understandings and constructions of athlete identities, and the regulatory work that such constructions might accomplish, to be obtained.

Media representations from four widely read Australian newspapers were explored: The Age, The Australian, The Advertiser, and The Sydney Morning Herald. These newspapers were chosen in order to provide a representative sampling of Australian newsprint media. They were selected on the basis of providing a mix of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers (The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age and The Australian are broadsheet and The Advertiser is a tabloid), as well as newspaper ownership (The Advertiser, and The Australian are owned by News Limited and The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age are owned by rival Fairfax media). In addition, newspapers from different states in Australia (and one national paper) were selected to cover a wider range of sports given that certain sports (e.g. rugby and Australian Rules Football) have differing levels of popularity in different regions in Australia.

Media accounts of sporting career transitions appearing within the data collection period were gathered. However, not all career transitions received media attention. The majority of articles reported the retirement of athletes, with 248 articles collected reporting on the retirements of 19 different athletes. A smaller number (23) of articles reported the comeback (subsequent to retirement)

of two elite athletes. However, transitions into sport or into elite level sport did not receive media attention. Accordingly, the focus of analysis is on the transition out of elite sport and the transition back into elite competition following retirement.

Results of the media study are presented (in manuscript form) in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis. Given that the results (of both studies) are presented in manuscript format (designed to be stand-alone papers in different journals), there is some, unavoidable, repetition of methodology and overlap of relevant literature throughout the thesis.

2.4.1 Overview of Chapter Three (Paper One)

Given that the transition out of elite sport has been linked with psychological distress for athletes, how such retirement events are routinely constructed and reproduced within the media was of interest in informing understanding of athletes' experiences during these transitions. This chapter explores media accounts of retirements, with retirements depicted as occurring under three broad circumstances – those occurring due to the age of the athlete, those occurring due to injury, and retirements chosen for other reasons – and examines how each of these retirements was accounted for, and represented within the media. Each broad type of retirement was depicted differently, with some types constructed as problematic whereas others were not. Through these varying representations, athletes' actions in retiring and the decision making around the retirement, were constructed as good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate. In highlighting actions and choices of athletes that are constructed as appropriate or not, this chapter provides insights into dominant constructions of athlete identity.

Within the media accounts, the athletes were positioned such that choice around decision making was restricted (despite choice being privileged as ideal). Given existing literature suggesting choice to be a moderating factor in the ease of adjustment to retirement (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), such restrictions in choice and decision making can be understood as

potentially problematic for athletes as they approach retirement. Insights from the analysis presented in Chapter Three can inform understanding of the potentially distressing experiences of transitioning athletes and may inform psychological practice when working with retiring athletes.

2.4.2 Overview of Chapter Four (Paper Two)

Chapter Four builds on the analysis presented in Chapter Three by contrasting retirement accounts with the (rare) instances of sporting comebacks. Specifically, how the accounts of the 'chosen' retirements (rather than age- or injury-related retirement accounts) differed from the accounting around the return to elite competition is explored. Through accounts of these different kinds of transitions, considerable contestation around identities took place. Moreover, accounts of the return to elite sport were selected for analysis given that the transition back into elite sport (subsequent to retirement) has not received research attention, yet, like other career transitions, it may be a crucial period for athletes and may also potentially be distressing.

In this chapter, constructions around athletes' choices to return to compete in sport at an elite level were explored, highlighting the reasons for electing to return that are constructed as appropriate or inappropriate. The actions, choices and decisions of athletes that are considered normal or abnormal, and appropriate or inappropriate, produce versions of what is considered acceptable behaviour for athletes and, thereby, informs understanding of versions of appropriate athlete identities that have cultural currency. As such, the focus was to examine how athletes are positioned as needing to act and make choices accordingly. From this exploration, it was evident that athletes are positioned as needing and being compelled, rather than choosing, to return to compete in sport at an elite level. Gaining insight into how athletes are positioned as needing to compete, establishes a frame for understanding the subsequent distress and difficulties that athletes might encounter during times of transition.

2.5 Study Two: Analysis of Athletes' Body Regulation in Practice

Following the examination of constructions of athlete identity in the social context surrounding career transition, the aim of Study Two was to explore athlete identity in an additional context in which athletes can experience distress, namely distress around their athletic bodies. In addition to exploring a further context for potential distress, the aim was also to build on the media analysis by exploring constructions of identity within athletes' everyday interactions.

The field of discursive psychology is moving increasingly toward a focus on studying talk-in-interaction within institutional settings (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2005), with the study of talk-in-interaction argued to be advantageous because it displays the moment-by-moment understandings and orientations of the participants (Schegloff, 1997). Schegloff has advocated for the use of conversation analysis for analysing talk-in-interaction, arguing that a fine-grained conversation analytic approach overcomes the imposition of researchers' ideas and opinions on the data and, instead, is guided by the participants' orientations (see Schegloff, 1997). Wetherell (1998), however, argues that conversation analysis fails to altogether avoid the imposition of researchers' categories on the data. She argues for a synthesis between conversation analysis and other analytic approaches within discursive psychology, arguing that each level of analysis can add unique insights and understandings. Hence, a more eclectic, synthetic approach to analysis is argued to be preferable for exploring the social world.

Therefore, different insights can be gained by exploring the fine-grained detail of talk-in-interaction, adding to the exploration of media representations. Chapters Five and Six, therefore, aim to build on and complement the findings from Chapters Three and Four, by exploring how (and if) broad, cultural understandings of identity (such as those that are reproduced in media accounts) are oriented to and reproduced within athletes' everyday interactions. The use of interactional data, then, in building on the knowledge gained from the media analysis, aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of constructions of athlete identity in contexts potentially causing psychological distress. The analysis of the interactional data in Chapters Five and Six was informed by conversation

analysis (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2006), focusing on the sequential organisation of talk and how each turn at talk is designed and the actions that these turns accomplish. In order to explore how identity was made relevant, attended to, and constructed, in everyday interactions with athletes, interactions from athletes' everyday sporting environment were the focus. The interactions analysed were recorded within a sport institute.

Within this institutional context, the initial aim was to collect a range of interactions including sport psychology consultations, practices of body regulation, and performance agreement meetings, to capture how athletes and sport staff attended to and constructed identity throughout their interactions in the sporting environment. However, due to a range of factors including changes in staffing and ongoing changes in scheduling, the interactions that were most recorded were those occurring during routine body composition testing. Perhaps interestingly, coaches, sport staff and athletes were often resistant to the recording of other interactions; however, the request to record interactions that occurred during practices of body regulation was met with minimal hesitation or resistance. Given the above, Chapters Five and Six present the findings from analyses of interactions taking place during body composition testing.

2.5.1 The Institutional Context

The data for Study Two (Chapters Five and Six) were recorded within the South Australian Sport Institute (SASI). SASI operates in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Sport as well as other state and territory institutes/academies in Australia as part of a national sport institute/academy network, with the goal of assisting athletes to pursue sporting excellence and success. SASI aims to develop athletes to attain national selection and achieve sporting success at an international level with the ultimate goal to develop Olympic medal winning athletes.

SASI works to enhance athletes' ability and performance by providing them with a range of services in the areas of biomechanics, medicine, performance analysis, physiology, psychology,

strength and conditioning, nutrition, and also Athlete Career and Education counselling. Athletes train regularly under institute coaches and use a range of facilities from the institute including a gym, recovery centre and biomechanics laboratories to improve technical and physical aspects of performance.

SASI provides high level coaching and intensive training to over 300 scholarship holders from over 16 sports. Talented athletes identified to have Olympic potential are awarded scholarships and provided training opportunities at the Institute. These scholarships are awarded yearly, and athletes must reapply for a scholarship at the completion of each year/cycle. Scholarship renewal is dependent on performance and improvement during the previous year. At the beginning of a scholarship period, athletes sign performance agreements, with targets for physical (including strength, fitness and body composition) and performance aspects of their sports. Athletes failing to reach targets during their scholarship period may potentially lose their scholarship.

2.5.2 Skinfold Testing Interactions

Within this institutional context, as is typical throughout elite sporting environments (Malina, 1992; Wilmore, 1992), the policing of athletes' bodies is commonplace. Interactions occurring during routine monitoring of athletes' bodies were collected for analysis, given that athletic bodies are argued to be an integral part of athlete identity (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006). Furthermore, bodies, and the regulation thereof, can be a site of potential distress and pathology for athletes (such as increased prevalence of disordered eating; Jones, et al., 2005; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). The interactions to be analysed occurred during skinfold testing sessions. Skinfold testing is a common type of body composition testing, which occurs regularly within this sport setting (and is commonplace within elite sport settings more generally). Athletes on scholarships are frequently tested for body composition (using skinfold tests), and skinfold score targets constitute a part of their athlete agreements. The skinfold testing interactions under analysis for this thesis took place between an athlete and an

exercise physiologist (often with a physiology student also present). They occurred while the athletes were being measured in either the gym or the physiology laboratories at the institute. Analysis allowed for an understanding of how body regulation takes place in practice and how athlete identities were made relevant, attended to and co-produced within the context of body surveillance.

Forty two skinfold testing sessions were recorded for analysis. Interactions took place between one of thirty one athletes and three exercise physiologists, often with a physiology student present. For the purposes of analysis, the interactions were coded into openings, the testing period, and closings with each section was analysed to explore how identities were produced and made relevant throughout the testing sessions.

2.5.3 Overview of Chapter Five (Paper Three)

Chapter Five explored how culturally dominant understandings of athletes, and the broad discourses prevailing within society and sporting settings which constitute athlete identities, are reproduced in interaction. Johns and Johns (2000) argued that within elite sporting environments, discourses of self-surveillance and regulation around the body are pervasive and come to be normalised. Such prevailing discourses have been argued potentially to lead to the development of eating disorders (Jones, et al., 2005), as well as pushing athletes to transcend bodily limits by excessive exercising and pathological eating behaviours (Franklin, 1996). How such discourses are oriented to and reproduced within athletes' everyday sporting environment and within the potentially delicate business of doing body regulation is the focus of analysis.

To explore how these broad discourses are reproduced, the turn-by-turn detail of the interactions was explored. Kitzinger (2005) has shown how a fine-grained conversation analytic approach to interactional data can shed light on the ways in which the assumptions that are taken-for-granted as the ordinary world are reproduced and reconstituted in interaction. She demonstrated how a conversation analytic approach can be used by analysing telephone calls made after-hours to a

medical practice; phone calls made on behalf of others (family members, neighbours or friends) were particularly of interest. In analysing the use of person reference terms - that is, exploring how the callers referred to and made relevant the person on behalf of whom the call was being made - she was able to highlight the ways in which hetero-normative definitions of the nuclear family (with a co-resident husband, wife, dependent biological children, and the mother acting as primary caregiver etc.) were reproduced by participants in conducting everyday interactional business. For example, she demonstrated that, when women were calling on behalf of their husbands or children, calls were treated by both participants as a non-accountable activity that is natural and ordinary, and the interaction was non-problematic, progressing to descriptions of symptoms and so on. However, when such normative family units were breached, interactional trouble was routinely evident within this corpus of calls (Kitzinger, 2005).

The aim of Chapter Five was, likewise, to undertake a fine-grained analysis, drawing on principles of conversation analysis, in order to explore how dominant understandings and discourses, which constitute athlete identities, are played out and reproduced within interaction. Particularly of interest was how discourses around body regulation, which have been identified as potentially problematic for athletes' physical and psychological health, are reproduced during practices of body regulation.

Orientation to dominant discourses and versions of athlete identity were evident throughout the interactions, however, it was in the closings of these interactions that reproduction of the discourses of body surveillance was most saliently and succinctly accomplished. Thus, Chapter Five focuses on exploring the closing of the interactions, when the news of the skinfold scores were (frequently, although not always) delivered and then (typically) assessed. Throughout the interactions, normalisation of such testing was evident, exemplified in the delivery of news of skinfold score increases, which was not accompanied by typical interactional markers of bad news delivery (see Maynard, 1997; Mycroft, 2007). The routine and normalised nature of these interactions was thus made evident. Additionally, discourses espousing a need for athletes to self-regulate continually,

monitoring their bodies and eating and exercising behaviours, were reproduced by exercise physiologists through the assessments of skinfold scores. Considering the high prevalence of disordered eating amongst elite athletes, the reproduction of discourses around the body may potentially be problematic for athletes. The implications of these interactions and how they reproduce the drive for thinness and perfectionism, both of which have been linked to the aetiology of eating disorders (Franco-Paredes, Mancilla-Díaz, Vázquez-Arévalo, López-Aguilar, & Álvarez-Rayón, 2005; Gustafsson, Edlund, Kjellin, & Norring, 2010; Sands, 2000), is also a focus of discussion in Chapter Five.

2.5.4 Overview of Chapter Six (Paper Four)

Chapter Six furthered the analysis presented in Chapter Five, with the aim of Chapter Six, specifically, to explore how athletes and exercise physiologists co-produced and attended to identity within the skinfold testing interactions. Analysis in this chapter focuses on the accounts that athletes produced within the interactions in relation to their body regulatory behaviours. Within these accounts, athletes did considerable work to attend to their identities and present themselves as 'good athletes' who engaged in self-regulation. Moreover, exercise physiologists, in explicitly requesting accounts of body regulatory behaviour and through their receipting of such accounts, also made relevant the actions that are acceptable, or not, for athletes, thereby also producing and constructing appropriate athlete identities. The implications of the accomplishment of such identity management and the co-production of athlete identities for disordered eating and Social Physique Anxiety are also discussed in Chapter Six.

2.6 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis offers an alternate theoretical and methodological perspective to researching identity in sport psychology and the sociology of sport. Athlete identity is widely understood within the

sport psychology literature to be crucial in understanding the lived experiences of athletes, including experiences of psychopathology. Thus, through adopting an alternate theoretical and methodological perspective from that previously employed, this thesis adds novel understandings of the construct of athlete identity, as well as shedding light on the relationships between identity and psychopathology. Furthermore, this thesis offers unique insights into arenas in which athletes frequently experience distress – career transition and body regulation – particularly adding to understanding of how societal understandings and everyday interactions reproduce versions of appropriate identities within such arenas. As such, this thesis offers implications for practice when working with athletes who are experiencing distress. The findings of this research will be synthesised and the clinical implications discussed in Chapter Seven.

Media Study: Paper One

Elite athletes and retirement: Identity, choice and agency

Cosh, S., Crabb, S., & LeCouteur, A.

Submitted to *International Journal of Sport Psychology*

Statement of contributors

Suzanne Cosh (Candidate)

I was responsible for the study conception, literature review, data collection, data analysis, manuscript drafting, preparation and submission.

Signed: Date: 02/09/2011

Dr Shona Crabb and Assoc Prof Amanda LeCouteur (*Co-authors*)

We provided ongoing supervision throughout the research programme that led to this manuscript and there was ongoing collaboration between Suzanne Cosh and us in refining the direction of the research. Suzanne Cosh was responsible for writing this paper; our role was to comment on drafts, make suggestions on the presentation of material in the paper, and to provide editorial input. We hereby give our permission for this paper to be incorporated in Suzanne Cosh's submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Adelaide.

Signed: Shona Crabb   Date: 02/09/2011

Signed: Amanda LeCouteur   Date: 02/09/2011

3.1 Abstract

This paper employs a discursive psychological approach to explore constructions of choice and identity around elite athletes' retirements within Australian newsprint media. Within these accounts, three 'types' of retirements were identified: retirements occurring in relation to age, injury, or active choice. Retiring with individual agency and at an appropriate time was repeatedly privileged, whereas retiring in different ways was routinely problematised. In privileging particular ways of retiring, certain identity positions were made more accessible than others. Consequently, certain actions and choices are deemed appropriate (or not) for athletes, ultimately constraining decision making around retirement. The implications of such limited identity positions and choices are explored in relation to the psychological distress and clinical concerns that emerge amongst many athletes in the transition out of elite sport.

3.2 Introduction

"An emotional Miller yesterday told his sentencing hearing for supplying a prohibited drug that, after reaching the highs of becoming a dual Olympic medallist, he hit rock bottom. ``Just since 2004, my career was over and I didn't know what to do with my life…It was to numb the pain of being finished."

The Advertiser, 29th August 2009 (Adelaide, Australia)

As the above quotation illustrates, the termination of sporting careers is a salient event in athletes' lives that can be highly distressing. Sporting retirements differ from other forms of retirement in a number of ways, making retirements of this social group especially unique and, thus, of particular interest to explore. Sporting careers are much shorter than other types of careers and athletes retire at (typically) much younger ages (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Wylleman, et al., 2004). Given the young age of athletes upon retirement, athletes are subsequently required to move into other occupations and careers, often requiring entirely new skill sets (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993). The transition out of sport

also constitutes a disruption to what have become self-defining activities and marks an identity change (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Lotysz & Short, 2004; McGillivray, et al., 2005; W. M. Webb, et al., 1998; Wylleman, et al., 2004). During their careers, athletes' lives are dedicated to their sport, organised around competition and training schedules and highly structured and regulated by coaches and other support personnel. Retirement for athletes means a shift to needing to independently mange and structure their whole lives (Schwenk, et al., 2007).

Given the substantial life changes ensuing from retirement, many athletes struggle to adjust. Indeed, retiring athletes are particularly vulnerable to experiencing depression and other forms of psychopathology (Brewer, 1993). In a review of the literature, Wylleman et al. (2004) reported that some athletes experience clinical levels of depression (with suicide attempts being reported), identity crises, alcohol/substance abuse, decreased self-confidence and eating disorders following retirement from elite sport. In addition, athletes often pursue sporting careers to the detriment of their educational achievement, leaving athletes often ill-prepared for alternate careers and lifestyles after sport (McGillivray, et al., 2005). Such career and future uncertainty often further leaves athletes vulnerable to experiencing increased levels of anxiety into transition (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; W. M. Webb, et al., 1998). Athletes may also struggle with their changing bodies (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007), depression associated with ongoing chronic pain resulting from injuries sustained during sporting careers (Schwenk, et al., 2007), and, for some, the loss of a public role (W. M. Webb, et al., 1998). Accordingly, the retirement from elite sport can constitute a significant risk to athletes' psychological health and well-being.

Inevitably, however, not all athletes experience difficulties upon retiring. Indeed, several factors that are said to influence the ease with which athletes transition out of sport have been identified. For example, numerous studies have explored the relationship between athlete identity and the ease of adjustment to retirement. In such studies, athlete identity has typically been understood as the level of identification with the athlete role (Brewer, et al., 1993) and has usually been assessed using questionnaire methodologies. It has been suggested that individuals displaying exclusive athlete

50

identities (i.e., those who identify solely with the athlete role to the exclusion of other possible roles) are more vulnerable to transition difficulties, typically taking longer to adjust to retirement and having increased levels of stress and anxiety (Grove, et al., 1997). Other factors thought to be particularly influential in moderating the ease of transition are athletes' level of preparedness for retirement and the voluntariness, or degree of choice, the athlete has over the decision to retire (Grove, et al., 1997; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Wylleman, et al., 2004). When retirements are involuntary (e.g., due to injury or de-selection), it has been reported that athletes typically struggle more with the transition (both in the short- and long-term), especially if these terminations are also sudden and unexpected (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Wylleman, et al., 2004), with injury-forced retirement considered to be the most distressing (Lotysz & Short, 2004). Likewise, Webb et al. (1998) reported that a lack of control over the decision to retire is associated with retirement difficulties as well as being negatively linked with life satisfaction.

Hence, in the sport psychology literature exploring athletic career transition, psychological notions of identity and choice are highlighted as particularly salient in the outcomes and psychological well-being of retiring athletes. However, research in this field has typically occurred within a realist perspective, where identity is conceptualised as either a core inner essence of the individual, or as a matter of adherence to a social role. In this approach, decision making is located within the rational and autonomous individual. While some sociological research has begun to shift exploration of athletic identity away from traditional mainstream understandings and employ alternate approaches, such as narrative analysis (Tsang, 2000), interpretive biographical analysis (Jones, et al., 2005) and analyses informed by Bourdieu's work (McGillivray, et al., 2005; McGillivray & McIntosch, 2006), predominantly research has remained rooted in an essentialist epistemological framework.

This paper aims to explore the notions of identity and choice from an alternate, discursive psychological perspective, informed by social constructionism. Rather than viewing identity as an inner essence, in the approach taken here, identity can be understood as situated within the social realm, as something that is discursively and socially constructed in talk and text (Potter & Wetherell,

1987; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Accordingly, people cannot be treated as informants on their identities and what such identities lead them to think, feel and do (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b). Rather, as Edley (2001) argues, who we are is always in relation to discursive practices. That is, language comes to constitute (and reconstitute) the individual through the creation of subject positions (Davies & Harré, 1990). As descriptions and accounts shift in differing contexts of use and are used flexibly to do things in the world, so varied subject positions or identities are produced, shaped and taken up or resisted. With these varied positions come implications for ways of being, which ultimately frame subsequent experience and constrain behaviour (Burr, 1995). That is, with certain positionings come prescriptions for behaviour, actions and even choices that are morally acceptable or unacceptable for individuals who are so positioned. Furthermore, certain subject positions, or ways of being, come to be culturally dominant: They gain currency and become taken for granted in society as 'truth' (Edley, 2001). So certain positions and, thus, the obligations and responsibilities associated with those positions, can come to dominate at certain points in time, thereby making other identities, choices, and actions harder to access.

Accordingly, certain choices that people are seen to make also come to be culturally and discursively normalised, privileged, problematised, or demonised (depending on the subject positions ascribed and taken up or rejected), thus, constraining and limiting the actions that are made available (Gill, 2007). Therefore, when considering the notions of rational choice and agency, critical social psychologists have argued that we need to look beyond the individual and broaden the analytic frame to consider the social and cultural (Braun, 2009). Choice, then, comes to be seen as located within discursive practices and positionings, rather than as something individuals do within their own heads. In other areas of study, choice has been explored within such a framework. For example, in an exploration of New Zealand policy documents aimed at improving outcomes for women, Kahu and Morgan (2007) demonstrated how, in this policy context, women were positioned first and foremost as paid workers, with other subject positions made less accessible. Women's 'choices' to participate in the paid-workforce were, thus, discursively privileged over the 'choice' to engage in fulltime caregiver

roles, ultimately restricting and limiting the choices available to women. Similarly, Murtagh and Hepworth (2003) explored how dominant constructions in general practitioners' talk around women's choice and autonomy in menopause functioned to produce 'choice' in particular ways and, thus, constrain the health-care options available to women.

Accordingly, the investigation of identity and choice of athletes needs to move beyond assessing and exploring the individual. An investigation of the culturally dominant public discourse around athletes and retirement allows us to look beyond the individual and beyond constructions of choice as voluntary or involuntary, chosen by the individual or forced by injury or de-selection, to instead explore which actions are culturally favoured, normalised or problematised. Accordingly, this paper aims to explore the ways in which athletes' choices to retire from elite level sport are constructed, as well as the range of positions and choices that these constructions make available to athletes. In doing so, the goal is to expand our knowledge of the conditions that generate the difficulty and distress that many athletes report experiencing around career transition.

In order to look beyond the individual and instead explore dominant cultural understandings around athletes and their retirements and the ways certain subject positions and choices are favoured, the mass media becomes a site of exploration. Studying dominant media representations provides insight into the cultural assumptions and values that have come to appear as 'common sense' knowledge of the world (Wachs & Dworkin, 1997). The media also functions to produce and reproduce culturally shared understandings of the world, people and events (Lyons, 2000). Moreover, as Gardiner (2003) noted, the media is also a stage on which sporting identities are constructed and produced. Thus, it is through exploring media representations that insight into the ways in which certain 'choices' made by athletes are understood as appropriate, or not, and the subject positions made available for athletes can be gained.

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Data

The data analysed in this paper come from a corpus of Australian newspaper articles reporting the retirements of high-profile elite athletes. Retirement articles were collected across a one-year sampling period, from November 2006 - December 2007. During this period, the retirements of 19 athletes attracted considerable media attention and from these retirements, 248 articles were collected from four widely read Australian newspapers: *The Age, The Advertiser, The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*. These papers were selected on the basis of high readerships as well as being representative of a range of newspapers available throughout Australia. They represent a mix of both broadsheet and tabloid papers and also of newspaper ownership. Additionally, these papers were selected as they are produced in different states in Australia. Different sports enjoy different levels of popularity across the country and so this sampling strategy was used to ensure that articles on a wide range of sports were collected.

Within the Australian media, the sports of cricket and Australian Rules Football dominate, thus, as a result, the majority of the data collected came from reports of athletes competing in these two sports. In addition, a smaller number of articles were collected from other sports including swimming, netball, rugby and tennis. The patterns of reporting were typically similar across sports and no differences were noted in the types of reporting around athletes competing in team sports as opposed to individual sports. In addition, the majority of reporting within the Australian media focuses on male athletes. Accordingly, very few articles reporting retirements of female athletes were collected during the sampling period. While patterns within these accounts were often similar to accounts of male athletes, given the very small numbers of articles reporting on females, analysis in this paper focuses on reports of male athlete retirements.

3.3.2 Analysis

Analysis was informed by the principles of discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996). This constructionist approach aims to explore the ways in which language constitutes reality, specifically, by exploring how people, objects and events are constructed in and through language. Data were systematically examined to identify recurring themes, constructions and understandings of athlete identity and constructions of choice around retirement decisions. After initial coding, the data were then examined in more detail to allow for a fine-grained analysis of language use. That is, the specific ways in which athletes and their choices were created and built up, and the particular rhetorical practices and linguistic formulations regularly used to achieve these constructions, were examined (see Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wiggins & Potter, 2008).

3.4 Analysis and Discussion

Retirements of high-profile elite athletes attract considerable media attention and articles reporting sporting retirements appeared frequently throughout the sampling period. The sampled articles typically fell into three broad categories – retirements that were reported as occurring in relation to the age of the athlete, those occurring in relation to injury, and retirements reported as chosen by the athlete for other reasons (when uninjured and still 'young enough' to continue competing). The different types of retirement tended to be reported in different ways. However, all such accounts contained understandings around appropriate and inappropriate choices and decision making processes that functioned to position athletes in certain ways and to limit and restrict the choices available to them. In this paper each of these 'types' of retirement will be outlined in turn.

Numerous articles within the dataset depicted athletes as retiring due to their age. Although some retirements (as will be discussed below) were depicted as being controversial and the athlete's choice to retire was contested, typically the focus of these age-related retirement articles was on celebrating the athlete's career with minimal emphasis on the retirement itself or on the 'choice' to retire. Throughout these articles, there was a recurrent orientation to a 'right' time or age at which it became appropriate to retire. To play sport beyond this point was explicitly presented as undesirable, whereas retirements constructed as occurring at this 'right' time were uncontested and even praised. In addition, retirements constructed as occurring on the athletes' 'own terms' (i.e., with the athlete depicted as having individual agency over the decision to retire, rather than retiring because circumstances had required it) and whilst the athlete was still at the pinnacle of elite sport also went uncontested. Indeed to retire in this way was commended as being appropriate and even an ideal way in which to retire.

The following extract - reporting the retirement of Australian cricketer, Shane Warne - provides an example of how retirements presented as occurring at the 'right' time, when still 'on top', and with agency, left the athlete's decision to retire unquestioned and even commended the decision.

Extract 1

```
1    Warne's career on the cricket field has been superlative.
2    However, his judgment off the field has often been
3    questionable. Not so yesterday.
4    "My time is now," Warne declared at a packed press conference.
5    "I'm going out on top and I'm going out on my terms.
```

The Advertiser, 22/12/06

This extract illustrates the components that were repeatedly drawn on to constitute an appropriate retirement in the corpus. Warne is depicted as retiring when still at the pinnacle of sport ('going out on top', line 5), retiring at the appropriate time ('my time is now', line 4), and having agency

in the choice to retire ('I'm going out on my terms', line 5). His agency in the 'choice' is further worked up through the depiction of his retirement as a 'judgement' he has made (line 2). Formulating this decision as a judgement implies rational decision making, with Warne positioned as autonomously and actively considering and rationally electing retirement. Warne is also presented as 'declaring' (line 4) this 'judgement', which further builds a sense of rational and autonomous decision making. To declare something suggests certainty and confidence in the decision, thereby implying an actively considered and well thought-out decision, one that he can be confident to state. The use of personal pronouns such as 'I' (line 5) and 'my' (lines 4 and 5), as opposed to possible passive constructions such as 'it's time', also work to emphasise Warne's agency, presenting the decision as his own rather than as something that was externally determined. Depicting the retirement as occurring with agency, at the right time, and when he was 'on top', leaves it as uncontested and, moreover, commended. This lauding can be seen in the initial contrast structure (lines 2-3), where Warne's past public indiscretions, or 'questionable' past 'judgement', were contrasted with his current judgement. This contrast works to construct his retirement as good and appropriate; although his past judgement has been 'questionable', his current one is not. This praise functions to present this retirement as occurring in an ideal way.

The following extract provides another example of how constructing a retirement as occurring on the athlete's 'own terms' not only removes contestation around the retirement, but serves to praise and even to privilege such retirements. This extract comes from the end of an article reporting on the retirement of another Australian cricketer, Glenn McGrath.

Extract 2

```
1    But while his lanky and remarkably resilient body has allowed
2    him to become Australia's most durable paceman - and the third-
3    most experienced of all time with 122 Tests behind him - other
4    forces have finally led McGrath to call time on his career. He
5    at least has the deserved honour of leaving on his own terms.
```

This extract provides a further illustration of how retirements worked up as actively chosen were praised. The retirement here is constructed as chosen with agency through the formulation of McGrath having 'call[ed] time on his career' (line 4). To 'call time' arguably functions to suggest a non-arbitrary decision that is both considered by McGrath and rational, thus, presenting him as an active agent in the retirement decision. Furthermore, the frequently deployed trope 'own terms' (line 5) was invoked to depict McGrath's retirement as occurring with individual agency. Although some reference is given to external factors (lines 3-4), it is McGrath himself who is positioned as having agency over the decision, rather than these 'other forces'. As in Extract 1, having agency over the retirement decision is again celebrated and even presented as an 'honour' (line 5). It is interesting to note that this honour is hedged by the terms 'at least' (line 5). This qualification suggests that there is something inherently problematic with retiring, yet this retirement is rendered acceptable and uncontested as it occurs on the athlete's 'own terms'.

Presenting these forms of retirement as desirable and honourable functioned to privilege them. Further, not only was it repeatedly depicted as desirable to retire with agency and at the appropriate time, but to continue playing beyond this 'right' time was something that was repeatedly depicted as problematic. Indeed, to play for 'too long' was routinely presented as a 'danger'. Thus, to make an incorrect choice, or to fail to make the choice to retire at the appropriate time, was systematically constructed in these newspaper accounts as something that was questionable and undesirable. That is, a point was constructed at which athletes became positioned as *needing* to retire. This notion of continuing in sport for 'too long' is clearly illustrated in the following extract, which comes from an article reporting on the retirements of two Australian cricketers, Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath, after the Ashes series in 2006-07.

Extract 3

```
1      "It is a sad day, but it is also great that they have made the
2      decision themselves and have not risked staying on too long. It
3      was a pleasure to deal with both of them."
```

```
4    Commentator Ian Chappell, a leading batsman and Australian Test
5    captain of the 1970s, said the timing was right for both greats
6    to retire.
7    "I'm delighted for both of them that they are calling it a day
8    at the end of this series," he said.
9    "I think it's perfect timing for a champion player . . . if you
10   make a mistake it's best to get out a little early than a
11   little late."
```

This extract again highlights the desirability of athletes having individual agency over their retirement decision, and retiring at the 'right time'. Citing external 'expert' opinion (another highly successful Australian cricketer, Ian Chappell) works here to reinforce this version of retirement as preferable. However, as this extract highlights, not only is there depicted to be an ideal time for athletes to retire, but to continue beyond this time is represented explicitly as undesirable and problematic. Continuing to play past this point is problematised through its construction as a 'risk' (line 2) and, thus, as a danger to be avoided, as well as a 'mistake' (line 10), arguably implying a bad choice. This construction was bolstered by the preference given to quitting 'a little early' rather than 'a little late' (lines 10-11). This preference again works to build the notion that there is an ideal time at which athletes should retire. Thus, these formulations work to construct athletes who continue to play for 'too long' as acting inappropriately and as engaging in bad decision making.

Accordingly, to retire with agency, at the right time and whilst still at the top of the sport, was typically privileged as the appropriate way in which to retire. Indeed, athletes were repeatedly positioned as having a time at which it is preferable, even necessary, for them to make the choice to retire. Not to do so, or to retire at another time, was depicted as problematic. Interestingly, in such constructions, the exact 'time' at which it becomes 'right' to retire was not specified. Furthermore, although to retire on the athletes' 'own terms' was also repeatedly presented as commendable and ideal, in having a specific (and externally determined) time to retire, agency is therefore limited. As

such, this privileged agency around retiring is not necessarily possible in practice. Choice, although privileged, is constrained.

3.4.2 Retirement Through Injury

In articles reporting retirements occurring in relation to injury, little (if any) attention was paid to the retirement decision; it was something that remained unquestioned and uncontested. Typically, in such accounts, the athletes' agency for the retirement decision was minimised, with responsibility typically located within the athletes' body[3] and its inability to continue. Indeed, reporting around such retirements often used passive terms, with 'choice' words (such as 'judged', 'decided' and so on, as seen in other retirement accounts) typically absent. Moreover, athletes were repeatedly depicted as wishing to continue playing and having the mental ability to do so, but as unable to continue due to their fallible bodies. These depictions created a sense of sadness or misfortune around the retirement – athletes had the desire to continue, but were unable to do so – thereby reinforcing the construction of agentic retirements as preferable.

The following extract provides an example of typical reporting around retirements occurring due to injury and illustrates how the retirement choice goes uncontested. The extract comes from an article reporting on Darren Lehman, a prominent South Australian and former Australian cricketer, retiring from all levels of cricket.

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[3] Although it is acknowledged that there is an extensive literature exploring the 'body' and the mind/body dualism, the focus of analysis in this paper is on the way in which athletes' bodies were used as a rhetorical device to construct differing versions of choice and retirement

```
1    There was nothing particularly shocking about Lehmann's
2    announcement yesterday that he would be retiring after South
3    Australia's home matches against Western Australia this week.
4    The simple reason is that his 37-year-old body could no longer
5    take it. While his mind might still be sharp, the same could
6    not be said for his frail achilles tendon and dodgy back.
```

The Australian, 20/11/07

In this example the reason for retiring is formulated exclusively in terms of Lehmann's body. Presenting the retirement as being due to 'the simple reason' (line 4) of Lehmann's injuries, functions both to locate responsibility for the retirement in his body as well as to negate the need for further justification for the retirement – injury itself is a sufficient warrant. This retirement, then, remains uncontested and is even presented as inevitable or expected ('there was nothing particularly shocking about Lehman's announcement', lines 1-2). Contrastingly, although his body is presented as rendering him unable to continue competing, Lehmann's mind is constructed as having the ability to continue (line 5). Thus, this contrast between the ability of the athlete's mind and body to continue to compete was worked up to present the retirement as an unfortunate or sad event: His mind is able to continue, yet his body cannot. The created sense of misfortune is further highlighted in the following extract, which reports on champion player Nathan Buckley's retirement from the Australian Football League.

Extract 5

```
1    It was at that moment when his ragged hamstrings gave way again
2    that Buckley realised the body that had carried him through 15
3    seasons and 280 games had given up on him.
4    "My body is just not ready to go, I will never not want to play
5    the game - that will remain with me for the rest of my life -
6    (but) I just can't trust my body any more," he said.
```

In this example, Buckley's body is depicted as responsible for the retirement – 'my body is just not ready to go' (line 4), 'the body…had given up on him' (lines 2-3) - and this description functions to minimise Buckley's agency for the retirement decision. Furthermore, Buckley's decision to retire was formulated as a 'realisation' (line 2), which functions to deflect agency for the decision away from Buckley. A 'realisation' suggests that the retirement decision involved the discovery of an external truth, rather than an active and rational process of deciding not to continue. Moreover, this realisation is constructed as occurring at a precise 'moment' (line 1) and this again counters the possibility that it was a lengthy, thought-out and rational decision making process. Formulating this 'realisation' as occurring when his body 'gave way' (line 1), further locates responsibility for the retirement in his body. The contrast between the body - that is unable to continue - and Buckley's will - which sees him still wishing to compete - was worked up in this extract (lines 4-5). This formulation arguably builds a sense of misfortune around the retirement: Buckley has not chosen to retire, but has been forced to even though he has the will to continue.

Therefore, in the case of retirements presented as occurring in the context of injury (as with those related to age), the pattern of representation in this data corpus was that retirement decisions were not contested or presented as controversial, with the actual choice afforded minimal attention. Formulations constructing these retirements as 'choices' were largely absent from these accounts. (Yet it is worth noting that injury does not necessarily lead to retirement: Many athletes continue to compete after recovering from serious injury. Arguably, then, a choice is being made, although it is not constructed as such). Indeed, within the injury accounts, agency for the retirements was primarily placed within the body, rendering the athletes themselves somewhat passive in the decision making. Moreover, athletes were depicted as having the mental ability or requisite desire to continue, but as restricted by their bodies. These depictions functioned to foster a sense of sadness around such retirements. In doing so, the construction of retiring with agency as preferable or ideal was bolstered.

3.4.3. Contesting the Choice to Retire

Within the corpus, there were numerous articles reporting retirements that were depicted as actively chosen by the athletes on their 'own terms' when they were considered sufficiently young to continue playing and also retained the physical ability to do so. Although, as already discussed, retiring with individual agency was privileged in other retirement accounts, to actively choose to retire, in the absence of any external trigger (such as age or injury), was, in practice, presented as controversial. A typical feature of these articles - as was also noted in the age-related retirement accounts – was the notion of a right and appropriate time to retire. However, these agentic retirements were depicted as occurring *before* this right time and, accordingly, were portrayed as abnormal or problematic.

The following extract provides an illustration of how the notion of an externally determined 'right time' to retire was drawn on in questioning an actively chosen retirement. The extract comes from an article reporting on AFL footballer, Nathan Ablett, who, at the age of 21, was contemplating retirement.

Extract 6

```
1    Ablett yesterday started a month-long break from football, and
2    has until the Christmas break to decide whether to recommit
3    himself or retire prematurely at 21.
```

The Advertiser, 1/12/07

In constructing the retirement as 'premature' (line 3), this account orients to the notion of a boundary that governs appropriate ages and times for retirement. This formulation of prematurity further functions to present the retirement as something that is in some way abnormal: The retirement falls before the time that is expected or appropriate. Constructing retirements that occur when athletes are 'too young' or before the 'right time' as abnormal arguably works to problematise such occurrences. This problematising, then, suggests that athletes should continue to participate in elite sport (until the 'right time' is reached).

However, these retirements were not only problematised through the invocation of external time boundaries. Unlike the accounts of age- and injury-related retirements (where the retirement remained unquestioned), in these accounts where retirements were constructed as actively chosen, considerable accounting and justificatory work was typically seen. This additional accounting can be seen to bolster the depictions of such retirements as problematic: These particular retirements typically needed to be accounted for at length, whilst age- and injury-related retirements did not. Furthermore, in accounting for these retirements, agency for the decision was located solely within the individuals, who were worked up as acting rationally.

The following extract illustrates the pattern of discussion and contestation around retirements that was typical in 'actively chosen' retirement accounts. The extract further highlights the way rationality was routinely built up around this decision to retire. It comes from an article reporting on the retirement of AFL footballer, Stuart Dew, who retired when he was argued to be physically able to continue competing at an elite level.

Extract 7

```
1    Turn up for the Power's [Dew's team] premiership reunion dinner
2    in 2024 and inevitably the master of ceremonies will ask: "Now
3    Stuart, do you regret pulling the pin at just 27?" Today, Dew -
4    after mulling over his place in AFL football for more than nine
5    months - is ready for all of this. He suggests he will be
6    quickly forgotten as the AFL circus focuses on the new
7    sensation who will emerge in his absence.
8    Yet, Dew knows the question - why he left the AFL before it was
9    physically finished with him - will linger for years.
10   "Making it official (as Dew did on Monday) was tough," says
11   Dew. "But I walked away comfortable with what I have done. I
12   never thought, `What have I done?'
```

<div align="right">The Advertiser, 8/11/06</div>

As with the previous example, the notion of an appropriate age at which to retire is oriented to here. In this instance, Dew is depicted as currently too young to retire. The age at which he is retiring is problematised in line 3, particularly through the description of Dew as '*just* 27' (emphasis added). Dew's retirement is formulated as occurring before football 'was physically finished with him' (lines 8-9). This description locates typical or ideal agency for the timing of careers within the sport itself, rather than allowing Dew (or athletes generally) agency around this choice. This locating of agency further builds the idea that external boundaries govern when athletes should retire, subsequently also serving to problematise Dew's retirement: He has retired before the right time.

A recurrent way in which these contested retirement accounts were built up was to create the athletes as acting rationally in making a decision to retire. One way this was frequently achieved was through the building up of the length of time taken to make the retirement decision. In this extract, for example, the decision was presented as something that Dew 'mulled over' for 'more than nine months' (lines 4-5). The word 'mull' implies considered and ongoing thought and decision making (as opposed to possible other constructions, such as, that he had 'occasionally' considered retirement during this period, or had 'realised' that he needed to retire, as in Extract 5, thereby creating Dew here as a rational actor in this decision making process). Orientation to the future and to potential regret (lines 1-3) further function to represent Dew as making a rational choice. Although the decision is constructed as something inherently and inevitably (line 3) regrettable, Dew is subsequently constructed as rationally considering the choice to retire; such that he is 'comfortable' with this decision (line 11). Being 'comfortable' with the decision disavows the suggestion of potential regret. Although this retirement is constructed as something that is expected to be regretted in future, he is presented as having carefully considered the decision such that he is comfortable with it and will not come to regret it (it should be noted, however, that despite this construction, Dew returned to the AFL one year later).

In sum, throughout the dataset there were instances where athletes were depicted as having active and rational choice in making a decision to retire. Although such agency around the choice to retire was constructed as the ideal in other retirement accounts, in these accounts the decision to

retire was questioned and contested. Considerable accounting work was done to build up the rationality of retiring (arguably further orienting to the problematic nature of these retirements). This pattern of problematising 'premature' retirements works to position athletes as needing to continue participating in sport until the externally determined (but somewhat ambiguous) 'right' point in time is reached (or they are injured). Indeed, as was seen in the above example, to retire before the right time was constructed as something that is 'inevitably' (line 2) regrettable. Moreover, although to retire is constructed as problematic and regrettable, what is interestingly absent from accounts of actively chosen retirements is the idea that to continue playing may be a choice that could also be regretted. Decisions to play or to continue playing were not questioned in the data, nor were they presented as decisions. By contrast, electing to discontinue playing was constructed as something that is potentially (even inevitably) regrettable. This builds the notion that not only should athletes retire at the right time, but that athletes should (or even need to) continue competing if (and for as long as) they have the ability. As such, it can be seen that retiring from elite level sport is something that is strongly socially and morally regulated: Athletes *should* continue playing whilst they are young enough and physically able. Accordingly, athletes may be placed in a dilemmatic position: They need to retire before they have stayed 'too long', but also they should not retire 'too early'. However, what constitutes the 'right time' for retirement is never clearly specified. This regulation, then, positions athletes such that decision making is restricted (even though agency around retirement is constructed as preferable). Therefore, to retire according to the social and moral ideal appears, in practice, to be problematic and renders any such decisions highly contestable.

3.5 Conclusion

In the media representations of athletic retirements analysed here, three 'types' of retirement accounts were typically seen: Retirements related to the age of the athlete, those relating to injury, and those retirements that were depicted as actively chosen (independent of external forces). Presentations of retirement due to age saw the retirements being uncontested and even praised.

66

Indeed, within these accounts, constructions around preferable retirements could be seen. To retire with agency, on the athletes' own terms, and at the 'right time' (before having played for 'too long') were constructed as preferable and honourable. As Gill (2007) suggests, in depicting certain actions and choices as preferable, these become culturally privileged. Likewise, in depicting such retirements as preferable, these types of retirements come to be culturally sanctioned as the appropriate and ideal way in which to retire. To retire in the context of injury was not typically constructed as actively chosen by the athletes themselves, but as a necessary outcome of their fallible bodies. In these accounts, athletes were constructed as having the desire to continue competing, and a contrast between their internal desire and their bodies' limitations functioned to depict these retirements as unfortunate. The injury-related retirement accounts thus further privileged the ideal of retiring with agency, because when agency is removed from the individual athlete, the retirement is something that is both sad and a misfortune.

However, in the accounts where retirements were depicted as actively chosen by the individual athlete when their bodies were (constructed as) able to continue competing, the choice to retire was highly controversial. In these instances, athletes were depicted as retiring 'too soon' and before the 'right time'. Such retirements required considerable justificatory work, further orienting to the inherently problematic nature of these types of retirement. The problematising of these accounts where athletes were constructed as actively choosing to retire functioned to create these alternatives as deviant or less desirable, whilst simultaneously further privileging retirements constructed as occurring at the 'right time'.

Athletes are, thus, positioned as needing to continue playing until this appropriate 'right' time is reached. These constraints around the timing of careers and appropriate retirements subsequently limit and restrict choice around retiring. Yet (in addition to retiring at the 'right time') to retire with individual agency is also repeatedly constructed as preferable and ideal. However, in restricting the timing around athletes' careers, agency is also ultimately constrained. Thus, to retire according to the privileged version is, in practice, highly problematic. Through this favouring (and problematising) of

some versions of retiring from elite level sport, limited identity positions are made accessible to athletes and, subsequently, certain behaviours and decisions are deemed appropriate and inappropriate for athletes, which ultimately also constrain the choices that can be made.

Choice and identity have been strongly linked to psychopathology and clinical distress of athletes in the sport psychology literature (Brewer, 1993; Wylleman, et al., 2004). However, the understandings of choice and athlete identity that dominate the mainstream literature in sport psychology (e.g., Brewer, 1993) can also be understood in terms of the dominant cultural discursive practices around athletes and athletic performances. As Kahu and Morgan (2007) demonstrated, in and through discursive practices, available identity positions can be limited and this likewise limits choices that can be accessed and made. Similarly, the present exploration of media representations around sporting retirements suggests that culturally dominant discursive practices around retirement only allow limited subject positions and choices to athletes. This exploration of patterned discursive practices allows increased understanding of the contexts in which clinical concerns may arise for individual athletes, for whom only limited identity positions (and subsequently choices) appear culturally acceptable.

Understanding the ways in which athletes are positioned is an important consideration when dealing with the psychological well-being of athletes, particularly during transition. Traditional approaches suggest that retirements that are involuntary, or lack a choice on behalf of the athlete, are the most difficult to adjust to (Grove, et al., 1997; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Wylleman, et al., 2004). However, this exploration of the discursive practices around retirement and the ways in which athletes are positioned such that choice is minimised and constrained, challenge current understandings of choice around retiring and provide an alternative understanding of the lived experience of athletes before and during transition. Additionally, positioning athletes as needing to retire when a precise point is reached may have significant implications for athletes, especially given that athletes are often ill-prepared for life and alternate careers after sport (McGillivray, et al., 2005; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

Having being positioned as needing to play sport, alternate choices and positions may not be available to athletes when they, instead, become positioned as needing to retire.

Further, as this analysis has highlighted, athletes are positioned as needing to continue competing in elite sport until a certain point in time is reached. Accordingly, then, only limited identity positions are made available to athletes during their careers as well. This restriction in agency and choice may have further implications for athletes. Those athletes who are struggling with form, motivation and so on, are positioned such that to do other than continue competing is problematic and difficult. Again, an understanding of the social contexts within which distress may occur for athletes when limited identity positions are accessible can provide further insight into the experiences and difficulties of athletes.

In the privileging of certain types of retirements, limited identity positions are made available for athletes (both during their careers and into transition) and this, too, necessarily limits and restricts the choices that are available to athletes around playing and retiring from sport. Given the clear link in the sport psychology literature between identity, choice and transition difficulties, an understanding of the context in which these limited identity positions are constructed and reproduced in public forums may allow for enhanced understanding of the particular difficulties that athletes face during their sporting careers and during transition out of these careers.

Media Study: Paper Two

Career transitions and identity: A discursive psychological approach to exploring athlete identity in retirement and the transition back into elite sport

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Statement of contributors

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I was responsible for the study conception, literature review, data collection, data analysis, manuscript drafting, preparation and submission and reply to reviewers' comments.

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We provided ongoing supervision throughout the research programme that led to this manuscript and there was ongoing collaboration between Suzanne Cosh and us in refining the direction of the research. Suzanne Cosh was responsible for writing this paper; our role was to comment on drafts, make suggestions on the presentation of material in the paper, and to provide editorial input. We hereby give our permission for this paper to be incorporated in Suzanne Cosh's submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Adelaide.

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4.1 Abstract

Athletes' career transitions have received widespread research attention and have been identified as potentially distressing for athletes. Yet, the transition back into elite sport following retirement, although rare, has not been a focus of research attention. The concept of athlete identity has been widely researched within sport psychology to give insight into the varied experiences of athletes, especially in relation to the transition out of elite sport, and may provide additional insight into the transition back into competing at an elite level. Through adopting a discursive psychological approach to the examination of 84 newsprint media representations involving athletes and career transitions, the present study aims to explore dominant social understandings around athlete identity and the choices athletes make to compete (or not) in sport. In doing so, the aim is to add to existing literature around athlete identity and gain insight into the social contexts in which athletes choose to transition back into elite sport, as well as to extend the existing discursive psychological literature of sport and exercise into areas of athlete identity, career transition and the media. Returning to compete in elite sport was routinely depicted in media accounts as something that is not chosen, but as driven by emotion, compulsion, and a need to play. Such representations of athletes, construct their identity as necessarily motivated by emotion and compulsion.

4.2 Introduction

Athletes experience a number of transitions during their sporting careers, including the uptake of sport, transitioning into competing at an elite level, and retirement from sport (for an overview of development theories of career transitions, see   Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Côté, 1999; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman & Reints, 2010). Athletes' transitions have received widespread research attention and are considered an important topic, with failure to cope with such change often resulting in negative consequences including depression, anxiety, and alcohol and substance abuse (Stambulova, et al., 2009). Most transition research has focused on the transition

out of elite sport, with limited research having also considered the transition into elite competition. However, less common transitions, such as returning to elite sport following retirement, have not been addressed in the literature to date.

The transition out of sport, or retirement, has been widely agreed to be potentially distressing for athletes, with many struggling to adjust to retirement (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Lotysz & Short, 2004; W. M. Webb, et al., 1998; Wylleman, et al., 2004). In a review of the literature, Wylleman et al. (2004) suggested that athletes are vulnerable to experiencing a range of difficulties following retirement including: depression, identity crises, alcohol/substance abuse, and eating disorders. Increased levels of anxiety have also been noted amongst retiring athletes (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; W. M. Webb, et al., 1998). Involuntary retirement - that is, those occurring due to injury or de-selection - are reported to be more distressing for athletes, especially when they are sudden and unexpected (Lotysz & Short, 2004; W. M. Webb, et al., 1998; Wylleman, et al., 2004; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), with choice over the decision to retire suggested to mediate ease of adjustment to retirement (Ceci, Wylleman, & Zupan, 2004; Grove, et al., 1997; Lavallee, Grove, & Gordon, 1997; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Wylleman, et al., 2004).

The transition into elite sport has also received limited research attention (Bruner, et al., 2008; MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010a, 2010b; Pummell, et al., 2008). This transition has been reported to be highly stressful for athletes as they adjust to new demands associated with increased training and expected performance outcomes, as well as new psychological and psychosocial challenges encountered at an elite level (Stambulova, et al., 2009). Through interview research, MacNamara et al. (2010a, 2010b) identified that psychological characteristics, such as commitment, competitiveness, vision, self-belief and imagery were associated with successful transition into elite level competition. Furthermore, in interview research exploring the experiences of eight Canadian ice hockey players transitioning into an elite amateur league, Bruner et al., (2008) noted that the studied athletes reported experiencing transition difficulties both on and off the ice, particularly in relation to performance stress and changes in psychosocial support. In a further interview study, equestrian

riders reported sacrificing academic and social pursuits to adjust to the transition into competing at regional level (Pummell, et al., 2008). Thus, identity foreclosure was identified as a risk of the transition into elite level sport.

Given the potentially distressing nature of other career transitions, it appears likely that the transition back into elite sport following retirement may also be stressful. Yet this transition has not been explored. Insights into athletes' experiences during the transition back into elite sport might be drawn from the body of literature that explores the return to elite sport following injury (see Podlog & Dionigi, 2010; Podlog & Eklund, 2009; Webster, Feller, & Lambros, 2008), although there has been an emphasis on exploring athletes' fear of re-injury (Kvist, Ek, Sporrstedt, & Good, 2005; Tripp, Stanish, Ebel-Lam, Brewer, & Brichard, 2007) and defining 'successful' return to elite sport (see Podlog & Eklund, 2009). Survey research has shown that whether athletes' motivation to return to elite sport following injury is intrinsic or extrinsic impacts on athletes' subsequent outcomes, with extrinsic motivation being associated with decreased confidence, increased performance anxiety, and fear of re-injury (Podlog & Eklund, 2005). However, study participants reported intrinsic motivation to be the most salient in their decisions to return to elite sport following injury. Although research exploring the transition into elite sport, and the return to elite sport after injury, may offer some insights into the transition from retirement back into elite sport, the particular experiences of athletes in this specific and unique transition have not been examined. Moreover, the reasons for returning to elite sport following retirement remain unresearched.

4.2.1 Athlete Identity

The concept of athlete identity has been widely researched within sport psychology in order to shed light on the varied experiences of athletes. The extant athlete identity literature has predominantly conceptualised identity as the level of identification with the athlete role, and has operationalised identity as a trait-like predictor of other variables (Brewer, et al., 1993). In research

exploring athlete identity, it has been considered to be a factor that can mediate the ease of adjustment to retirement (Ceci, et al., 2004; Lally, 2007; Lavallee, 2005; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Lotysz & Short, 2004), with strong athlete identity (i.e., those who identify strongly with the athlete role) having also been linked to experiences of depression following retirement (Horton & Mack, 2000). Athletes with exclusive athlete identities (i.e. whose identity is formulated solely in terms of their role as an athlete) are reported to be more vulnerable to experiencing difficulties, typically taking longer to adjust to retirement and having increased levels of stress and anxiety (Grove, et al., 1997).

Moreover, the body of literature exploring athlete identity has suggested links between identity and a range of other experiences of athletes, including a relationship between identity and overtraining as well as anxiety when not training (Horton & Mack, 2000; Stephan & Brewer, 2007). Athlete identity has also been reported to be a significant predictor of emotional difficulties and depression following injury (Brewer, 1993; Brewer, Cornelius, Stephan, & Van Raalte, 2010; Green & Weinberg, 2001), and subsequent adherence to rehabilitation (Brewer et al., 2000). Identity has also been linked with alcohol misuse amongst US college students (K. Miller et al., 2003), the development of Social Physique Anxiety (Martin, 1999) and anxiety around aging and future bodily changes (Phoenix, Faulkner, & Sparkes, 2005). Accordingly, athlete identity is an important construct to consider when exploring the experiences of athletes and an exploration of identity in the transition back into elite sport may offer insight into this specific transition experience.

4.2.2 Theoretical and Methodological Approach

The role theory conceptualisation of athlete identity that has typically been adopted in the sport psychology literature has received critique. Some theorists have argued that role theory implies that identities are static, formal, ritualistic and unchanging and, thereby, overlooks the possibility that identity can be dynamic and changing (Davies & Harré, 1990). Thus, in contrast to other research in this area, this paper adopts a discursive psychological approach to explore athlete identity and the

choice to return to elite level competition. The application of a discursive psychological approach to research in exercise and sport psychology is relatively new (for discussion on the use of discursive psychology in sport see Locke, 2004) and has been used to explore exercise adherence (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010), as well as attributions (Finlay & Faulkner, 2003; Locke, 2004), emotion in sport (Locke, 2003), and performing in 'the zone' (Locke, 2008).

Discursive psychology challenges the assumption that language is a passive tool through which internal psychological constructs can be accurately described and accessed (Locke, 2004; McGannon & Mauws, 2000). Rather, in adopting a constructionist perspective, discursive psychology views language as socially performative (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Locke, 2004; McGannon & Spence, 2010; Potter, 1996). That is, in and through language, versions of the world, people, objects and events are built up and constructed, and it is these constructed versions that constitute our experiences of the world (Hepburn & Potter, 2003). Traditional approaches within sport psychology typically conceptualise identity as the adherence with a social role, with identity residing within the individual's mind as an inner essence or trait, which then guides actions and behaviours (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b). Discursive psychology, however, argues that psychological constructs such as identity cannot be accessed and measured independent of language but, instead, these notions need to be explored within the language practices that create them. Thus, rather than view identity as an internal adherence with a role that can be accessed and explored through participants filling in questionnaires or through analysis of individual responses to interview questions, identities are viewed as being created and produced in and through discursive practices (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b).

Accordingly, through language the subject is constituted by the creation and ascription of subject positions, which come to constitute the identity of the individual (Davies & Harré, 1990). Through repeated reproduction, certain constructions of people and events become culturally dominant and are understood within society as common-sense truths about how people are and should act (Edley, 2001). Thus, subject positions come to constitute dominant understandings of how people so positioned should be. The ways in which people experience the world are then by-products

of subject positions in which people locate themselves and others. Within subject positions come prescriptions for behaviour, actions and choices that are morally acceptable and appropriate (or not) for someone so positioned (Edley, 2001). Accordingly, alternate actions and behaviours become harder to access. As has been demonstrated within exercise psychology (see McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010) a discursive psychological approach can thus build on previous research that has explored athlete identity from a role theory conceptualisation. In exploring identity as produced and created in and through discursive practices, rather than as an internal trait located within an individual that can be accessed and uncovered by asking people about their identity, novel understandings of, and insights into, athletes' identity and, subsequent, experience can be gained.

Given that traditional approaches to exploring identity typically conceptualise identity as an internal adherence with a role, that comes to be subsumed within the mind of the individual, athlete identity has typically been assessed through questionnaire methods, particularly using the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (Brewer, et al., 1993) and other surveys such as the Athlete Identity Questionnaire (Anderson, 2004). In addition, some qualitative methods, typically content-analytic approaches to analyses of interview data, have also been employed. As such, the existing literature subscribes not only to one understanding of identity but, therefore, to similar epistemological and methodological approaches to its study (i.e. questionnaire and content analysis of interviews). Although these approaches have contributed to the development and understanding of the concept of athlete identity, the use of quantitative and content-analytic research methods is not without limitations. It has been argued that questionnaires are highly reductionist and content analyses have also been criticised for providing an overview of the data without offering depth or detail (Finlay & Faulkner, 2003; Locke, 2004; Wilkinson, 2000). Given that exploring identity as isolated within the realm of an individual's head does not make possible the exploration of identity as socially and discursively accomplished, novel methodological approaches for studying identity from a discursive psychological perspective are necessary. Thus, in addition to building on previous research by offering an alternate understanding of identity, discursive psychological approaches also offer different

methodological and analytic approaches, which overcome the limitations of coding and quantifying content by focusing on the fine-grained detail of repeated representations of identity (and other psychological notions) in language and the broader functions these might serve.

Moreover, within discursive psychology there is an increasing trend towards using naturally occurring data (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2005). That is, increasingly talk and text that are produced without the researchers' involvement are considered a preferable focus of study. In naturally occurring data, participants talk about issues which are relevant at a given point in time, without influence from a researcher (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). By contrast, self-report data (in interview and questionnaires) rely on individuals making sense of, and explaining, their own experience and identity. Narrative analytic approaches, likewise, rely on the individual to tell and inform about their own identity. Many theorists, however, have argued that people cannot be treated as informants on their own identity; rather, constructionist approaches posit that psychological constructs, including identity, are the product of social interaction and discursive practices (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b). Accordingly, naturally occurring data can be used to explore the discursive practices in and through which identities are constructed and created (Potter & Hepburn, 2005, 2007).

The present study adopts a discursive psychological approach to exploring athlete identity and the transition back into elite sport in order a) to contribute to the literature on athlete identity by drawing on an alternate epistemological approach, b) to extend existing discursive psychological literature in sport and exercise psychology, and c) to offer insight into the transition back into elite sport and social contexts in which such transitions take place. This paper analyses a corpus of newsprint media representations both of athletes' comebacks and also retirements, drawing on the principles of discursive psychology. In contrasting how retirement and comeback accounts are produced, additional insight into identity constructions around the transition back into elite sport can be gained. The media produces and reproduces culturally-shared understandings of the world, people and events (Lyons, 2000) and is a site in which sporting identities are constructed and produced (Gardiner, 2003). In analysing the ways in which events are constructed in media representations, the

aim is to move beyond exploring the individual and gain insight into dominant constructions of elite athletes and their identity and to gain insight into the social contexts in which decisions around competing (and not competing) in sport are made. The present paper explores media accounts of two instances in which athletes, subsequent to retirement, elected to return to elite level competition. In addition, the ways in which retirements were depicted and accounted for were also examined to further elucidate the ways in which athletes' identities were constructed and reproduced within the media accounts. Accordingly, the questions this paper endeavours to answer are: How are normative retirements routinely constructed within the Australian newsprint media? How is the return to elite levels typically depicted? How do these accounts construct athletes' identity? What subject positions are made available and what actions and choices do these subject positions allow or constrain?

4.3 Method

4.3.1 Data

A corpus of over 250 newspaper articles reporting athletic transitions was gathered from four widely-read Australian newspapers: The Age, The Advertiser, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian across a one-year sampling period (November 2006 - December 2007). These newspapers were selected on the bases of having wide readerships and representing a mixture of the print media available in Australia. These papers reflect a mix of both broadsheet and tabloid papers and also of newspaper ownership[4], as well as being produced in different states in Australia. This sampling strategy was employed to ensure a broad range of articles, representative of the Australian context, was collected.

Within the sampling period, a series of 23 articles reporting the decisions of two elite athletes to make comebacks to elite level competition were collected. During this period, there were numerous

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[4] *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* are owned by Fairfax Media, and *The Australian* and *The Advertiser* are owned by the rival News Corporation. *The Age, The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* are broadsheet newspapers; *The Advertiser* is a tabloid.

articles reporting on the retirement of 19 athletes. The retirement accounts depicted retirements as occurring due to the athletes' age, due to an injury, or as chosen for other reasons. The focus of the present paper is to contrast the 'chosen' retirement accounts with the accounts of the return to elite sport, as it is this comparison which most succinctly illustrates how identity is constructed in media accounts of transition. Thus, the retirement accounts examined in this paper are of retirements often referred to as 'normative' transitions within the sport psychology literature (i.e. not the result of de-selection or injury etc., see Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Additional focus on non-normative types of retirements (i.e. involuntary) was outside of the scope of this paper. All articles collected reported the retirement and comebacks of athletes competing at an international level, or competing in the Australian Football league (the highest level of competition for this sport). Media accounts were collected from a range of sports including swimming, netball, rugby, cricket, Australian Rules Football, and tennis[5]. The majority of articles appearing in the newspapers throughout the sampling period focussed on male athletes. Although patterns within accounts of males and females were similar, given the very small numbers of articles reporting on female athletes, analysis in this paper focuses on reports about male athletes.

4.3.2 Analytic Method

Analysis of the newsprint media was informed by the principles of discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996). Discursive psychological analyses differ from alternate methods of qualitative research. Unlike thematic analyses, the aim is to explore the ways in which people, objects and events are constructed and the specific rhetorical devices and strategies (see Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wiggins & Potter, 2008) through which such versions are created, rather than a specific focus on identifying and presenting broad general themes and subthemes in the data. Moreover, as is typical in discursive psychology, a selected number of extracts that are representative

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[5] Patterns of reporting were typically similar across sports and no differences were noted in the types of reporting around athletes competing in team sports as opposed to individual sports.

of the dataset are presented and these are analysed in detail in order to explore how people and objects are constructed. Although some qualitative approaches draw on inter-rater reliability of coded themes, validity and credibility is assessed in discursive psychology by the presentation of detailed extracts. For a full discussion of reliability, validity and transferability in discursive psychology in the context of sport, see Locke (2004).

The focus of analysis in this paper was on examining the ways in which athlete identities were recurrently constructed and reproduced in the collected media accounts, and on the linguistic devices and resources through which identities were worked up and constructed in accounts of retirements and comebacks. The regulatory work that such dominant constructions may accomplish was also considered. Thus, analysis in this paper drew on a synthetic approach informed by Wetherell and Edley (1999) between fine-grained analysis of how language is used to perform social actions, and the broader patterns of collective-sense making that talk reflects. Exploring how decisions around retiring and returning to elite sport were worked up in and through media representations, allowed for examination of how identities were constructed and of the subject positions that were made available in accounts of decisions about competing in sport (or not). The corpus was examined to explore how retirement and sporting comebacks were typically depicted and the versions of athletes that these accounts routinely constructed and reproduced. A smaller dataset of the 84 articles reporting comebacks and 'chosen' retirements was then explored in further depth in order to explore the rhetorical devices through which such versions of athletes were constructed and created.

4.4 Analysis

Exploration of media accounts of retirements and comebacks allows for insight into the social and discursive practices in and through which identities are constructed and created. This paper explores, in turn, retirement and comeback accounts. Representative examples of how these accounts were routinely worked up and the ways in which identities were constructed throughout the

corpus are presented for both retirement and comeback accounts. It will be argued that retiring is constructed as a rational decision making process, whereas competing in sport is commonly depicted as based purely on emotion[6]. Accordingly, athletes are constructed as driven by emotion and compulsion, rather than as actively choosing to return to compete at an elite level. Recurring descriptions of the reasons why athletes choose to return to play sport position athletes in certain ways. That is, their identity as athletes with appropriate motivation is reproduced and such identity constructions gain currency and become accepted as common-sense understandings of what it means to be an athlete. When particular versions of reasons for playing sport at elite level gain such currency, alternate forms of motivation can be difficult to defend and, likewise, alternate identity positions may become difficult to occupy.

4.4.1 Retirement Accounts

Within the media accounts examined, retirement, when not in the context of injury, age or de-selection, was typically presented as controversial and as requiring rational accounting to justify or warrant the choice. The invocation of a long time-frame taken to decide upon retiring was recurrently used to present retirements as decisions that were rationally arrived at. Furthermore, an absence of emotion was drawn on to further construct retirements as justified, even when the athlete had the physical ability to continue competing, thereby further depicting retirement as based on rationality. By contrast, decisions to return to compete in sport were routinely presented as based on emotion and, as such, did not require rational accounting. The following extract provides an example of how an athlete's decision to retire was presented as a rational choice. The extract comes from an article reporting the retirement of Australian swimmer Ian Thorpe. It makes evident a number of reasons that were commonly used to describe why athletes play sport.

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[6] It should be noted that this is not to argue that athletes necessarily experience retirement as rational and the return to elite sport as based on emotion and do not engage in decision making. Rather, it is argued that this is how these transitions are routinely constructed within media accounts. Such constructions then have implications for athletes' ways of being.

Extract 1

```
 1    He acknowledged yesterday there was still life in his body, but

 2    revealed that there was no spark of desire left in his mind.

 3    "It isn't the best time for me to be walking away from the

 4    sport, but it's my time," he said. "If I stood in front of a

 5    mirror, it looked right for me from the outside. Physically I

 6    had it there, I could do it, I was physically in shape. Inside

 7    I had nothing, it wasn't there any more."

 8    Thorpe knows better than anyone that to be a champion athlete

 9    is an act of will, built on the blessing of natural physical

10    ability. Without the desire, the skill, fitness and talent do

11    not amount to greatness.

12    If the will is lost, and Thorpe is convinced it is, then it is

13    pointless for him to go through the motions, whether it be for

14    the public, his family, his team-mates or his supporters.

15    He will never be great in the pool again, the divine fire has

16    gone out.

17    It has been a long, slow, agonising process for Thorpe to reach

18    this conclusion. He has not reached it lightly nor abruptly, he

19    has searched his soul and taken professional counsel to be

20    sure.
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The Australian, 22/11/06

This extract presents an example of the way retirement decisions were recurrently presented as rational in the corpus. The rationality of the retirement decisions was routinely worked up in several ways. The invocation of a long time-frame around the decision making process was used, here depicting Thorpe as having made a rational choice ('a long, slow, agonising process', line 17; 'not reached it lightly nor abruptly', line 18). Reporting the choice as 'agonising' and something deeply considered (or not taken lightly) and the reference to consultation with others (line 19), further suggests serious consideration was given to this decision (rather than being made spontaneously or for emotional reasons). These features bolster the rationality of the decision to retire. The accounting

work seen in this extract - typical of that seen throughout the data set - also functions to problematise the decision as something that must be accounted for and justified, rather than something that is considered acceptable and appropriate.

Further evident in this extract (and recurrent throughout the data) was a pattern of drawing on emotion to build up the rationality of the retirement. That is, an absence of emotion - having 'lost' the 'passion' and 'desire' to continue - was used in most articles to account for retirement decisions. Thus, the retirements were presented as rational, because without requisite emotion, continuing was depicted as not possible. Typically, a contrast was drawn between an athlete's 'will' and their body's abilities. Athletes were regularly depicted as having the physical ability to continue competing successfully in elite level sport, yet being unable to do so due to psychological notions like the mind, will and desire. In the above extract, reference to Thorpe's remaining physical capability was made on several occasions ('still life in his body', line 1; 'physically I had it there', lines 5-6; 'I was physically in shape', line 6). These descriptions were contrasted with the lack of emotion: 'no spark of desire left in his mind' (line 2), 'inside I had nothing, it wasn't there anymore' (lines 6-7) and 'the divine fire has gone out' (lines 15-16). This contrast between the mind and the body's abilities constructs competing in elite level sport as contingent on emotion, passion and will (over and above having the physical ability to compete). While Thorpe possessed these requisite emotions, he was able to compete successfully; when these emotions were gone, competing was no longer possible. Describing this lost passion and desire using extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) such as 'no spark of desire' (line 2), 'inside I had nothing' (line 6), and 'he will never be great in the pool again, the divine fire has gone out' (lines 15-16) further functions to justify the need for retirement. Extreme case formulations are used in everyday language to achieve rhetorical ends including strengthening and legitimising claims (Edwards, 2000). Extreme case formulations work here to construct the emotionality inherently associated with sport as permanently and completely lost, rather than as something that is temporarily, transiently, or only partially lost. As such, the retirement is warranted. In depicting a loss of emotion as requiring the athlete's transition out of elite level sport, reasons for playing sport were

also implied. Competing in sport was constructed as something that is not actively or rationally chosen (as retirement is), but as driven by emotion, the absence of which warrants retiring. This depiction also constructs the identity of athletes as necessarily driven by emotion, passion and desire, rather than as people who actively make a choice to engage in sporting pursuits.

Also notable in Extract 1 (and elsewhere in the dataset) was the invocation of religious language, such as 'divine fire' (line 15) and 'searched his soul' (line 19). The use of such language presents competing in elite sport as motivated by more than emotional (or rational) reasons. Rather it works up a sense of athletes having a higher calling, or purpose, in life. Constructing competing as a part of a higher calling further illustrates what are understood as appropriate motivations and actions for athletes.

The following extract also highlights the use of 'lost' emotion to work up a justification for, and the rationality of, retirement decisions. It comes from an article reporting on Australian Rules footballer Nathan Ablett's retirement.

Extract 2

```
1    At an age when the best key forwards in the game should be
2    starting to impose themselves on the national competition,
3    Ablett has decided to ``take a break'' from the pressures of
4    life in the AFL. ``I feel as though I don't have the passion
5    and the commitment to continue playing at the highest level,''
6    Ablett said yesterday. ``To do so therefore would be unfair to
7    the club and the players.
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The Australian, 8/11/07

The controversial nature of the decision to retire is oriented to in this extract. In the first line, a contrast is drawn between Ablett's contemplation of retirement, and what other aspiring footballers his age are, or should be, doing. In drawing this comparison, Ablett's action in 'tak(ing) a break' (line 3) was depicted as abnormal. Problematising the decision to retire functions to present continuing to play sport as what he *should* be doing. To account for this retirement decision, the notion of missing

84

emotion is again drawn on, presenting Ablett as making a rational decision to retire ('I don't have the passion', line 4). Reference to Ablett's obligation to the team and the club further presents his loss of emotion as a justification for retiring. That is, not only is it depicted as being not possible to play without the required passion, but that to do so would be 'unfair' to these others.

Accordingly, within retirement accounts, understandings of what are appropriate motivators for competing in elite sport were evident. There is a clear culturally sanctioned emphasis on *playing*, rather than not. To retire from elite sport (when physically able to continue), therefore, is presented here as something that is problematic. In depicting these retirement choices as questionable, athletes are positioned as needing to elect to continue competing in sport (for as long as they are physically able). Moreover, in the retirement accounts analysed, a contrast between reason and emotion was recurrently drawn. To play sport was depicted as driven by emotion rather than as rationally and actively decided upon. Emotion, passion and desire were depicted as crucial components of an athletes' ability to play, without which retirement was warranted and even necessary. By contrast, to retire was depicted as a rational and well-thought-out decision making process. Furthermore, the use of religious language throughout the data oriented to notions of participation in sport being driven by a calling or purpose in life. Accordingly, athletes were ascribed identity positions as people motivated by emotion and a higher calling. The repeated reproduction of such identity positions in the media enhances the dominance of such positions, making alternate identity positions (and, subsequently, appropriate choices, actions and motivators) harder for athletes to occupy and enact. Dominant versions of appropriate athlete identity can be further seen through a comparison of these retirement reports with media accounts of athletes who chose to return to elite level sport, following earlier retirements.

4.4.2 Comeback Accounts

Although retiring from elite sport was often subject to debate in the current dataset, accounts of athletes' decisions to return to competing in elite sport were not accompanied by similar questioning.

Indeed, playing sport was not typically presented as something that was actively chosen by athletes. Within the data collection period there were a limited number of articles reporting that, subsequent to retirement, two athletes had returned to elite level competition. The reporting of comebacks contrasted starkly with the reporting of the initial retirements of these athletes. In both cases, the retirements had sparked considerable controversy, with both athletes portrayed as sufficiently young and physically able to continue competing. However, despite the rarity of sporting comebacks, articles reporting the returns of both athletes did not render their decisions as contestable or controversial, nor did their decisions require justification (as their actions in retiring had). Instead, the return to sport was depicted as something that was natural and even inevitable, with the athletes depicted as being unable to stay away from competition. Moreover, the action of returning to sport was not typically presented as a decision but as a realisation on the part of the athlete of needing or wanting to play. In contrast with retirement accounts, this realisation was described as requiring only a short time-frame to reach.

The following extract illustrates the style of reporting used in comeback articles to present decisions to return to competing at elite level as natural and uncontested (rather than as problematic or controversial). It comes from an article reporting Australian Rules Footballer Fraser Gehrig's announcement of his return to elite level competition less than three months after his initial retirement.

Extract 3

```
1    The dual Coleman medallist lasted just 85 days, from the time
2    he was chaired from the MCG after St Kilda's round-22 win over
3    Richmond until last Saturday morning when the Saints called his
4    name as the 57th pick of the national draft.
5    Nor could the realisation that he still had the passion to play
6    AFL football have come in any more atypical surrounds than the
7    freezing cold of Schaffhausen, on the Swiss-German border.
8    On his first day back with his old club - barely a day after
9    returning to the country - Gehrig recalled the moment he
10   decided to give football another shot. "I was at the local gym
11   and having a run on the treadmill and looking out over the
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12      Rhine River, and it was cold and snowing, and I thought: 'Oh
13      well, if I'm going to be running on a stupid treadmill here, I
14      probably should be running around a footy field'," he laughed.
```

As can be seen in this extract, the reporting around the decision to return to playing differs from the way in which retirement decisions were routinely presented. Rather than contesting or debating the decision, the athlete's choice to return to competitive sport was downplayed. Phrases such as 'he laughed' (line 14), 'give football another shot' (line 10), and 'probably should be running around a footy field' (line 14) not only failed to question the choice to return, but also gave the article a casual tone. This casual reporting serves to minimise the comeback to elite level sport, presenting it as something that does not require serious discussion or debate. The unproblematic nature of the comeback can further be seen through the presentation of Gehrig's account for his return. He was depicted as 'recalling' and 'telling' his reasons for returning (rather than using possible alternate terms, such as 'claimed', 'insists' and so on) and the use of these terms functions to suggest that this 'telling' is not motivated. That is, he was depicted as recalling an event and telling his reasons, rather than producing an account aimed at convincing or justifying questionable actions.

An additional way in which the reporting of comeback decisions contrasted with the reporting around retirements was in the time taken to arrive at these decisions. Whereas to retire was presented as involving a lengthy and rational decision making process, decisions to return to sport were depicted as spontaneous and based on emotion. Gehrig's decision to return was presented as one that involved a 'realisation' (line 5) that occurred in a 'moment' (line 9) and was based on 'passion' (line 5). Thus, the decision to return was not presented as the result of a rational decision making process, rather, the use of terms such as 'realisation' (line 5) and 'the moment' (line 9), further work to depict Gehrig's return as unmotivated. That is, Gehrig was not presented as taking time to consider additional external motivators (such as money, fame and so on) and as making a decision based on these. Rather, his return was presented as a realisation or rediscovery of a passion to play.

Indeed, returning to playing sport was not only presented as based on emotion and desire. Within comeback accounts, playing sport was further presented as something of a compulsion or need. Made visible in this account was a depiction of Gehrig as unable to stay away from playing sport and, thus, to return was natural and even inevitable. This sense of compulsion was worked up though reference to the short duration of his retirement ('lasted *just* 85 days, from the time he was chaired from the MCG, line 1, italics added). Presenting the timeframe in days (rather than weeks or months) emphasises the short duration of his initial retirement. Moreover, Gehrig was depicted as having 'lasted' only a matter of days without playing football. Again this lexical choice creates a sense of compulsion around playing sport. The formulation is similar to what might be expected in accounts of giving up an addiction. Reference to Gehrig returning to training 'barely a day after returning to the country' (lines 8-9) also builds the sense of being unable to stay away from playing elite sport. Playing sport, then, was not depicted as a choice that athletes were actively making, but as inherently a part of who they are as athletes. Hence, athletes' identities can be seen as understood to involve a compulsion and need to compete (and return to compete) in elite sport for as long as they are physically able.

The following extract provides an additional illustration of the way in which the return to sport, in contrast with retirements, was presented as uncontroversial and based on emotional reasons. It comes from an article reporting another footballer, Stuart Dew's, subsequent return to the AFL.

Extract 4

```
1    ``Spending time in the media has helped me find my love for the
2    game again,'' he said.
3    ``I enjoyed my time away but to get another opportunity at a
4    club like Hawthorn is fantastic. I feel I've still got some
5    more good football left in me.''
6    Dew, 28, cited a lack of motivation and losing his competitive
7    edge for his shock decision to walk away last year.
```

The Advertiser, 26/11/07

The non-problematic nature of returning to sport is highlighted in this extract through the contrast with the description of Dew's initial retirement decision. Whereas to retire was depicted as a 'shock decision' (line 7), the return to sport was not problematised. In this extract, Dew's account for returning to sport was presented as something that was 'said' (line 2). Like the use of 'telling' in Extract 3, the use of the descriptor 'said' (as opposed to alternate speech terms) arguably functions to position this telling as unmotivated – he was presented as providing a factual telling, not justifying or accounting for his decision. By contrast, Dew's reasons for retiring were presented using the verb 'cited' (line 6). 'Cited' is a term commonly used when drawing on evidence to strengthen or justify a claim. Using 'cited' here functions to depict the retirement as requiring explanation and justification and, therefore, as something that is questionable. The unproblematic nature of returning to sport (in contrast with the routine contestation of retirements where athletes had the physical ability to compete) presents returning to competition as natural and appropriate. Accordingly, athletes were positioned as people who inevitably will, and should, compete in sport. Furthermore, a contrast between reason and emotion is again invoked. The rational reasons for which Dew retired are listed (lines 6-7), whereas the reasons for his comeback are again formulated in emotional terms – 'my *love* for the game' (lines 1-2, italics added), 'I *feel* I have some more good football in me' (lines 4-5, italics added). This emotional framing further positions athletes as driven by passion and emotion, rather than by external motivators (e.g., money, prestige, status).

The following extract provides further evidence of the ways in which competing in sport was presented as based on emotion and even as a compulsion. It comes from another article reporting on Gehrig's return.

Extract 5

```
1    FRASER Gehrig spent the last years of his career doubting the
2    wisdom of continuing to play.
3    Having made the decision not to only three months ago, he has
4    surprisingly discovered that he must.
```

As has been seen in previous extracts, the return to sport was not problematised here but, rather, it was presented without the types of accounting that were typically presented in the retirement articles. In this extract (as was recurrent throughout the data) returning to play was not presented as an active choice, but rather as something the athlete had to, or '*must*' (line 4, italics added), do. Indeed, terms presenting this comeback as a choice were interestingly absent from this corpus, in contrast with articles reporting on retirements.

Drawing on the earlier retirement decision, specifically its short time-frame ('only three months ago', line 3), functions again to construct a sense of compulsion around playing: Even when he tried to retire, Gehrig was unable to discontinue, even for a short time. The contrast between the lengths of time taken to decide to retire and to return to sport also constructs competing in sport as based on emotion. Whereas to retire was depicted as a rational process that took 'years' to reach a decision, Gehrig was presented as taking only 'three months' to realise that he needed to continue to play. Moreover, presenting his return in terms of a 'discovery' works in a similar way to the use of the term 'realisation' in Extract 4, suggesting that this return was not motivated by glory or money (and other external motivators) but, rather, that to play sport was something he was compelled to do.

By exploring reports of sporting comebacks, it is possible to gain insight into dominant cultural constructions and understandings of the reasons for competing in elite sport. To return to playing sport is not constructed as something that is actively decided upon; rather, making a comeback is depicted as driven by emotion and compulsion. Moreover, the depictions of returning to sport as unproblematic, as opposed to the controversial depictions of retiring, indicate that common understandings of athletes are that, as long as they are physically able, they *should* play sport. These constructions around motivations for returning to sport construct the identity of athletes as driven by passion and compulsion, rather than constructing athletes as people who choose to engage, for a time, in sporting pursuits. Such understandings of appropriate motivators can be seen to provide insight into the social contexts in which athletes elect to transition back into elite level sport. Athletes are reproduced as making this transition because of a compulsion to compete.

90

4.5 Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore how athlete identity is constructed in media accounts of decisions to transition back into elite sport and to contrast these accounts with typical retirement accounts (that are not related to the age or injury of an athlete). In the media accounts examined, to retire from sport was typically depicted as a problematic decision, whereas, by contrast, returning to play sport was constructed as natural and inevitable for athletes. In constructing comebacks as natural and retirement as problematic, playing sport is privileged as athletes' right way of being. Moreover, in the retirement and comeback accounts examined, playing sport (in contrast to retiring) was depicted as driven by emotion rather than reason. Indeed, to return to playing sport was not presented as something that was actively decided upon by athletes. Rather, competing was recurrently depicted as a compulsion and, even, a purpose in life for athletes. Athletes were thereby positioned as expected to play and to continue playing sport for as long as they are physically able. Such constructions of athletes may also have implications for decisions to compete in sport in the first place, with athletes positioned as necessarily driven and compelled to play sport. The recurrent reproduction of these reasons for playing sport in media accounts reinforces their currency as the appropriate reasons for which athletes compete and continue to compete. As such, alternate motivators and reasons for (returning to) competing are rendered inappropriate and, thus, are hard for athletes to access.

Given that athletes' career transitions have been identified as potentially stressful and can lead to adverse consequences including depression, premature drop-out from sport and substance abuse (Stambulova, et al., 2009; Wylleman, et al., 2004), the transition back into elite sport, though not previously explored, may also be stressful. This paper offers insight into the social context whereby certain choices around this potentially stressful transition dominate and are favoured. Although this transition has not previously been examined, insights into this transition may be able to be drawn from the literature exploring athletes' return to competition following injury. From this body of literature, it has been argued that whether the return is driven by intrinsic or extrinsic motivators, impacts the

psychological outcomes for returning athletes (Podlog & Eklund, 2005). Podlung and Eklund (2005) further showed that athletes typically report being motivated by intrinsic factors. However, from this analysis, athletes are positioned as being driven by emotion and passion to return to competition. Thus, the culturally acceptable reasons for returning are necessarily intrinsic motivators and to return due to alternate motivators (such as extrinsic factors) may be problematic and harder to defend.

The present exploration builds on the limited research that has adopted a discursive psychological approach to research in sport and exercise. As Locke (2004) argued, by adopting a discursive psychological approach, the theoretical assumptions that drive sport psychology research can be challenged. McGannon and Mauws (2000), for example, challenged existing understandings of exercisers and exercise adherence and Locke (2008) challenged existing understanding of the 'zone' and optimising performance by offering a discursive psychological approach. From these examples, it can be seen how challenging existing ideas enables new research to emerge, which furthers understanding of psychological phenomenon and necessarily has implications for practice. Within sport psychology, athlete identity is considered to be an important construct in both theory and practice (Brewer, 1993). Yet a role theory conceptualisation, which informs a large body of athlete identity research, has gone largely unquestioned and limited alternate approaches have been adopted within the sport psychology literature. As such, current understanding of athlete identity relies upon one theoretical perspective and, consequently, has been explored only from limited methodological approaches. The current exploration of athlete identity extends the work of McGannon and Spence (2010) who argued for studying and conceptualising 'the self' and identity as situated in language in order to understand behaviour and actions and, in doing so, builds on existing athlete identity research and develops athlete identity theory. That is, rather than viewing identity as an internally held identification with a role that guides behaviour and actions - such as the ability to cope with, and adjust to, transitions - identity can instead be viewed as created in and through discursive practices, with dominant understandings of identity creating subject positions for athletes. Such subject positions prescribe ways of being and, thus, make acting differently harder to access. Hence, the use of an

alternate approach, which challenges existing theorising, allows for different conclusions to be drawn about athlete identity, which informs both future research and practice. Therefore, through adopting a different approach, the present study also allows for new insights into the social context in which athletes are vulnerable to experiencing distress to be gained.

As was evident in the media accounts examined, representations of athletes' motivations to return to elite level competition make only limited subject positions and identities available. These subject positions have implications for athletes, limiting and constraining the actions, choices and behaviours that are accessible during their careers. Constructing participation in sport as driven by passion does not allow room for alternate motivators, nor does it make visible the hard work required to compete at an elite level and to return from retirement. As evidenced by media accounts of retirements (as discussed above), to retire, even when requisite motivation and passion is absent, remains highly contested. To struggle with motivation (especially to retire or quit as a result) goes against what is seen as natural for someone so positioned. Moreover, within these constructions there is not room for ambiguity or partial motivation. Rather, athletes are depicted as being highly driven by desire, passion and a need to compete. Given that athletes are understood to be driven by such passion and desire, to struggle with motivation may not be well understood by coaches and sporting staff. Therefore, exploring identity in terms of subject positions (rather than role theory) allows for new insights into concepts such as motivation and retirement to also be gained. In doing so, the difficulties that athletes may encounter can be further elucidated.

This exploration of athlete identity from a discursive perspective can also extend existing literature exploring retirement and provide additional understanding of the social contexts in which athletes may experience distress. This understanding, in turn, can offer further insight into ways to provide support for athletes. Existing literature has identified strong links between athlete identity and difficulties in transitioning out of sport (e.g., Grove, et al., 1997). From this media examination, it can be seen that to retire is routinely constructed as a failure to fulfil a natural drive or compulsion. Such a way of viewing retirement differs from that typically seen within sport psychology research.

Considering the social context around retirement can, thus, add to existing understanding of the difficulties and distress experienced by athletes during this transition. Moreover, being ascribed the identity position of needing to devote life to sport does not allow room for alternate pursuits or identities. Having needed to play sport, upon retirement athletes may be left without other identity positions. Indeed, identity crises and lack of preparedness for alternative careers have been identified as highly distressing for athletes upon retirement (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Lavallee, 2005; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Lotysz & Short, 2004).

An exploration of identity and career transition from a discursive psychological perspective may offer additional insights to inform coaches and sport staff when working with athletes. Discursive psychological research into exercise adherence has demonstrated how using an alternate conceptualisation of 'the exerciser' may be able to inform practice to foster exercise adherence (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010). Likewise, the further understanding of the subject positions made available for retiring athletes may further aid in supporting athletes. Gaining critical insight into how athletes are positioned, may allow sport staff to better understand the difficulties that athletes may experience and may allow space for alternate versions and positions to be considered and allowed within a sport environment. Furthermore, the application of a discursive psychological approach builds on previous research informing practice when working with athletes. Within the sport psychology literature, it has been recommended, for example, that practitioners work to develop athletes' identities and nurture them in other aspects of life (Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Lally, 2007). Yet, as is evident from this analysis, only limited subject positions are made available to athletes and, as such, developing alternate identities may be less possible in practice. However, drawing attention to the social contexts in which these subject positions are created and ascribed may help athletes and practitioners in times of distress. Moreover, the use of Narrative Therapy (White, 1995, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) during periods of distress, especially during transition, may be beneficial. Such an approach considers the discourses and broader stories that are dominant within a given society in which individuals are located (Lock, Epston, Maisel, & de Fariad, 2005). This

approach allows, then, for stories and identities to be explored and re-authored in relation to the broader societal discourses and versions which surround athletes and athlete identities. Accordingly, from drawing on a different theoretical and methodological approach, additional insights into the experiences of athletes might be gained, which points to different interventions as helpful for athletes.

Future research might continue to adopt diverse and novel approaches to exploring the notion of identity in order to increase understanding of athletes' experiences and offer implications for working with athletes. Continued exploration within sport and exercise psychology that adopts discursive psychological (and other novel approaches to those commonly seen in traditional sport psychology) may, likewise, build on existing research and understanding by offering alternate conceptualisations of well-researched constructs, such as this analysis has offered for identity and as has been offered previously for attributions (Finlay & Faulkner, 2003; Locke, 2004), emotion (Locke, 2003), 'the zone' (Locke, 2008), and exercise adherence (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010).

The present study, explored media accounts focusing on male athletes. Although no noticeable differences were observed between accounts of male and female athletes in terms of how identities were worked up and constructed, the focus on male athletes may be a limitation of the present study and may fail to encompass societal understandings of athletes more generally, or of understandings related to male or female athletes specifically. It should, however, be noted that there is a gender disparity with regard to sporting media coverage (Messner & Cooky, 2010), hence, the scope to include or focus on female athletes is, itself, limited. Moreover, within Australia sports such as cricket, swimming, Australian Rules Football, and Rugby dominate media coverage, hence, a majority of articles examined in the present analysis focused on these sports. Whether such constructions of athletes are reproduced for athletes in other countries and in other sports cannot be certain.

In summary, the application of a discursive psychological approach to newsprint media representations of elite athletes has allowed for insight to be offered into the broader social context in which athletes transition out of and back into elite level sport. Given the minimal existing knowledge

95

on this topic, exploration of dominant versions of appropriate motivators for athletes can inform future research and practice for assisting athletes during such transitions. Moreover, in applying a novel theoretical and methodological approach, different understandings of athlete identity can be gained, particularly around the social contexts in which athletes may experience distress.

Analysis of Skinfold Testing Interactions: Paper Three

The normalisation of body regulation practices and body surveillance in an elite sport setting: News delivery sequences during routine body composition testing

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Statement of contributors

Suzanne Cosh (Candidate)

I was responsible for the study conception, literature review, data collection, data analysis, manuscript drafting, preparation and submission.

Signed: Date: 02/09/2011

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We provided ongoing supervision throughout the research programme that led to this manuscript and there was ongoing collaboration between Suzanne Cosh and us in refining the direction of the research. Suzanne Cosh was responsible for writing this paper; our role was to comment on drafts, make suggestions on the presentation of material in the paper, and to provide editorial input. We hereby give our permission for this paper to be incorporated in Suzanne Cosh's submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Adelaide.

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5.1 Abstract

Within elite sport there is a ubiquitous emphasis on elite athletes' bodies and physiques. It has been suggested that discourses of regulation and surveillance of athletes' bodies become normalised within elite sport and such normalisation of these discourses may contribute to athletes' vulnerability to eating disorders. Indeed, the prevalence of disordered eating is higher in athlete populations than in the general population (Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004). The routine ways in which discourses about the body are reproduced and constituted within sporting environments have not been systematically explored. By analysing interactions occurring during routine body composition testing within an elite sport setting, using discursive psychology informed by conversation analysis, this study explores how practices of body regulation and discourses surrounding athletes' bodies are reproduced in athletes' everyday institutional interactions. Specifically, it is argued that through news delivery sequences of body composition testing scores, practices of body regulation can be seen to be normalised. Moreover, in such interactions, athletes are positioned as needing continually to improve, thus, (re)producing dominant discourses of body regulation as requiring self-discipline and surveillance. Implications for athletes in terms of increased disordered eating prevalence are discussed.

5.2 Introduction

Within elite sporting environments, there is continual emphasis on athletes' bodies, with routine policing and regulation of athletes' bodies being commonplace. Idealised body shapes and physiques have been devised for most sports, and there is evidence of an increasing focus on shaping athletes' bodies to meet these ideals (Malina, 1992; Wilmore, 1992). This emphasis on athletes' bodies has been argued to be a precipitant for disordered eating (e.g., Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Indeed, Franklin (1996) argues that in order to achieve the bodily ideals routinely espoused in sporting environments, athletes are regularly required to transgress their bodies' limits through pathological

eating and exercising practices. Such eating and exercising practices that might otherwise be considered harmful thus become normalised within the sporting environment (Shogan, 1999).

A body of sociological literature suggests that discourses of regulation and surveillance around athletes' bodies have currency within sporting environments. Using a Foucauldian discourse analysis, Johns and Johns (2000) argued that within elite sport the body is the site of a discourse of performance, which prescribes and constrains athletes' actions in order for their bodies to comply with espoused ideals. They further argued that these discourses produce coaches as holding a privileged position of expertise and, in turn, position athletes as needing to be unquestioning and compliant. Within this context of power relations and prevailing discourses, it is argued that practices of discipline and regulation around the body become normalised. Moreover, within the context of elite rowing, for example, it has been argued that discourses around the body govern athletes to self-regulate their bodies and that such self-surveillance becomes normalised (Chapman, 1997). The prevalence of discourses of self-regulation and surveillance has been argued to contribute to the development of eating disorders amongst athletes, as well as functioning to shape the ways in which athletes view and experience their bodies and, subsequently, their identities as athletes (Jones, et al., 2005). This shaping of athletes' identity and the understandings of how they should be and act has been argued to leave athletes further vulnerable to the development of disordered eating (Jones, et al., 2005; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006).

Athletes are known to have a higher prevalence of eating disorders and sub-clinical disordered eating than non-athlete populations (Milligan & Pritchard, 2006; Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004). For instance, amongst Norwegian elite athletes the prevalence of disordered eating was reported to be 13.5%, compared with 4.6% of age-matched non-athletes (Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004). Female athletes are, in addition, reported to be vulnerable to experiencing the Female Athlete Triad, a sporting-specific health concern consisting of a combination of three conditions: disordered eating, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis or osteopenia (a precursor to osteoporosis involving loss of bone density or the failure to gain optimal bone deposition; Hawley &

Burke, 1998; Yeager, et al., 1993). Though prevalence estimates vary, elite athletes are suggested to experience each of these conditions, and the combination of triad conditions, at higher rates than non-athletes (Fenichel & Warren, 2007; Khan, Liu-Ambrose, & Sran, 2002; Schtscherbyna, et al., 2009).

How dominant discourses of surveillance and regulation around the body that are potentially problematic are conveyed, reproduced and normalised within elite sport settings, however, has not been systematically explored. The aim of this paper is to explore how discourses of regulation of athletes' bodies are worked up in institutional interactions and to consider the implications of these discourses for athletes' psychological health. Moreover, the dominant discourses in which athletes bodies are located constitute athletes in certain ways. In prescribing actions that are required and considered normal for athletes in relation to their bodies, the identity of athletes is constructed and constituted. Given that such discourses constitute athletes' identities, the paper also aims to examine how the identity of athletes is produced and constituted within a sporting environment. A fine-grained approach to exploring interactions has been argued to be valuable in exploring how dominant discourses and versions of the world are reproduced within everyday interactions (Kitzinger, 2005). For example, Kitzinger (2005) used conversation analysis to explore how dominant versions of the hetero-normative family were reproduced through interactions between doctors and patients/patients' family members. In a similar vein, this paper provides an analysis of interactions taking place within an elite sport setting in order to explore how discourses of regulation and surveillance, identified in the sociology literature, are reproduced in interaction. The interactions analysed in this paper took place during routine practices of body regulation – specifically, during skinfold testing - within a sport institute.

Skinfold testing (see Bouchard, 2007) is a commonly used technique for measuring body composition (i.e., percentage of the body that is fat, muscle, viscera etc.), which is used to determine athletes' body fat percentage. This testing involves excess skin at seven sites around the body being measured with callipers to provide an estimation of overall body fat percentage. The aim of such regulatory practices is to reduce body fat in order to maximise performance (Hawley & Burke, 1998;

100

Ostojic, 2006; Wilmore, 1992). Within the elite sport setting examined here, skinfold testing is routinely conducted on athletes. Scholarship-holding athletes sign performance agreements with the sport institute, which include targeted skinfold scores that athletes are required to meet. If these targets are not met, athletes can lose their scholarship and, thus, cease receiving training and support. Throughout the institutional skinfold interactions, the reproduction and reconstitution of dominant discourses around athletes' bodies was evident. In particular, discourses of self-regulation were often reproduced and visible in the closings of skinfold interactions, when news of skinfold scores was routinely delivered to athletes and assessed. Accordingly, this paper focuses on the news delivery sequences of these skinfold interactions.

Although the discourses around body surveillance that are dominant in sport have been examined (e.g., Chapman, 1997; Johns & Johns, 2000; Jones, et al., 2005) interactions taking place during body regulation practices in sport settings have received only limited systematic exploration (see Chapter Six). Interactions during body regulation have, however, been explored in other contexts such as commercial weight management groups (Mycroft, 2007, 2008) and an obesity clinic (Pillet-Shore, 2006). Interactions occurring during these alternate contexts of body regulation are highly relevant in highlighting how the discourses specific to the sporting environment are reproduced within the skinfold interactions. Specifically, how news-delivery sequences unfold within the commercial weight management group interactions has been examined (Mycroft, 2007), and will be used as a comparison for the news-delivery sequences of the skinfold interactions.

Mycroft (2007) examined interactions taking place while weight loss Group Leaders were weighing Group Members. She demonstrated how news of weight gain was delivered (and receipted) as bad news. That is, news is not inherently good or bad, but the delivery and receipting of news by interactants co-produces it as either good or bad (Maynard, 2003). The delivery of bad news is typically accompanied by pauses, self-repairs, hesitations, hedging and other such markers of interactional difficulty (Maynard, 2003). Additionally, in delivering bad news, tellers often forecast or preface news to allow recipients to make inferences about what type of news is coming and to soften

the upcoming news (Maynard, 1996). Such forecasting (i.e. providing some warning of upcoming news such as 'you're not going to like this but...') and interactional difficulty have been found to accompany bad news in a range of settings including other health-care settings (Heritage & Stivers, 1999; Maynard & Frankel, 2006). Following bad news delivery by the Group Leader in weight management groups, Group Members routinely produced an announcement response (i.e., an acknowledgement that news has been delivered, such as an 'ok' token), which was followed by an assessment of the weight news by both the Group Leader and Group Member. In cases where Group Members did not assess the news, Group Leaders prompted assessments. In contrast to news of weight gain, weight loss news was delivered as good news (Maynard, 2003), with no forecasting by Group Leaders of the kind of news that was to be delivered and no markers of interactional difficulty (Mycroft, 2007). Group Leaders and Group Members then produced assessments around the results. Group Leaders frequently assessed results by offering congratulatory statements such as 'well done'. The offering of such statements constructed weight loss as an accomplishment, warranting congratulations and, as such, invoking notions of accountability and morality around body weight.

The focus of the present paper is on exploring news delivery sequences within the skinfold interactions taking place in an elite sport setting. The analysis will examine how discourses of regulation around athletes' bodies, which have been identified as prevalent within the sporting environment, are reproduced in athletes' routine institutional interactions. Patterns observed from news delivery in an alternate context of body regulation (weight management groups) inform the analysis presented in this paper and provide a framework for comparison with news delivery in the sporting context. It is recognised that there are important differences between these contexts: In commercial weight management groups the individuals being assessed are overweight, whereas the athletes being assessed are in peak physical condition and are institutionally required to engage in such body surveillance practices. Examining how the interactions between exercise physiologists and athletes during routine skinfold testing might differ from interactions in other contexts of body

regulation can serve to highlight how the discourses specific to the sporting environment are routinely reproduced.

5.3 Method

Interactions occurring during over 40 skinfold testing sessions involving one of 31 different athletes and any one of three different exercise physiologists (often with a physiology student also present) were recorded for analysis. Athletes were competing nationally or internationally in their age groups, and ages ranged from 13-23 years. The athletes competed in a variety of sports including netball, diving, trampolining, sailing, and water polo. The testing took place within an Australian network of sport institutes and academies. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee. The exercise physiologists gave their permission for involvement in the study and then approached coaches asking for permission to record testing with their squads. A researcher was present at the testing sessions to gain athletes' (and guardians' where applicable) consent and to audio record the interactions. The recordings were then transcribed according to the Jeffersonian transcription system (Jefferson, 2004) with all names and other identifying information removed from transcripts.

The interactions typically began with a review of the athletes' scores from the previous skinfold test, followed by a discussion of changes that athletes had made in their eating and exercising behaviour. Such discussion took place concurrently with the measuring of skinfolds. Following the testing, the news of the score was typically delivered and advice was sometimes offered by the physiologist. The interactions were analysed according to the principles of Discursive Psychology (Edwards & Potter, 2005; Potter, 1996), informed by Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2006). Analysis focused on exploring the turn-by-turn structure of news delivery sequences in order to explore how participants collaboratively accomplished the interaction and how dominant discourses around athletes' bodies were reproduced. Particular focus was on the sequential organisation of the

news delivery sequences and how these differed (or not) from news delivery in other contexts of body regulation. Analysis further explored the range of conversational resources that both athletes and exercise physiologists drew upon in co-producing and constituting dominant discourses around athletes' bodies.

5.4 Analysis

In the present corpus, news of skinfold scores was only rarely automatically delivered to athletes. Rather, in most interactions, skinfold score news was either: a) not told to the athlete at all, b) not delivered until the score was requested by the athlete, or c) was offered to athletes by the exercise physiologist (EP) without being automatically delivered (athletes always accepted). Non-automatic delivery of news contrasts with other contexts in which body regulation takes place, where news of weight is delivered immediately following testing (Mycroft, 2007; Pillet-Shore, 2006). Failure to provide results to athletes arguably orients to the institutional context within which the testing is occurring; where athletes are required by the institute to engage in body regulation and surveillance. Not providing results to athletes automatically suggests that the results are for the institute (the coaches and support staff) rather than for the athletes themselves, which could be interpreted as an objectification of athletes as bodies to be measured and as locating athletes' bodies (and, therefore, an integral part of athlete identity) within institutional ownership. The following sections of analysis will outline the news delivery sequences of score increases and decreases in instances when news is delivered. Whether news was requested or otherwise offered did not then alter the news delivery sequences.

5.4.1 News of Score Increases

Within the dataset, there were several instances in which athletes' skinfold scores increased. In other contexts of body surveillance, news of weight increases were noted to be delivered as bad

news, with the news forecast and delivered with markers of interactional difficulty (Mycroft, 2007). Within the sport context, increased skinfolds might be expected to constitute bad news; increases would usually mean failure to comply with athletes' responsibilities as outlined in their athlete agreements. However, news of score increases was not delivered as bad news in the interactions analysed here. Rather, the news delivery was straight-forward and was not accompanied by markers of interactional difficulty or forecasting. The following extract provides an illustration of the typical delivery of news of a skinfold score increase. The extract begins in the closing stages of the interaction, immediately following the last of the seven assessed body sites being measured.

Extract 1

```
1     EP:    do you wanna know the:se tonight?
2     A:     um:: ye:ah alright (.) huh heh
3     (EP calculating total score)
4     EP:    hundred and sixteen point one
5     A:     hhh (.) that sucks huh
6     EP:    ma::ybe ah:: (.)look at adjusting sli::ghtly the volume
7            of
8            food
9     A:     yep?
10    EP:    you might be sitting down to (.) ever so sli:ghtly and
11           we'll see the changes over the next few weeks
12    A:     ok
```

Evident within this extract is the EP offering the athlete news of her skinfold result at line 1. The athlete (as occurred in every instance where news was offered) accepted the offer and her score was delivered at line 4. As can be seen, the news is delivered in just one turn, rather than being forecast, and no hedging or other markers of interactional difficultly accompany the news delivery. Maynard (2003) has noted that when delivering news of HIV test results, news of positive tests was also not accompanied by typical markers of bad news. He suggested that this was due to the long period of

time between testing and news delivery. However, in the present data news delivery (when it occurred) immediately followed testing.

During nurse-patient interactions occurring during weighing in an obesity clinic, Pillet-Shore (2006) reported that, whereas patients routinely offered expansive utterances during the interactions, the nurses were 'matter-of-fact' (remaining neutral and avoiding affiliating with patients by providing up-take of these expansive utterances), displaying their experience of the weighing as medical, rather than orienting to alignment between themselves and the individuals being weighed. In doing so, the nurses treated the interactions as standardised medical encounters, acting as institutional representatives who deal with patients as routine cases. Likewise, EPs in the skinfold interactions remain 'matter-of-fact' throughout the news delivery sequence, delivering news in a straight-forward manner with no interactional difficulty. In this sense, EPs are arguably treating the interactions as routine institutional practices, akin to medical interactions around bodies. Producing these interactions with minimal markers of interactional difficulty during the delivery of what could be bad news, indicates that these interactions are necessarily non-problematic for the EPs. In producing these interactions as non-problematic, the EPs treat them as routine and they, thus, become normalised.

In Extract 1, following the news delivery (at line 4), the athlete receipts the news at line 5, assessing it as bad ('that sucks'). Thus, although the news is not delivered in the typical format of bad news (Maynard, 2003), the recipient's assessment orients to the news as being bad. Moreover, the athlete's assessment follows a short pause and an outbreath, both of which are markers of dispreferred responses (see Pomerantz, 1984). That is, in producing a conversational turn, a certain type of response is made relevant, such as accepting an invitation or agreeing with a claim. Dispreferred responses (such as refusals of invitations and disagreements) are responses that do not follow the response format projected by the previous turn. Thus, in treating the news as non-problematic, the EP projects that the athlete would, likewise, orient to the news as non-problematic in her assessment. However, the athlete (at line 5) produces her assessment as a dispreferred response, thereby further indicating that the news is bad. Following the athlete's assessment, the EP

106

does not offer an assessment of the news and, rather, moves into an advice-giving sequence (beginning at line 6). In weight loss groups, assessments were offered by both the Group Members and Group Leaders (Mycroft, 2007). However, in the skinfold interactions, EPs did not offer assessments of the score increases. The absence of assessments from EPs may be further reflective of EPs remaining 'matter-of-fact' and creating the interactions as routine. Moreover, athletes did not always assess the news either, with assessments offered in only half of instances of score increases. At other times, news receipts were issued by athletes but assessments were not offered. An example of an interaction in which news is not assessed by the athlete or EP is shown in Extract 2 where, following the final measure, the EP delivers the score news.

Extract 2

```
1    EP:    ok so sum score of seven are up, by fi:ve mils
2    A:     ok .hhh
3    EP:    erm and up body mass is slightly up
4    A:     yep
```

In Extract 2, the skinfold news is delivered automatically. Again, the news delivery (line 1) is straight-forward and occurs without forecasting or hedging, pauses, self-repairs and so on. The athlete offers a news-receipt ('ok', line 2) but does not go on to produce an assessment of the news, nor is he prompted to by the EP. In weight loss groups, when Group Members did not offer assessments, they were prompted to do so by Group Leaders (Mycroft, 2007), however, this pattern was not seen in the skinfold data. Such failure to produce an assessment does not appear to be interactionally problematic with the EP continuing to discuss the athletes' body (line 3), before then moving into an advice-giving sequence (not shown in the extract).

In contexts where HIV news was being delivered, patients receipted news of positive tests but did not produce assessments (Maynard, 2003). Maynard argued that the recipients were performing stoicism. Recipients have been shown to display stoicism when responding to bad news in which they are the primary figure (Maynard, 2003). The absence of assessments within the skinfold interactions

may, likewise, be evidence of athletes performing stoicism in the face of bad news for which they are, ultimately, responsible. Failure to produce assessments may also reflect athletes themselves orienting to (and reproducing) the skinfold interactions as routine. Indeed, in contrast to the dispreferred response offered by the athlete in assessing her score in Extract 1, the athlete in Extract 2 aligns with the preference structure (producing a preferred response) and, thus, orients to the interaction as non-problematic. An additional example of the typical news delivery sequence of skinfold scores is provided below in Extract 3. Again, in this example, the athlete does not assess the skinfold news.

Extract 3

```
1     A:      ah:: so what was the result,
2     EP:     oh: yep
3     (EP looks up score)
4     EP:     ninety seven point two
5     A:      oh ok,
6     EP:     so that's up a bit
7     A:      yep
```

The above extract provides an additional example of the straight-forward delivery of score increase news. Following the athlete's request for the score (line 1), EP delivers the score (line 4) and the upshot that this score is an increase (line 6). Such news delivery is again unaccompanied by markers of interactional difficulty and, likewise, the news is not forecast. Similar to Extract 2, neither the athlete nor the EP assess the news. The athlete offers news receipts at both lines 5 ('oh ok,') and 7 ('yep'). Again the failure to produce an assessment is not interactionally problematic. Thus, this extract offers an additional example of the typical way in which EPs and athletes arguably both oriented to the skinfold interactions as routine and normal.

5.4.2 News of Score Decreases

News of skinfold decreases was delivered similarly to other instances of good news delivery, with no forecasting, hesitations or self-repairs (e.g., Maynard, 2003; Mycroft, 2007). Following news delivery, athletes routinely produced assessments, with EPs again not always producing assessments. Except for rare instances of large improvements (two cases), when EPs did assess the news, assessments were qualified or functioned to downgrade prior assessments offered by the athletes. An example of typical delivery and receipting of score decrease news is shown in Extract 4, following the EP offering the skinfold result and the athlete accepting.

Extract 4

```
1    EP:    one forty seven point ei↑ght
2    A:     yes::: it's payi:ng off,
3    EP:    u::mm=
4    A:     =I've got to keep it like that though now
5           (.)
6    A:     what was
7    EP:    so it was one fifty two (.) last time so it's heading in
8           the right direction
```

As was evident throughout the dataset, and typical in other contexts, the news delivery (at line 1) is straight-forward and occurs in one turn. Following this, the athlete assesses the news as positive (at line 2). The EP, however, does not provide an assessment, but rather issues a continuer ('u::mm', line 3). The lack of uptake of the athlete's prior positive assessment is possibly heard by the athlete as problematic, with the athlete offering a latched orientation to the need for maintenance of this improved result. As was seen recurrently throughout the dataset, the EP did not, however, treat this change in body composition as sufficient and, thus, agree with the athletes' orientation to maintaining her current skinfolds. While acknowledging the prior score (and, thus, the improvement made) at line 7, the EP then orients to this change as not sufficient. That is, the EP treats the change as 'heading in the right direction' (lines 7-8), rather than a sufficient improvement in body composition. In commercial

weight management group interactions, Group Leaders typically assessed weight loss news as positive and frequently offered congratulatory statements, orienting to weight loss as an achievement (Mycroft, 2007). By contrast, in skinfold interactions, improvements were treated by EPs as a step in the right direction rather than an accomplishment. Thus, EPs oriented to athletes' need to continue striving to reduce body composition. The following extract is another illustration of typical delivery and assessment of improved skinfold news.

Extract 5

```
1    EP:    ok so one eleve:n point three
2    A:     so that's down, great thank you (EP)
3    EP:    good. you're doing the right things, keep it up
```

The news delivery is again straight-forward (line 1). The athlete assesses the improved result as 'great' (line 2), yet this assessment is downgraded by the EP from 'great' to 'good' (line 3). Such downgrading of assessments was frequently seen throughout assessments offered by EPs in instances of improved skinfold scores. The EP in this extract then further orients to the athlete's need to continue to work to improve body composition ('keep it up', line 3). Thus, rather than treat the decreased score as an achievement and a great result the EP again orients to a need to continue to improve skinfold results. The following extract provides an additional example of the typical way in which decreased skinfold scores were delivered and assessed.

Extract 6

```
1    EP:    do you:: wa:nt to know your tota:l now?
2    A:     ooh I dunno it's a bit scary huh
3    EP:    well it's up to you
4    A:     yeah, yeah
5    EP:    yeah?
6    (EP calculating total score)
7    A:     so I can see where I'm up to
8    (EP calculating total score)
```

110

```
9     A:     °.hh oh god°

10    EP:    so last ti::me, your total was,

11    A:     ooh it was really high= =it was like s[omething in the

12    EP:                                          [one forty five

13           was it

14    EP:    right one thirty four point five today

15    A:     good=

16    EP:    =good change
```

Following the EP's offer of the skinfold news and the athlete, albeit reluctantly, accepting the offer, the EP delivers the skinfold score news at line 14. The news delivery is again straight-forward and occurs across one turn. The athlete receipts the news with an assessment (line 15), which is then immediately followed by an assessment from the EP. However, through the assessment the EP formulates the score as a 'good change' rather than as a 'good' result (as the athlete does). In doing so, the EP treats the improved score as part of a trend towards reaching a desired body composition, rather than in itself an adequate improvement. Accordingly, the EP further reproduces the notion that a small amount of improvement in body composition is not sufficient, but that athletes need continually to work to regulate and improve their bodies. A further example of the delivery and receipting of skinfold decrease news is provided in Extract 7.

Extract 7

```
1     EP:    fourtee:n point one:: you happy: to see the:se today,

2            Sarah

3     A:     yep

4     (EP calculating total score)

5     EP:    ninety- seven- point two-

6     A:     (claps) a[ma:zing

7     EP:            [you're under the ton, go↑od girl (.) might

8            reassess that target now
```

111

Again evident was the straight-forward delivery of decreased skinfold score news (line 5), which is assessed (partly through the clapping) by the athlete at line 6. Following this assessment, at line 7 the EP orients to the athlete's score being below 100 ('the ton' her targeted score) and offers an assessment ('good girl'), before qualifying the assessment by suggesting a reassessment of the athlete's target (lines 7-8). Even when the athlete reaches her targeted score, the degree of change is not treated as sufficient, thereby further reproducing the need for ongoing improvement. It is in these sorts of ways that athletes are routinely positioned as needing to work continuously towards improved body composition. Moreover, in offering the assessment 'good girl', the EP orients to moral dimensions around the athlete's behaviour. That is, in designing talk to demonstrate the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of behaviours, speakers performs moral work (Drew, 1998). Throughout the interactions, EPs' assessments around athletes' behaviours and actions in reducing body composition demonstrated such behaviour as appropriate and good. Through depicting certain actions as appropriate (or not), identities for athletes (i.e. what constitutes a 'good' or 'bad' athlete) are created and reproduced (Davies & Harré, 1999). Accordingly, in assessing athletes' behaviour as good or bad, EPs construct athletes as people whose moral responsibility is to work to reduce body composition and, thereby, EPs reproduce dominant discourses around athletes' need for self-surveillance. Moreover, through producing such assessments, EPs also construct and reproduce institutional ownership over athletes' actions and bodily practices.

5.5 Discussion

In exploring news delivery sequences within interactions occurring during routine body composition testing in an elite sport setting, it is possible to highlight how discourses of regulation and surveillance around athletes' bodies, which constitute and construct athletes' identity, are reproduced. Comparison of interactions occurring within a sport setting with other contexts of body regulation illustrates how discourses that are reported to be dominant within the context of elite sport are

reproduced uniquely within the sport context. Such comparison also makes visible how athlete identities are reproduced and reconstituted.

Sociological research suggests that within elite sport settings, practices of body regulation become normalised (Johns & Johns, 2000; Shogan, 1999). Within the skinfold interactions examined here, it can be seen how such normalisation takes place in interaction. The EPs did not deliver news of score increases in the typical format of bad news delivery (Maynard, 2003). Accordingly, EPs can be seen as orienting to the routine and medicalised nature of such skinfold interactions, thereby normalising the practices of body composition testing. Moreover, in the half of instances where athletes receipted the news without offering assessments, athletes arguably were, likewise, orienting to and co-producing the routine and normalised nature of body regulation practices. Furthermore, the delivery of 'good' news (i.e., reduced skinfold scores) was similar to the way in which news of increased skinfold scores ('bad' news) was delivered. Delivering 'bad' news similarly to 'good' news arguably further orients to the routine nature, and normalisation, of the skinfold testing.

Moreover, in contrast with weight loss groups where Group Leaders frequently offered congratulatory statements in their assessments (Mycroft, 2007), improved body composition was typically not congratulated in the skinfold data. Rather, when EPs offered assessments, these typically functioned to downgrade positive assessments made by athletes, treating improvements as a move in the right direction rather than an accomplishment in and of itself. Accordingly, athletes were positioned as needing continually to work to improve their body composition. It has been argued that discourses around athletes' bodies create regulation as a discipline of the self, thus constituting athletes as individuals who need to engage in self-surveillance (Chapman, 1997). In orienting to a need perpetually to improve body composition, athletes are positioned as needing to engage in ongoing surveillance and monitoring of themselves and their bodies. Accordingly, in assessing skinfold news, EPs reproduced discourses of self-surveillance.

In not always delivering news of skinfold scores, EPs treat athletes as not needing to know their results; however, ongoing improvement and self-surveillance are oriented to as required regardless of

113

changes that have taken place in body composition between testing sessions. Moreover, within the skinfold data, EPs oriented to moral issues around athletes' body composition. When producing assessments, EPs routinely displayed actions of improving body composition as good and appropriate for athletes and, in doing so, oriented to their moral responsibility and institutional accountability for these actions (Drew, 1998). Prescribing which behaviours are morally acceptable (and by implication which behaviours are not), constructs athletes' identity as necessarily involving the regulation of their bodies. In doing so, discourses of self-regulation are further reproduced by EPs in the sport setting.

As has been discussed, results were rarely automatically delivered to athletes. Failure to automatically deliver results to athletes in interactions in which they are being measured, arguably orients to the institutional context within which the testing is occurring. That is, the testing is done for the institute and coaching staff rather than for the athletes themselves. Johns and Johns (2000) argue that discourses of performance position coaching staff as expert, with athletes positioned as compliant and non-questioning. Assessing athletes' bodies without necessarily providing results to them treats them as compliant in a routine process, while reserving the knowledge of results to the 'expert' institute staff. Furthermore, positioning athletes as needing to self-regulate without providing them knowledge of their results produces athletes as compliant and non-questioning, acting to regulate their bodies without the expert knowledge held by sport staff indicating their progress.

This exploration of interactions occurring during routine skinfold testing sessions has illustrated how dominant discourses around athletes' bodies, which constitute athletes' identities, are reproduced and reconstituted by athletes and sport staff within the context of a sport institute. Sociological research has explored which discourses and ideals come to dominate within sport contexts, however, how such discourses are reproduced has not been a focus. Moreover, athletes have been shown to have increased prevalence of disordered eating and the Female Athlete Triad (Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Fenichel & Warren, 2007; Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004; Yeager, et al., 1993) and the discourses that are dominant in elite sport around athletes' bodies have been argued to contribute to such pathology (Jones, et al., 2005). Yet, such research has, likewise, not explored how these ideals

114

are reproduced in athletes' everyday sporting environment and how such discourses may relate to athletes' experiences. A more fine-grained analysis of interactions adds to, and complements, existing sociology of sport and sport psychology literature illuminating the discourses and discursive practices in and through which athletes' bodies (including pathological behaviours in relation to their bodies) are located and how such discourses are reproduced in practice. From the present study, it is possible to see how athletes are produced as needing to engage in ongoing body regulation and strive for continual improvement. Athletes are further positioned in these interactions as compliant and non-questioning in the pursuit of such ongoing improvement in body composition. Being positioned as needing continually to improve (with targeted scores not deemed an adequate end point) may leave athletes vulnerable to engaging in excessive and pathological eating and exercise behaviours in the pursuit of reaching shifting body composition targets.

Indeed, as Franklin (1996) argued, within sport, such eating and exercising practices that transgress the body's limits become normalised. This analysis of skinfold interactions demonstrates how such notions are normalised for (and by) athletes. Given athletes' increased prevalence of disordered eating, the normalisation of body regulation and extreme practices around the body, including eating and exercising behaviours, is potentially problematic. Analysis of the skinfold interactions allowed for insight into how everyday interactions functioned to normalise body regulation practices. Indeed, potential problems associated with body regulation and extreme reductions in body fat are not oriented to in interactions, rather, practices of regulation and self-surveillance are normalised.

Moreover, the normalisation of body regulation practices by sport staff, who are positioned as expert, place athletes (positioned as unquestioning and compliant) at risk of developing unhealthy eating and exercising behaviours, as they unquestioningly strive to improve body composition. Moreover, the identity of athletes is reproduced as requiring engagement in body regulation and surveillance. Such positioning of athletes can constrain behaviour and make alternate actions (i.e., not engaging in extreme acts of body regulation) difficult to access (Burr, 1995; Edley, 2001). To not

participate in ongoing self-surveillance means a failure to act as a good and appropriate athlete. As such, the way athletes are produced and understood within elite sporting environments, places them at risk of developing disordered eating.

The 'drive for thinness', or preoccupation with dieting and weight, and fear of weight gain (Wiederman & Pryor, 2000) has been suggested to predict the development of disordered eating (Gustafsson, et al., 2010; Sands, 2000). Through orientation to the need for ongoing change, notions of the drive for thinness are also oriented to and reproduced. In addition, the drive for thinness has been argued to develop when there is a perceived discrepancy between the body and an ideal view of what the body should be (Sands, 2000; Wiederman & Pryor, 2000). Within the skinfold interactions, the downgrading of positive assessments and orientation to ongoing change as required in order to achieve ideals, may produce or reinforce the notion of a discrepancy between the athletes' body and the ideal or the institutional requirement. Moreover, with athletes' identity constructed as requiring self-surveillance of their own bodies, the drive for thinness is privileged within these interactions as the right way of being. Furthermore, perfectionism may also be reinforced and privileged within these interactions, with improvement required even when targets are met. Perfectionism has also been linked to the development of Social Physique Anxiety (Haase, Prapavessis, & Owens, 2002) and eating disorders (Franco-Paredes, et al., 2005).

Knowledge of the ways in which potentially detrimental discourses are reproduced can inform practice for sport staff when engaging with athletes. Insight into the ways in which news delivery sequences can normalise body regulation and position athletes as needing perpetually to improve, as well as reproducing the privileged and expert position of sport staff, may be used to inform sport staff and improve their interactions with athletes. It has been argued that knowledge of differential power relations can help coaches to better manage and frame their interactions with their athletes (Jones, et al., 2005). Here, for example, sport staff may draw on the insight into news delivery to improve body regulation practices, by a) delivering news to athletes in all instances and, thereby, allowing athletes some ownership over their own scores and bodies, b) forecasting bad news and delivering 'bad' news

as seen in other contexts (see Maynard, 1997), thus avoiding treating the interactions as routine and normalised, and c) orienting to maintaining skinfold scores and reaching maintenance stages, rather than orienting to continual improvement through the downgrading assessments. Accordingly, knowledge of the ways in which dominant discourses are regularly reproduced in interaction may further assist sport staff in better managing their interactions with athletes to work towards changing dominant versions of athletes and their bodies which may, ultimately, be detrimental to athletes' health.

Through exploration of the fine-grained detail of everyday institutional interactions taking place within an elite sport setting it is possible to gain understanding of how dominant ideas and discourses around athletes, their bodies and their identities are (re)produced and (re)constituted. Such exploration allows for new insights into how athletes are positioned and how such positionings leave athletes vulnerable to disordered eating, and may also inform further research exploring the increased prevalence of disordered eating amongst athletes.

Analysis of Skinfold Testing Interactions: Paper Four

Accountability, monitoring and surveillance: Body regulation in elite sport

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Statement of contributors

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I was responsible for the study conception, literature review, data collection, data analysis, manuscript drafting, preparation, submission and replies to reviewers' comments.

Signed: Date: 02/09/2011

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We provided ongoing supervision throughout the research programme that led to this publication and there was ongoing collaboration between Suzanne Cosh and us in refining the direction of the research. Suzanne Cosh was responsible for writing this paper and replying to reviewers' comments; our role was to comment on drafts, make suggestions on the presentation of material in the paper, and to provide editorial input. We hereby give our permission for this paper to be incorporated in Suzanne Cosh's submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Adelaide.

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6.1 Abstract

Regulation of athletes' bodies is commonplace in sporting environments, despite evidence that athletes have a higher risk of developing disordered eating than non-athletes. This paper explores how athletes' bodies are regulated in practice, building on examinations of body surveillance in other contexts. Over 40 interactions occurring during body monitoring are analysed. Athletes, pre-emptively or following an explicit request, accounted for their body regulatory behaviours, also working to produce positive athlete identities. Failing to produce an account of improvement was interactionally problematic, making visible athletes' accountability to the institute to regulate their bodies. Implications of body regulatory practices are discussed.

6.2 Introduction

The body weight and physique of athletes has become focal for coaches and training staff in elite sporting environments (Wilmore, 1992). Idealised standards of weight and body composition[7] have been devised for most sports and are routinely policed within sporting contexts. In particular, considerable research (see Malina, 1992; Wilmore, 1992) has indicated that body fat is negatively related to performance, especially in endurance sports (Hawley & Burke, 1998; Ostojic, 2006; Wilmore, 1992). This research has not gone unchallenged, however. Studies have typically been based on cross-sectional rather than longitudinal research and, as such, the influence of changing body composition on performance over time for individual athletes has not been explored (Hawley & Burke, 1998). Nonetheless, pressure to reduce body fat in order to optimise performance remains commonplace within sporting environments.

Given the demands to reduce body fat and thereby improve performance, numerous tests have been devised to assess body composition (see Bioanalogics, 2004). Skinfold testing is a widely-used technique, where folds of skin and subcutaneous fat beneath are pinched and measured (with

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[7] Body composition refers to the evaluation of the different tissues comprising the body i.e. quantifying the amount of tissue that is muscle, bone, fat, and viscera.

callipers) at different sites around the body (including abdominal, iliac crest, quadriceps). Using one of several available equations, the total score from the skinfolds is converted to give an approximation of overall body fat percentage (see Bouchard, 2007; Otte, et al., 2000). Regular testing of skinfolds is routine within many elite sporting contexts.

Although the reduction of body fat can lead to performance gains (Hawley & Burke, 1998; Ostojic, 2006), reducing it too far can have physical and psychological health consequences. Reducing fat too much can result in decreased performance, fatigue, anaemia and increases in illness and injuries (Bouchard, 2007; Wilmore, 1992). Athletic pressure to reduce body fat has also been linked with psychological concerns. In particular, it has been suggested that pressure from the sporting environment to reduce fat and to perform at an optimal level, can lead to the development of eating disorders (Jones, et al., 2005; Malina, 1992; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006; Wilmore, 1992) and Social Physique Anxiety (Haase, 2009). Moreover, the development of an exclusive identity as an athlete has been shown to leave athletes vulnerable to eating disorders (Jones, et al., 2005; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Jones et al. (2005) suggest that when athletes' identity is strongly or exclusively formed in terms of being an athlete, self-worth becomes overly dependent on performance outcomes and success. As a result, athletes may experience increased fear of failure and vulnerablity to critcism of their sporting abilities (Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Hence, a more diverse identity may reduce the susceptibility of athletes to develop disordered eating.

Compared with non-athlete populations, athletes have been shown to have a higher risk of developing eating disorders and sub-clinical disordered eating (Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Milligan & Pritchard, 2006; Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004; Wilson & Eldredge, 1992). Disordered eating refers to eating behaviours that do not meet full DSM-IV diagnostic criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) for Anorexia or Bulimia Nervosa (behaviours occur either less frequently or with less severity), yet are still problematic and can lead to long-term health consequences. A number of studies have demonstrated the prevalence of disordered eating in athlete populations. A study of the population of male and female Norwegian elite athletes estimated

prevalence rates of clinical and subclinical eating disorders to be 13.5% compared with 4.6% of age-matched controls (Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004). Studies exploring student-athletes within the US College system have reported higher prevalence rates of disordered eating (e.g., Johnson, et al., 1999; Milligan & Pritchard, 2006), possibly reflecting differences in culture and sporting systems.

Moreover, the reduced energy intake resulting from disordered eating, in combination with large energy expenditure from intense training, can lead to amenorrhea[8] (the absence of three or more menstrual cycles, or delayed menarche) in female athletes. Amenorrhea can subsequently lead to osteopaenia (a precursor to osteoporosis involving loss of bone density or the failure to gain optimal bone density) and, ultimately, osteoporosis (Bouchard, 2007; Hawley & Burke, 1998; Yeager, et al., 1993). This combination of disordered eating, amenorrhea and osteopaenia is known as the Female Athlete Triad[9], a sport-specific health concern that can lead to long-term psychological and physical health consequences (Gottschlich, et al., 2008; Nichols, et al., 2006). Premature bone density loss can be particularly problematic as it increases the risk of stress fractures and other injuries (Bouchard, 2007; Yeager, et al., 1993). In addition, the rapid loss of bone density is not totally reversible and, consequently, increases the risk of developing osteoporosis. Although non-athletes can experience the Female Athlete Triad, prevalence is much higher amongst athletes (Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Khan, et al., 2002; Yeager, et al., 1993).

Given the prevalence and associated long-term health consequences of the triad conditions, the management and surveillance of athletes' bodies within the sporting context is a delicate matter. Sporting organisations are focused on maximising performance, albeit potentially to the detriment of athletes' well-being. How such regulation and surveillance of athletes' bodies occurs in practice has not previously been explored. The present study examines interactions that occur during skinfold

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[8] Whilst amenorrhea is typically seen in Anorexia Nervosa, due to the intense training schedules, amenorrhea occurs sooner and with lower levels of disordered eating in athletes.

[9] It should be noted that male athletes can also experience reductions in bone density due to disordered eating.

testing within an Australian Sport Institute/Academy network. Within this institutional setting, athletes are subject to routine skinfold testing to assess body composition. Athletes hold scholarships with the institutes in this network, entitling them to a range of services including coaching, performance analysis, nutrition, psychology and strength and conditioning coaching. As a condition of the scholarship, athletes sign agreements that involve targets for body composition including targeted skinfold scores. Failure to comply with these agreements can result in loss of scholarship.

Interactions that occur during body composition testing of elite athletes have not previously been explored. Extant research has considered interactions occurring during other forms of body regulation, such as during obesity consultations in health-settings (Pillet-Shore, 2006; H. Webb, 2009) and in the context of commercial weight-management groups (Mycroft, 2008). The focus of such research has been on the functions that talk accomplishes in the interactions, rather than aiming to provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of individuals about the practices in which they are engaging. For example, in an analysis of nurse-patient interactions during weighing of patients, Pillet-Shore (2006) showed that patients pre-emptively oriented to changes in their weight in order to display themselves as good patients who monitor their health. Mycroft (2007, 2008) demonstrated how weight-loss group members produced pre-emptive accounts of weight gain to manage self-presentation when they had gained weight. In such pre-emptive accounts, group members typically oriented to themselves as having been 'bad' or eaten 'badly'. Webb (2009) explored interactions where patients reported their weight to doctors. In these interactions, doctors did not explicitly request an account around patient's changes in weight; however, patients treated initial greetings as requests for accounts. Patients then produced accounts externalising responsibility in instances of weight gain, yet accepting agency in cases where weight had decreased.

In the studies outlined above, the individuals being assessed were overweight and were engaging in body regulation for themselves (for health or other reasons). In this paper, however, analysis explores how body regulation and management are routinely accomplished within an elite sporting environment where those being assessed are already in peak physical condition and are

122

required by the institute to engage in body regulation. In particular, this paper examines how athletes account for their body composition, whilst simultaneously orienting to themselves as elite athletes who are required to regulate and manage their athletic bodies.

6.3 Method

The data consist of interactions occurring during over 40 skinfold testing sessions of 31 different athletes taking place within an Australian network of sport institutes and academies. The testing was conducted by one of three Exercise Physiologists, often with a physiology student also present. Those being tested were junior elite athletes, competing either nationally or internationally in their age groups in a variety of sports including netball, diving, trampolining, sailing, and water polo. Two-thirds of tested athletes were female, and ages ranged from 13 to 23 years. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee. Coaches were approached for permission to work with their squads. Coaches informed athletes of the study and the researchers gained athletes' (and guardians' where applicable) consent and audio recorded the interactions. Recordings were transcribed according to the Jeffersonian transcription system (Jefferson, 2004). All names and identifying features were removed from transcripts.

Analysis drew on the principles of Discursive Psychology (Edwards & Potter, 2005; Potter, 1996) informed by Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2006), exploring recurrent patterns of interaction and the way in which interaction is collaboratively accomplished. Particularly of focus were the systematic ways in which accounts around body composition were co-produced in testing sessions. In accounting for, and describing, behaviours and actions, talk displays the appropriateness or inappropriateness of such behaviour (Drew, 1998). As such, talk also orients to, and produces, identities for individuals (Davies & Harré, 1990). Accordingly, the ways in which identities were jointly accomplished within the co-production of accounts was also a focus of analysis.

In analysing the skinfold data, the interactions were broken down into sections: Openings, the testing period, and closings. Each section was analysed to explore the similarities and differences in how athletes' behaviours were talked about and discussed and how identities were produced across the different testing sessions. The openings, in which athletes produced accounts around their behaviour, were then analysed in more depth. The specific conversational turns produced during the accounts were examined line by line to see how the talk was organised and what athletes and exercise physiologists made relevant and achieved in each turn at talk.

6.4 Analysis

During the interactions, athletes produced either one of two types of accounts of their body regulatory behaviours[10]. In around one-quarter of instances, athletes produced pre-emptive accounts of their test results in the opening turns of the interactions, typically projecting an increase in skinfolds. In the remaining interactions when pre-emptive accounts were not produced, athletes accounted for their body regulatory behaviours in response to an explicit request from the Exercise Physiologist (EP). Both types of accounting will be examined below.

6.4.1 Pre-emptive Accounts

In pre-emptive accounts, responsibility for failure to improve body composition was ascribed to external factors. While in other contexts, those being weighed projected weight gain in terms of their own bad behaviour, athletes in the present data worked to manage their identity as athletes, avoiding presenting themselves as having acted inappropriately by not working towards improved body composition. The following extracts provide examples of pre-emptive accounts. Extract 1 comes from

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10 In cases where athletes were being tested for the first time, or were being tested by a new EP for the first time (see Hawley & Burke, 1998; Ostojic, 2006) and so there was not a previous score to compare with, athletes did not necessarily produce accounts, however, in all cases of repeat testing, such accounting was evident.

the beginning of the testing session of a teenage female athlete. The pre-emptive account begins early in the interaction, just before testing commences (which begins at line 5 with the EP reading the score for triceps).

Extract 1

```
1    EP:    so. last t↑ime what were your results?

2    A:     I don't remember

3    EP:    oh↓ Sarah Sarah Sarah=

4    A:     =and [I've been

5    EP:         [seventeen point two for tricep

6    A:     and I've been really sick as [well

7    EP:                                 [have you?

8    A:     for the past month yeah=

9    EP:    =wha:t's been wrong,

10   A:     I've had um (.3) ah (.) it's called a pharan (.)pharyngitis or

11          something

12   EP:    ok,

13   A:     and it's like throat infection::n= =chest infectio::n and

14          li::ke=

15   EP:    =twenty two point two for subs[cap

16   A:                                   [it locked me up, basically

17   EP:    right
```

The initial question from the EP at line 1, asking the athlete to recall the previous test result orients to the institutional context within which the measuring is done. Within this context athletes are required to engage in body regulation. The opening question in the form of an interrogative implies that the athlete should know her previous scores and, thus, be engaged in surveillance of her body. The repetition of the (emphasised) athlete's name by EP (line 3) in exasperated intonation, in response to the answer that the athlete cannot remember (line 2), can arguably be heard as a telling-

off of the athlete. Telling-off suggests the need for athletes within this context to monitor and survey their bodies.

The athlete then begins to produce a pre-emptive account (line 4) that can be heard to imply potentially poor skinfolds. In nurse-patient interactions during weighing, Pillet-Shore (2006) showed that patients estimate increases in their weight to demonstrate that they are good patients who are aware of their weight. Similarly, in the present extract, in producing a pre-emptive account implying skinfold increases, the athlete is able to present herself as currently (even if not previously) aware of her body composition and, thus, engaging in required body surveillance. The offering of a pre-emptive account, then, allows the athlete to attend to her identity by presenting herself as acting appropriately (by monitoring her body).

In producing the pre-emptive account, agency for the potential score increase is ascribed to external and uncontrollable factors, in this instance illness. Formulating the account in terms of having been 'really sick' 'for the past month' implies an inability to train and a resultant failure to improve body composition. The use of 'really' emphasises the severity of the illness, countering potential claims that the athlete may have been able to continue training and improving body composition throughout the illness. Likewise, describing the illness as month-long further defends against claims that the athlete may have been able to improve body composition since the previous testing session prior to becoming ill. The account culminates with the upshot 'it's locked me up basically' (line 16), which arguably functions similarly to idiomatic expressions (Drew & Holt, 1988), working, in instances where there has been a lack of alignment between speaker and recipient, to end the account whilst simultaneously enhancing its legitimacy.

The externalisation of agency further manages identity. Rather than present herself as having failed to exercise enough, the athlete locates responsibility for increased skinfolds in external factors beyond her control. Accordingly, the athlete can produce an account of potentially bad scores without presenting herself as failing to act appropriately. Such pre-emptive accounting contrasts with accounts seen in weight management groups where members made explicit reference to themselves having

126

been 'bad' or 'naughty' (Mycroft, 2008). In the present data, for athletes to present themselves as acting badly would fail to meet institutional requirements.

The following extract provides an example of an additional way in which pre-emptive accounts were produced. In this pre-emptive account, injury or illness is not held accountable (as was seen in around half of instances), yet responsibility for potential skinfold increases is still externalised. This extract again constitutes the opening lines of the interaction between EP, the athlete and a physiology student and begins before the weight of the athlete is discussed. In many testing sessions, weight is measured and discussed. However, weight and skinfold scores measure different aspects of the body and changes in weight do not necessarily translate into changes in skinfolds (and vice versa).

Extract 2

```
1    EP:    ok so you're [very close
2    A:                  [I reckon they've gone up
3    EP:    to your target
4    A:     I kno::w I reckon it- they've gone [up,] I reckon
5    EP:                                        [what wa::s]
6    EP:    (Jane's) weight today (Student)
7    S:     seventy one point five
8    A:     what was it last time
9    EP:    seventy one point six, (.) very s↑imilar,
10   A:     °yeah that was ju[st°
11   EP:                     [so what makes you think they've go:ne u↑p
12   A:     oh I dunno= =I've just been hungrier lately (.4) >I actually
13          have been< hungrier lately not just
14   EP:    ri:ght
```

Unlike the previous example, the athlete produces an explicit account of increased skinfolds (lines 2 and 4). The forecasting of score increases was typically more explicit when pre-emptive accounts were not framed around illness or injury. Accounts of injury and illness are perhaps more

hearable as resulting in failure to improve body composition. The athlete prefaces her account of why her skinfolds may have increased with 'oh I dunno' (line 12). Oh-prefaced responses to inquiries can indicate that the recipient views the question as problematic, with oh-prefacing often signalling reluctance to continue with the topic (Heritage, 1998). The use of 'I don't know' can also be used to avoid developing a line of questioning (Hutchby, 2002). As such, the request for details can be viewed as problematic for the athlete, perhaps orienting to difficulties of producing accounts around skinfold increases without presenting behaviour as inappropriate.

The reason for the potential increase is then formulated in terms of the athlete being 'hungrier' (line 12). This account implies that she has been eating more. However, rather than produce an account of increased eating, as weight loss group members did (Mycroft, 2008), this formulation locates control outside of the athlete, allowing her to remain non-accountable. Indeed, the athlete fails to provide an account of her actions in response to this hunger. It could be argued that being hungrier need not necessarily result in increased skinfolds and that athletes could, and perhaps should, continue to eat appropriate proportions regardless of changes in appetite. In remaining vague around her actions, the athlete further avoids presenting herself as having acted inappropriately by overeating. The use of 'just' (line 12; 'I've just been hungrier lately'), works to present the externally determined hunger as the *only* factor contributing to the potential skinfold increase. The repetition of the 'hungrier' formulation (lines 12-13) with the use of 'actually' and the unfinished 'not just' (which could be heard as continuing to say 'not just an excuse', 'not just saying that', etc.) works to emphasise the athlete's account while also countering potential counter claims that this is not a legitimate excuse. Therefore, in formulating the account with agency externalised, the athlete was able to manage identity by avoiding depicting failure to engage in required body regulating behaviours. Moreover, as was also seen in Extract 1, the athlete oriented to awareness of body composition and regulation to manage identity as a good athlete who is both aware of, and monitoring, body composition.

6.4.2 Requested Accounts

When athletes did not produce pre-emptive accounts early in the interaction, Exercise Physiologists routinely made explicit requests for accounts of athletes' body regulatory behaviours (i.e., eating, exercise etc.). The requesting of accounts here differs from other contexts of body regulation in which either a) accounts were not requested nor contextually required (Mycroft, 2008; Pillet-Shore, 2006) or b) opening greetings were heard as requests for accounts, but accounts were not explicitly requested (H. Webb, 2009). Following requests from EPs, athletes produced accounts of positive behavioural change. However, these accounts were typically vague and hedged in order to avoid presenting themselves as previously having acted inappropriately and also to manage the potential of increased skinfolds. Extract 3 provides an illustration of how accounts of behavioural change were explicitly requested and produced. It comes from early in the interaction, after initial greetings had taken place.

Extract 3

```
1    EP:    so:: what changes have you made? Since (.) last time [we

2    A:                                                          [err

3    EP:    did this test

4    A:     ah↑ (.) just eating=

5    EP:    =yeah (.) like what [sort of] changes

6    A:                         [ah dinner,]

7    EP:    give me examples

8    A:     dinner, (.) instead of eating mostly pasta and stuff

9           we're eati:::ng (.) like protein for meat and then just

10          vegetables and stuff (.4) and then like and then

11          sna::cking, (.) I eat nuts and like that mixture? stuff

12          that we:: get instead of fat and

13   EP:    ok:: instead of (.) what were you eating

14   A:     o↑h na::h, I don't really eat like that (.) ba::d stuff

15          I just like eat lots of like (.) stuff (.) I eat lots of
```

```
16            good stuff (.) but I eat too much? so I've just cut down
17            on it (.) like I eat a lot of (.) I eat lots of bread
18    (.)
19    A:      [I eat like lots of
20    EP:     [so you've] cut down the volume of food you're ta:[king] in.
21    A:                                                      [yeah]
22    EP:     right (2.0) um (1.2) well le↑t's we'll see what the
23            results are. Here today,
24    A:      I'm hoping it's going to be lowe:r
```

As was typical throughout the dataset, an explicit request for an account is made by EP (lines 1-3). Requesting an account makes visible the role of the EP in regulating athletes' body management behaviour within this institutional context. Body regulation is required by the institute, and, therefore, as is evidenced by explicit requests for accounts, athletes are accountable to the institute (rather than to themselves) for body composition. Moreover, formulating the request in terms of changes that have been made implies that athletes should have changed behaviour.

As shown in Extract 3, athletes typically produced vague accounts of behavioural change in terms of 'eating' and food intake. Throughout this interaction, EP requests further detail (lines 5, 7 and 13). The continued requests for details place the athlete in a difficult position; needing to produce a detailed account of the change, while avoiding presenting herself as having previously acted inappropriately by not engaging in body regulatory behaviours. Identity management is particularly evident in line 14, where the athlete immediately responds to the EP in terms of having not previously eaten 'bad stuff'. In suggesting she was eating 'lots of stuff', the athlete allows room to show improvement (i.e., reduced food intake) without presenting herself as having previously acted inappropriately by consuming 'bad' foods. The upgrade to lots of 'good stuff' (lines 15-16), further attends to identity, presenting herself as eating appropriately. The vagueness of the account (e.g., repeated use of 'stuff', 'lots of stuff', 'like eating' etc.), despite the repeated requests from EP for further information, arguably highlights the difficulty of producing an account around change without

allowing a negative self-presentation of previous behaviour. Such accounting contrasts with that typical in weight-loss groups, where members routinely produced accounts of having eaten 'badly' (Mycroft, 2008). This contrast may reflect athletes' institutional accountability for body composition and behaviour.

Following the account, EP produces the upshot that the athlete has reduced food volume (line 20) and receives agreement from the athlete (line 21). EP then discusses seeing 'what the results are' (line 22-23). Within this context, not only do athletes need to produce accounts of change (whilst trying to avoid a negative self-presentation), but they produce these accounts in a context where a physiological measure may fail to show improvement in body composition. In Extract 3, the athlete orients to the potential difficulty of having produced an account of change prior to receiving results ('I'm hoping it's going to be lower', line 24). In doing so, she flags that changes in eating might not be reflected in the results. Similar hedging of accounts was seen throughout the data with athletes orienting to the possibility that skinfolds may not reflect their efforts to regulate their bodies, thus, allowing them to produce accounts of positive change, yet leaving room for possible bad results.

The following extract provides an additional example of a typical way in which accounts were requested and produced. This extract occurs early in the interaction, following discussion of the athlete's target score.

Extract 4

```
1    EP:    so have you ma:de any changes? to your (.) eati::ng
2           habits? since last test?
3    A:     yeah I feel like I'm eating healthier
4    EP:    mm hmm (.) fourteen point four for tri↑cep (.) what sort
5           of:: (.) thi::ngs have you done
6    (0.5)
7    A:     u::m=
8    EP:    =changes have you made
```

```
9      A:      I've tried to just like cut ou::t like the extra food
10             group >or whatever< like lollies and stuff like that
11     EP:     yep
```

As seen here, requests for accounts were, at times, framed specifically around eating, training, or exercise behaviours, rather than general behavioural change. As was typically seen, the request was framed in terms of changes made since the previous session (lines 1-2), orienting to a need for continual change and improvement. That is, asking athletes at each testing session about changes made, positions athletes as needing to continually make changes and strive to improve.

The athlete produces an account in terms of having eaten 'healthier'. The use of 'healthier' as opposed to 'healthy' (for instance) enables the athlete to attend to identity, allowing for an account of change without presenting herself as having previously eaten unhealthy food. In response to the request for further detail (lines 4-5), the athlete suggests she has 'cut out' an extra food group. The athlete's previous consumption is left vague; she may have consumed many lollies[11] or only eaten unhealthy food on rare occasions. In suggesting she is cutting out unhealthy food, she presents herself as currently engaging in healthy eating practices without presenting herself as necessarily having previously consumed large quantities of lollies. Further evident is the hedging of this account ('I feel' line 3, 'I've tried', line 9). Such hedging softens the claims and can be seen as a way to manage the potential of increased skinfolds, which would undermine her account of improvement.

The above extracts are typical examples of accounts produced throughout the dataset. However, one deviant case in the data did not follow the above pattern of producing an account of positive behavioural change. In this instance, the athlete instead produced an account of reducing (rather than improving) her body regulatory behaviour. This deviant case is shown in the extract below. It also comes from early in the testing session, following a brief discussion of the athlete's weight.

---

[11] Lollies is the Australian term for candy or sweets (Butler, 2009).

```
1    EP:    ok (.) tricep (0.4) sixteen point one (.) so:: what (.)
2           have you done differently? (.) anything
3    A:     a:h ye::ah, I I've pulled back on my li- cos I was
4           training too much (coach) said
5    EP:    ok:: so you're doing less traini::ng have you:: adjusted
6           your eating?
7    A:     mm heh heh no(heh):: heh heh heh
8    EP:    haven't done that (.) ok
9    A:     heh heh heh no heh
10   EP:    ten point three for subscap, (.) bi↑cep (.) eight point
11          five. (0.4) we'll just see how these go today
```

As was typical throughout the dataset, the EP produced an explicit request for an account. However, in contrast with the other accounts produced, the athlete formulates the account in terms of a reduction in training load (line 3). The self-repair from (what was presumably) 'I've pulled back on my training' (with li- presumably going to say like) to, instead, invoking the coach as the authority that she was training 'too much', justifies this behavioural change. Rather than present herself as having reduced her training load, the athlete (through the self-repair) frames herself as having previously trained 'too much' and, hence, reducing training is an appropriate action. Presenting training 'too much' as her coach's words strengthens the claim of over-training and externalises agency for her behaviour, thereby allowing her to manage identity.

EP then requests an account for changes in eating (lines 5-6). Here the athlete fails to produce an account of change. The hedging 'mm' and laughter at lines 7 and 9 indicate interactional difficulty (Potter, 1996; Potter & Hepburn, 2010). To fail to produce an account of change (even in the context of having made appropriate changes to training) is hearably problematic within this context. This interactional difficulty orients to the need for body regulation and change. To have failed to make

requisite changes and, therefore, not displayed appropriate athlete behaviour, is something that is problematic in this context.

Therefore, when athletes did not offer pre-emptive accounts, EPs requested accounts of change, orienting to the institutional requirements that athletes engage in ongoing improvement in body composition. In all but one instance, athletes produced accounts of having made positive changes, attending to their identity as athletes who should be engaging in body regulation. However, such accounts were typically hedged and vague, allowing athletes to manage the tension between needing to produce accounts of change, and (a) the possibility that testing would not show improvements in body composition and (b) to avoid presenting themselves as having previously acted inappropriately. As was seen in the deviant case, *not* producing an account of positive change was problematic, further showing how athletes are required to display engagement in improving body regulation.

6.5 Discussion

In interactions taking place during body composition testing within a Sport Institute/Academy context, athletes produced one of two types of accounts around body regulatory behaviour. Athletes either pre-emptively produced an account early in the interaction, or produced accounts in response to an explicit request from Exercise Physiologists. Similar to patients predicting weight increases to demonstrate that they were good patients who were aware of their weight (Pillet-Shore, 2006), athletes in the present data forecast skinfold increases to demonstrate that they are monitoring their bodies and, hence, are good athletes. Predicting failure to improve body composition, however, implies failure to engage in body regulation. To manage this, athletes routinely externalised agency for skinfold results. Externalisation of agency was also noted in interactions when patients were telling weight news to doctors (H. Webb, 2009). The removal of agency was used by patients to manage moral dimensions associated with being obese. Within the present data, externalisation allowed

athletes to avoid presenting themselves as acting inappropriately (by failing to regulate their bodies) and, hence, allowed them to manage their identities as athletes.

When pre-emptive accounts were not offered, Exercise Physiologists prompted accounts regarding regulatory behaviour. In other contexts of body regulation, explicit requests for accounts were not seen: During weighing, patients and group members typically accounted for their weight, however, accounts were not requested (Mycroft, 2008; Pillet-Shore, 2006). When telling doctors weight news, patients treated initial greetings as requests for an account, yet requests were not explicit (H. Webb, 2009). In these other contexts, weight loss can be understood as taking place largely for the individual (for health or other benefits), hence, the individual is ultimately accountable to themselves for weight gain/loss. Within the sporting context, body regulation is an institutional requirement placed on athletes and, thus, athletes are accountable to the institute for their actions and bodies. Requesting accounts of change makes visible the institutional context in which improving body composition is required. As evidenced by the deviant case, failing to produce an account of improving body regulatory behaviours was problematic. In weight-loss groups, members typically produced accounts in terms of having eaten or acted 'badly' (Mycroft, 2008). However, within the sport context, where athletes are required to improve body composition and are accountable to the sporting body, athletes needed to produce accounts around positive behavioural change. Moreover, in requesting accounts at each testing session (often framed in terms of changes made since the previous test), athletes are positioned as needing to improve continually and engage in ongoing behavioural change.

In contrast with other contexts of body monitoring, where those being surveyed are overweight and typically being assessed for health reasons, athletes in the present sample are in peak physical condition. As seen in the data, in the sport context athletes are made *more* accountable for their body composition and actions. Orientation to expectations that athletes engage in self-surveillance is also evident during interactions. Such exploration of skinfold testing builds on existing body regulation literature from health and weight-loss contexts and provides insight into how body regulation is done in additional contexts.

Moreover, the exploration of how body regulation is carried out in practice, and of the social actions accomplished in and through the interactions taking place, also contributes to traditional literature exploring behaviour and identity. For example, some theorists have argued that people often conform to or participate in behaviours that they are not necessarily in favour of due to a phenomenon labelled, pluralistic ignorance (see D. Miller & McFarland, 1987; O'Gorman, 1986; Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Pluralistic ignorance refers to individuals' erroneous impressions of others' attitudes and behaviour (O'Gorman, 1986). Individuals over-estimate the extent to which others are favourable towards engaging in a given behaviour and, therefore, in order to manage the impression that they give to others, they engage in the behaviour (Suls & Green, 2003). However, from a discursive psychological viewpoint, what individuals think and feel is not accessible or amenable to empirical exploration (Hepburn & Potter, 2003; Potter, 1996). Thus, rather, than revealing athletes' inner thoughts and feelings about whether they, or other athletes, are happy to be participating in body regulatory behaviours, the interactions analysed here can be viewed as performing actions in the social world, such as identity management. Rather than considering whether athletes have actually made the changes in regulatory behaviour that they claim, how they felt about these changes, or what they thought fellow athletes might think about such regulation, the current study highlights how athletes produced accounts during interactions taking place during body regulation in ways that presented them as good athletes.

In addition to building on the previous literature, such as that dealing with body regulation, the present study may provide insight into athletes' experiences and offer practical implications when working with athletes. Given the higher prevalence of eating disorders and disordered eating amongst athlete populations (Brewer & Petrie, 1996) and that Anorexia Nervosa is the third most common chronic illness amongst adolescent girls (Beumont, 2000), orientation to accountability and expectations evident within these interactions may be problematic. While the aetiology of eating disorders is complex, pressures from social environments, as well as environmental stressors, are argued to contribute (Polivy & Herman, 2002). The direct accountability for athletes' bodies within the

sporting context needs to be considered when understanding the social environment in which athletes may develop disordered eating.

Moreover, it has been suggested that difficulties with identity or identity formation are central to the development of eating disorders (Polivy & Herman, 2002). Within athlete populations, when identity is highly invested in being an athlete, vulnerability to disordered eating increases (Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Within the interactions, the relevance of presenting a good athlete identity is evident with athletes doing considerable work to manage their identity. As such, adequate body regulation can be seen as part of holding an appropriate athlete identity. Understanding the ways in which identity is oriented to and made relevant within these interactions may further aid understanding of the context in which athletes are vulnerable to disordered eating.

Furthermore, over-reduction of body fat results in serious physical health consequences (Bouchard, 2007; Yeager, et al., 1993), yet requests for accounts are often framed such that athletes are positioned as needing to engage in ongoing reduction of body fat. The reframing of requests could be modified and perhaps, instead of implying the need for continual change, could orient to maintaining targeted scores. Although interactions were only recorded within one Sport Institute network, routine testing of body composition is commonplace throughout sporting environments (Wilmore, 1992). It is likely that the way testing is conducted may be similar across alternate sport settings, something which may be beneficial for future research to explore.

Accordingly, the present study adds to literature regarding body regulation and monitoring, offering insights into similarities and differences of how body regulation occurs across contexts. Moreover, within the context of increased prevalence of disordered eating and the Female Athlete Triad, the study provides insight into the practices surrounding athletes' bodies and, hence, may contribute to understanding and improving athletes' psychological and physical health.

Discussion

7.1 Overview

The aim of the present research was to explore the notion of athlete identity from a discursive psychological perspective in order to add to existing literature in sport psychology and the sociology of sport exploring this construct. Additionally, this thesis aimed to explore a) the social contexts in which athletes' experience psychopathology and b) the link between identity and pathology established in the sport psychology literature. Identity was explored using two different data sources and styles of analysis to explore two contexts – body regulation and career transition - in which athletes are vulnerable to experiencing distress and pathology. This chapter summarises and synthesises the main findings from this research, discusses the methodological approach and use of varying data sources, as well as explores the implications for clinical practice and for athlete identity research.

7.2 Summary and Synthesis of Main Findings

7.2.1 Media Study

The aim of conducting a media analysis was to explore the versions of athletes and their identities that are culturally dominant and have come to be accepted as 'common sense' versions of what it is to be an athlete. The media analysis focused on transition accounts – both retirements from elite sport and returns to competing at an elite level after an earlier retirement. The transition out of elite sport has received widespread research attention; however, such explorations have typically remained rooted in a realist epistemology. Transitioning back into competing in elite level sport (after an earlier retirement), albeit a less commonly experienced transition, is largely absent from the transition literature, including lifespan developmental models of athletic career transitions (e.g., Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman & Reints, 2010). With transitions noted to be potentially highly distressing for athletes, the aim of the media study was to explore representations of decision making

around retiring and returning to competing in elite sport, in order to gain insight into the social contexts within which athletes experience distress during transitions. The focus was on exploring how versions of retirements and reasons for choosing to return to competing in elite sport, which gain cultural currency, create particular identity positions for athletes and the regulatory work that such positioning might accomplish.

It was evident throughout the media data gathered, that athletes are positioned such that choice around both playing and retiring from sport is constrained. Throughout the media accounts, versions of retiring and appropriate motivators for competing in sport were privileged or problematised. Chapter Three focused on exploring retirement accounts. Within the media, retirements were depicted as occurring under one of three broad circumstances: a) those occurring due to the age of the athlete, b) retirements occurring due to athletes' injuries, and c) retirements that were depicted as actively chosen for other reasons (independent of external forces). Each broad type of retirement was depicted differently; with retirements occurring due to the age of the athlete presented as desirable, retirements occurring in relation to injury depicted as sad, and those retirements that were chosen for other reasons were presented as problematic. Through the varying depictions of different forms of retirement, retirements that occurred on the athletes' 'own terms' and at the 'right time' (before having played for 'too long') were privileged as ideal. Through such privileging, appropriate and inappropriate actions and choices of athletes are reproduced and reinforced as the dominant versions of how athletes should be and act, thereby making alternate choices and identity positions harder to access. Accordingly, in the retirement accounts examined, athletes were positioned as needing to continue playing until the externally determined (but somewhat ambiguous) 'right' point in time is reached (or they are injured).

For athletes to continue beyond the 'right time' was constructed as inappropriate in retirement accounts. Although athletes were constructed as ideally having agency around the choice to retire, in positioning athletes as needing to play until the 'right time' is reached and then retire, decision making is ultimately restricted and constrained. Therefore, athletes are positioned such that they have minimal

agency in the choices they make to compete (and not compete) in elite level sport, despite the privileging of choice in retiring.

Chapter Four contrasted the accounts of retirements that were constructed as 'actively chosen' with accounts of sporting comebacks. Evident from this analysis was that playing sport was not constructed as something actively and rationally chosen by athletes, but as something that was driven by emotion, compulsion, and a calling or purpose in life. In constructing the return to competing at an elite level as driven by emotion, passion and a life-purpose, athletes are positioned as people who necessarily have the requisite emotion and calling. Thus, the exploration of sporting comebacks and retirements did, additionally, offer some insight into constructions around reasons to compete in sport in the first place. That is, athletes are positioned as needing to play (and to continue to play) sport if they have the physical ability to do so until a precise (and externally determined) point in time is reached. Evident from the retirement accounts, to retire before then (and whilst physically able to continue) was constructed as problematic, yet to return to competition following a retirement was depicted as natural and inevitable. In (re)producing the return to sport as driven by emotionality and a compulsion, such motivating factors are further reinforced as the common sense reasons why athletes play sport (in the first place) and return to competing. Accordingly, alternate motivators and reasons for competing become increasingly inappropriate.

Furthermore, absent from the media accounts were depictions of decisions to play, continue playing, or return to competing, as decisions. That is, while retirements were depicted as a result of a decision making process, to play was not presented as something actively chosen or decided upon within the media accounts. Moreover, although to retire was constructed as a regrettable decision, to continue playing sport was not constructed as a choice that might also be regretted. Thus, dominant versions of athletes as people who necessarily are compelled to play are further reproduced in the media accounts examined.

7.2.2 Interactional Data: Skinfold Testing Interactions Study

The aim of the skinfold testing interactions study was to explore how the discourses of self-regulation and surveillance around athletes' bodies (in which versions of athlete identities are constituted) are reproduced and how athletes and exercise physiologists co-produce identities for athletes within one context of athletes' everyday interactions within a sport setting. In focusing on skinfold interactions, a further goal was to examine how body regulation takes place in practice to shed light on the social and discursive contexts in which athletes experience eating and disordered eating behaviour.

While sociological research has identified discourses of surveillance and regulation around athletes' bodies that have gained currency, how such discourses are reproduced in the sport setting and, thus, gain dominance has not previously been explored. Chapter Five explored how discourses surrounding athletes' bodies were reproduced in news-delivery sequences during body regulation testing. Through delivering news of increased skinfold scores without typical markers of bad news delivery (Maynard, 1997, 2003), exercise physiologists were arguably orienting to the skinfold interactions as routine, thereby normalising practices of body regulation. In half of instances, where athletes produced receipt tokens but did not assess the news, they, too, were arguably orienting to the skinfold testing as routine interactions and co-producing the normalisation of such practices. In doing so, both athletes and exercise physiologists reproduced the normalisation of potentially detrimental practices around the body (Shogan, 1999).

The delivery of good news was similar to typical good news delivery (Maynard, 2003) and was also similar to the way in which news of increased skinfold scores was delivered. In producing assessments of good news (when assessments were offered), the exercise physiologists typically downgraded or minimised the athletes' prior assessment (contrasting with assessments typically offered in other body regulation settings). In doing so, exercise physiologists oriented to improvements in skinfolds as a move in the right direction rather than an accomplishment or sufficient change, thereby positioning athletes as needing to enact self-surveillance by engaging in ongoing change and

141

continual improvement. Thus, evident throughout the interactions was the co-production of discourses that construct athletes' body regulation as a discipline of the self (Chapman, 1997).

In Chapter Six, the focus was on how athletes and exercise physiologists co-produced and attended to identity within accounts produced by athletes around their body regulatory behaviours during skinfold testing. Athletes produced either a) pre-emptive accounts early in the interaction forecasting news of score increases, or b) when pre-emptive accounts were not offered, athletes produced accounts in response to explicit requests from the exercise physiologists. In pre-emptive accounts, athletes demonstrated that they were monitoring their body composition and were, therefore, good athletes. Athletes externalised agency for any skinfold increases, allowing them to manage their identities as good athletes by avoiding presenting themselves as acting inappropriately by failing to regulate their bodies. When pre-emptive accounts were not offered, exercise physiologists explicitly requested accounts from athletes about changes in their body regulatory behaviour. Thus, athletes' accountability to the institute for their body composition was made relevant. In the one instance where the athlete did not produce an account of improved changes in eating and exercising behaviour, this account was treated as problematic. Thus, athletes were produced in the interactions as needing to be engaging in improving body regulatory behaviour (and, consequently, body composition). Producing accounts of improved behaviour, then, allowed athletes to attend to their identity by presenting themselves as good athletes. Such accounts were, however, vague and hedged with athletes managing the tension between needing to produce accounts of changed body regulatory behaviours, (a) the possibility that testing would not show improvements in body composition and (b) to avoid presenting themselves as having previously acted inappropriately.

In addition to the assessments offered by exercise physiologists following news of improved body composition, athletes were further positioned as needing to engage in ongoing improvement in body regulation and monitoring through asking athletes at each testing session to account for the changes they had made in body regulatory behaviours since the previous testing session. Accordingly, throughout the interactions, athletes were repeatedly produced as needing to engage in

improving body composition and, therefore, be self-monitoring and regulating their own bodies. As such, appropriate athlete identity was recurrently reproduced throughout the interactions as involving practices of self-surveillance around one's own body. Moreover, in producing accounts of positive change and displaying knowledge of their body composition in order to present themselves as good athletes who monitor their own bodies, athletes also reproduced discourses of self-surveillance around the body. Thus, the need for self-monitoring was conveyed by exercise physiologists throughout the interactions, with similar notions also produced by athletes in orienting to displaying an awareness of body composition and engagement in body regulatory behaviours.

Additionally, in the skinfold interactions, news of skinfold scores was not always automatically delivered to athletes. In not always delivering results, athletes are further positioned as needing to engage in self-surveillance and improve body composition, with exercise physiologists orienting to athletes' need to engage in regulatory practices regardless of their skinfold scores. Therefore, self-surveillance was further constructed as desirable and required of athletes. As such, a tension exists for athletes. That is, in Chapter Six it was demonstrated that, in the interactions, athletes were treated as expected to know their scores and be monitoring their bodies, yet in previous testing sessions news of scores may not have been delivered. Furthermore, in not automatically delivering the score to the athlete, exercise physiologists position themselves as 'experts', holding expert knowledge, while athletes are positioned as compliant and non-questioning of the expert knowledge (reproducing the discourses of performance which position athletes and sport staff accordingly, Johns & Johns, 2000).

7.3 General Discussion and Implications for Athletes

The ways in which athletes are positioned and their identities constructed has implications for athletes, for practice when working with athletes, as well as for research. The implications of the findings presented above are discussed in the following sections. The analysis of media accounts of retirements and sporting comebacks allowed for insight into the social context whereby certain identity

positions and choices around transitioning out of, and back into, elite sport are dominant and favoured. Transitions have been identified as potentially highly stressful for athletes and may lead to adverse outcomes for athletes including depression, anxiety and substance abuse (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Lavallee, 2005; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Lotysz & Short, 2004; Stambulova, et al., 2009). The insights gained from the present research build on earlier descriptions of the transition into elite level sport (Bruner, et al., 2008; Stambulova, 2000; Wylleman, et al., 2004; Wylleman &. Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman & Reints, 2010) and offer some knowledge of the transition back into elite sport, which has been overlooked in the extant research literature. The findings from this research offer some insights into the social contexts in which transitions takes place and into the identity positions that are made available to transitioning athletes.

In the sport psychology literature, notions of choice and identity have been linked to athletes' experiences of psychological distress around retirement from elite sport, with involuntary retirements - where the athletes' lack choice around the retirement - reported to be the most difficult to adjust to (Brewer, 1993; Brewer, et al., 1993; Grove, et al., 1997; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Wylleman, et al., 2004). However, exploring identity and choice from an alternate perspective to the approaches which have dominated the mainstream sport psychology literature, allows for different understandings of athletes' choices around retiring to be gained. The privileging of certain types of retirements limits identity positions that are made available for athletes (both during their careers and into transition) and this privileging, too, necessarily limits and restricts the choices that are available to athletes around playing, and retiring from, sport. Therefore, although a lack of choice over the retirement decision has been identified as problematic for athletes, athletes are positioned such that choice around retiring is restricted. An understanding of the context in which these limited identity positions are constructed and reproduced in public forums, then, allows for enhanced understanding of the particular difficulties that athletes may face during and after their sporting careers. The dominant versions of choices to return to compete in elite sport further position athletes as driven by emotion and as naturally

compelled to participate in sport. Accordingly, alternate motivators – such as money and glory – may be less acceptable and more difficult for athletes to defend.

Moreover, if athletes are positioned as compelled to play sport as their purpose in life, such positioning is likely to have implications for athletes transitioning into elite sport as well. The construction of competing in sport as not actively chosen by athletes and as due to a need or compulsion, further positions athletes as needing to begin competing in elite sport due to their physical abilities in the first place. Accordingly, such positions may also have implications for athletes as they transition into elite sport. To transition into elite sport in alternate ways, such as to lack motivation or to resist transitioning into elite levels and remain competing at sub-elite and junior levels, may also be problematic and not well understood within elite sporting contexts. In addition, high profile athletes, especially those who receive regular media attention, typically assume the position of societal role models and, accordingly, their behaviour in all aspects of life is under public scrutiny (Gerdy, 2000). Yet, athletes are positioned such that they are compelled to play, and retiring is restricted unless the 'right time' has been reached. Thus, athletes' choices to play (and continue playing) are limited. Therefore, to play sport and so be placed in the public eye and have all aspects of their lives scrutinised, is a choice that is, ultimately, also restricted.

Moreover, being ascribed the identity position of needing to devote life to sport does not allow room for alternate identity positions. Accordingly, athletes are constructed as needing to dedicate their whole lives to competing in sport (during their careers), thus, the development of other skills and strengths may be limited. Developmental research suggests that in focusing on sport from an early age, athletes develop their identities as athletes to the detriment of other possible identities (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Pummell, et al., 2008). In foreclosing their identity, athletes often fail to explore alternate pursuits and, as such, fail to develop skills and knowledge in areas outside of their sport. Accordingly, positioning athletes as needing to play and leaving few alternate identity positions available to them may be detrimental for athletes' development, with athletes less able to develop skills in different areas other than their sport. Limited alternate pursuits and skills may be problematic

upon retirement, when athletes are left without alternate identity positions or without having gained alternate experiences and skills in life. It has been suggested that athletes are often ill-prepared for life and alternate careers after sport (McGillivray & McIntosch, 2006; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993); as such, the restriction in identity that limits alternate pursuits during careers may be a cause of difficulty upon retirement. Therefore, understanding the social contexts within which distress may occur for athletes, where limited identity positions are accessible, can provide further insight into the experiences and difficulties faced by athletes.

As was evident from the media study, athletes, ultimately, have limited choice around playing (and not playing sport). Being positioned as needing to play sport, athletes are further positioned as needing to act in appropriate ways and engage in certain behaviours (but not others) during their sporting careers. Indeed, exploration of the skinfold interactions highlights one such way in which athletes actions are constrained. In the skinfold data, it was evident that athletes' actions around eating and body surveillance were restricted, with athletes positioned as needing to engage in self-surveillance and ongoing body regulatory behaviours.

Athletes have been noted to have a higher prevalence of disordered eating and the Female Athlete Triad than non-athletes (Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Fenichel & Warren, 2007; Sundgot-Borgen & Klungland Torstveit, 2004; Yeager, et al., 1993), as well as being vulnerable to Social Physique Anxiety (Hart, et al., 1989; Martin Ginis & Leary, 2004). Thus, the exploration of skinfold interactions, then, allowed for new insights into how identity positions made available to athletes may leave them vulnerable to disordered eating.

It has been suggested that when identity is highly invested in being an athlete, vulnerability to disordered eating increases (Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006). Throughout the skinfold interactions, both in the accounts produced by athletes and the ways these were receipted by exercise physiologists, it can be seen that engaging in body regulation is constructed as part of holding an appropriate athlete identity. Positioning athletes as needing to engage in body regulation and self-surveillance makes alternate actions, such as failing to engage in body regulatory behaviours, harder

146

to access (Burr, 1995; Edley, 2001). As such, the dominant versions of athlete identity which are produced within the elite sport setting reproduce notions of reducing body fat, which may leave athletes vulnerable to developing disordered eating.

Requesting accounts of change makes the accountability of athletes to the institute visible. Within the sport setting athletes are made more accountable for their body composition and actions than weight loss Group Members or patients in other contexts of body regulation. In addition, in weight loss groups, Group Members performed 'not knowing' to manage accountability around weight gain (Mycroft, 2007), however, within the skinfold interactions athletes did not perform not knowing. Within this institutional context athletes need to demonstrate their awareness of their bodies, again highlighting the increased accountability of athletes to the institute for their bodies.

Furthermore, the aetiology of eating disorders is complex, however, it has been argued that pressure from social environments, as well as environmental stressors, may contribute (Polivy & Herman, 2002).The context of the sport institute and the direct accountability of athletes for their bodies within the sporting context may constitute pressures and stressors from the social environment in which athletes may develop disordered eating.

Body regulation has also been argued to become normalised within sport settings (Franklin, 1996; Shogan, 1999). How such normalistion was reproduced in practice was evident within the skinfold interactions. Given that athletes have a higher prevalence of disordered eating, practices normalising body regulation and self-surveillance may, in themselves, leave athletes susceptible to pathological eating and exercising behaviours. Moreover the normalisation of practices to reduce body fat may further normalise ongoing interpersonal evaluation of athletes' physiques and reinforce social ideals of athletes' bodies, which may also put athletes at increased risk of developing Social Physique Anxiety (Martin Ginis & Leary, 2004).

Additionally, positioning athletes as needing to engage in continual improvement may further leave athletes vulnerable to engaging in excessive behaviours to reduce body fat. Orientation to

maintenance of ideal body composition was not made during interactions, rather, a need continually to improve was reproduced, even when target scores were met. The 'drive for thinness', or preoccupation with dieting and weight, and fear of weight gain (Wiederman & Pryor, 2000), is a predictor of disordered eating behaviours (Gustafsson, et al., 2010; Sands, 2000). The development of the drive for thinness has been conceptualised as occurring within a psychosocial environment, rather than due to personality type of the individual and other internal factors (Gustafsson, et al., 2010), and is thought to be triggered by a perceived discrepancy between the body and an ideal view of what the body should be (according to societal ideals; Sands, 2000; Wiederman & Pryor, 2000). Such a discrepancy often leads to Social Physique Anxiety and, ultimately, disordered eating (Sands, 2000). Within the skinfold interactions, exercise physiologists reinforce and reproduce ideal notions of athletes' bodies. By orienting to ongoing change as required in order to achieve ideals, exercise physiologists may reinforce the notion of a discrepancy between the athletes' body and the ideal body, thereby potentially fostering the development of the drive for thinness and, ultimately, Social Physique Anxiety and disordered eating.

The orientation to ongoing change and continual improvement can also arguably be seen as reproducing perfectionistic ideals. That is, athletes are positioned as needing to make ongoing changes and improvements with goals recalculated once targets are met; thus, athletes are positioned as never able to meet the ideal. Although perfectionistic tendencies can be adaptive (even necessary) for elite athletes, perfectionism can also be maladaptive, leading to increased anxiety and lower self-confidence (Koivula, Hassmén, & Fallby, 2002), with maladaptive perfectionism having been linked to negative mood states (Stirling & Kerr, 2006). A link between perfectionism and the development of Anorexia Nervosa has also been well established in the literature, with perfectionism also reported to be a trigger for Bulimia Nervosa (Franco-Paredes, et al., 2005). Perfectionism has also been linked to the development of Social Physique Anxiety and disordered eating (Haase, et al., 2002).

Moreover, within the interactions athletes are also positioned as compliant and non-questioning, with sport staff constructed as 'expert', reproducing power differentials identified as

dominant in the sport setting (Johns & Johns, 2000). In alternate contexts of body regulation (Mycroft, 2007, 2008; Pillet-Shore, 2006; H. Webb, 2009), those being weighed and tested were not positioned as compliant and such power differentials were not evident. Producing athletes as compliant may be problematic in the context of body regulation. Given that athletes are positioned as needing continually to improve body composition and that body regulation is normalised by 'expert' sport staff, such non-questioning compliance may leave athletes vulnerable to engaging in excessive and pathological eating and exercise behaviours as they unquestioningly strive to improve body composition.

As observed from the analyses in this thesis, versions of athlete identity are reproduced at the broader societal level in media accounts and are also reproduced within elite sport settings. Within both the contexts of career transition and body composition testing, athletes are positioned such that only limited identity positions are made available and choices and actions are restricted. For athletes not to act accordingly is problematised both in media accounts (e.g. 'actively' chosen retirements) and in interactions (e.g. not producing accounts of positive behavioural change). Thus, for athletes to act in alternate ways is harder to access. Evident from the media accounts is that athletes are positioned as needing to play sport. Within this identity position, come further prescriptions for actions and ways of being with athletes further positioned as needing to engage in self-surveillance of their bodies and as being compliant with instructions from 'expert' sport staff. Yet, the ways in which athletes are positioned as needing to act, may potentially lead to distress and instances of psychopathology. In restricting choice around playing and retiring, athletes may be left vulnerable to distress during and after transition such as anxiety, depression and substance abuse, and in positioning athletes as needing to engage in ongoing improvement in body regulation and as accountable for this regulation, athletes are vulnerable to Social Physique Anxiety, disordered eating and the Female Athlete Triad.

While the current exploration of athlete identity focused on athletes' choices and actions in two specific contexts - transition and body regulation - athletes' identity and choices are likely to be further restricted in additional contexts. Athletes' unquestioning compliance, for example, may also be

149

problematic in additional situations to body regulation. With athletes further positioned as having little choice during their careers and little control over their actions and, ultimately, their lives, such compliance may leave athletes vulnerable to over-training, and the anxiety and physical health concerns which can accompany this (Horton & Mack, 2000; Stephan & Brewer, 2007). Moreover, some theorists suggest that pain and playing through injury are normalised in the sport setting, despite the potential for long term consequences and ongoing chronic injuries (Roderick, 2006). Again a failure to question 'expert' advice given in the sport setting may leave athletes vulnerable to physical health consequences of ignoring pain and playing through injury. The ways in which athletes are positioned (as evidenced in the current research) may also be helpful in understanding other experiences of athletes. Experiences of depression following injury (Brewer, 1993; Brewer & Petrie, 1996) may also be understood in terms of athletes failing to be able to fulfil a natural compulsion. Upon becoming injured, alternate identity positions may not be available to athletes, leaving injury as a failure to fulfil their calling in life. In addition, an insight into the social and discursive contexts in which athletes use performance enhancing drugs, for instance, may also be further informed by the current research. Having restricted choice around playing or not playing, for instance, may leave athletes vulnerable when performance slumps, with limited choices around discontinuing playing sport available to them. Moreover, with athletes positioned as non-questioning and compliant, advice from sport staff to use drugs may also go unquestioned. Therefore, exploring identity from an alternate perspective than that typically offered in the sport psychology literature offers additional insights into social contexts in which athletes may experiences distress. This alternate approach may be valuable for exploring alternate sources of distress for athletes.

7.4 Implications for Practice

This exploration of athlete identity from a discursive psychological perspective extends existing literature and provides additional understanding of the social contexts in which distress may occur for athletes. Such alternate understanding may inform sport staff when working with and supporting

athletes. For coaches and sport staff to be more aware of the ways in which athletes are routinely positioned may impact on the ways in which they work with athletes. Insight into dominant understandings of athletes as driven by passion and desire, for instance, may allow for better understanding, rather than demonising, of athletes who are struggling with motivation, or who lack desire to continue competing or to transition (back) into elite levels. Thus, having critical insight into the ways in which athletes are positioned may allow sport staff to understand the difficulties athletes may experience in different ways. Moreover, understanding athletes' choices around transitioning into and out of elite sport as constrained may also further make it possible for sport staff to allow for and encourage alternate ways of being to be accessible within the sporting environment.

Within the sport psychology literature, it has been recommended that, especially during the transition process, practitioners work to develop athletes' identity and build up other roles in life (Brewer & Petrie, 1996; Lally, 2007). However, from the analysis provided in this thesis, working to develop alternate aspects of athletes' identities, in practice, may be less possible. That is, athletes are positioned as needing to compete in sport and devote their whole lives to sport, with limited alternate identity positions made available. As such, to build up other roles may be less possible in practice. However, in understanding the social context in which these identity positions are ascribed and made available to athletes, practitioners may be able to help athletes identify prevailing discourses and understandings around athletes, which may aid them during times of distress. From analysis of the skinfold interactions, it was possible to see how dominant discourses around athletes' bodies were reproduced in the sport setting. Although this thesis did not explore how discourses around transition and choice were reproduced within the sporting environment, it is likely that such dominant versions are (like the discourses around body surveillance) reproduced by sport staff within sport settings. As such, an awareness of these discourses and the difficulties that might ensue, can help sport staff to be aware of discourses they may or may not be reproducing, with a view to shift the reproduction of these ideals in the sporting environment. That is, rather than build a new identity for athletes, sport staff may be able to reproduce alternate versions of athlete identity where sport is perhaps viewed as

part of life and part of the athletes' identity, thus making alternate identity positions more accessible for athletes, especially during times of potential distress (e.g., transition, lack of motivation, loss of form, injury and so on). Results from the present thesis have been fed back to the South Australian Sport Institute throughout the undertaking of each study. Results and publications have also been forwarded to SASI in the hope of informing practice in this institutional environment.

Likewise, insight into the discursive practices in which athletes bodies are located may further inform practice for sport staff when engaging with athletes. It has been argued that knowledge of differential power relations can help coaches to better manage and frame their interactions with their athletes (Jones, et al., 2005). Sport staff may be able to use knowledge of how power differentials and the privileged positions of sport staff are reproduced in their interactions with athletes to alter their interactions and minimise the reproduction of the positions of the 'expert' and the compliant athlete. Moreover, insight into how a need for continual improvement and accountability are reproduced in interaction may help sport staff to modify the reproduction of these ideals, which may be of benefit for athletes.

In a report of recommendations for best practice when working with athletes to minimise the likelihood of disordered eating emerging in the sport setting, it was recommended that sport staff avoid public weighing or discussing of results and that they do not pass derogatory remarks about the body composition of individuals (UK Sport, 2007). However, in the light of the findings from the present research, such recommendations may be insufficient. That is, although sport staff in the data examined did not make derogatory remarks about athletes' bodies, notions of ideal bodies were still reproduced in the interactions and athletes were positioned as needing to work continually towards reaching these ideals. Moreover, although weighing and body composition testing was not always public, the accountability of athletes to the institute was oriented to in the interactions. Therefore, rather than just avoiding public weighing and body composition testing, and derogatory remarks, sport staff may need to work to alter their interactions and the discourses and ideals that are reproduced within these.

Approaches for preventing eating disorders also suggest gaining an understanding of the congruence between individual and contextual factors, such as societal ideals of beauty (Gustafsson, et al., 2010). The reproduction of sporting ideals of the good athlete and the ideal body must also be understood to be contextual factors contributing to the development of disordered eating. Interventions with athletes should help athletes and sport staff to identify these sporting ideals and how they are reproduced. Furthermore, individualised bodily goals that are not accompanied by the reproduction of ideal physiques and the need for ongoing improvement may also be of benefit.

Moreover, in working with athletes who are identified as experiencing distress in relation to body regulation, and transition, as well as in relation to other events (e.g. injury), Narrative Therapy (see White, 1995; White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) may be an effective therapeutic intervention. Narrative Therapy is an approach that has arisen from social constructionism and takes into account the discourses and dominant social constructions in which our lives are embedded. Narrative Therapy is focused on working with the stories people have about their own lives. This approach suggests that through life events we create stories (about our struggles, competencies, relationships, achievement, failures and so on), which link certain events together as a way of making sense of, and explaining, them. The dominant stories we have for our lives effect the present, but also future actions and how we interpret and make sense of new life events as they take place (White, 2007). The focus of Narrative Therapy is on externalising the problem from the individual and on re-authoring or re-storying the lives of individuals. That is, people's life stories often reflect loss, incompetence and failure, with the aim of re-authoring being to help people to identify exceptions that are neglected because they do not fit with the dominant story line. Through these exceptions, therapists help individuals develop alternate storylines for their lives (e.g., of strength, ability to cope and success).

In addition, this approach views the stories we have about our lives as influenced by the broader stories of the culture in which we live (Morgan, 2000), with Foucauldian theories of discourses and technologies of the self incorporated into the development of Narrative Therapy (Lock, et al., 2005). Thus, Narrative Therapy explores how dominant storylines have been co-produced within the

dominant societal discourses and discursive practices within which the individual is located. Accordingly, when working with athletes, the stories they have about their lives can be examined by also considering the discourses within which they are located. Thus, when re-authoring athletes' stories, the constraints of the discourses around athletes and athlete identity can be highlighted and considered. For example, when working with non-athletes with eating disorders, Narrative Therapy has been shown to be a valuable approach (Lock, et al., 2005; Weber, Davis, & McPhie, 2006). Lock et al. (2005) suggest that by bringing into view the available discursive resources through which the disorder has been constructed and by disentangling the person from the common constructions that identify the individual as the problem, Anorexia can be resisted. Thus, this therapeutic approach also allows for exploring stories and identities in relation to the broader societal discourses and versions which surround athletes and athlete identities. Such an approach may be valuable in working with athletes' with disordered eating and in helping athletes through the transition process. Narrative Therapy, with a focus on the identification of the discursive practices in which athletes' bodies, in particular, are located, may help athletes struggling with disordered eating. In transitioning out of sport, Narrative Therapy may allow for athletes to rewrite their life stories and, thus, recreate their own versions of their identity, within the context of the broader societal discourses. Moreover, a Narrative Therapy approach may also be valuable for helping athletes who are experiencing distress in relation to other areas. For example, in working with an athlete who is struggling with an injury, a focus on re-authoring the importance of the injury in their lives may be effective in reducing distress associated with the injury.

7.5 Implications for Sport Psychology

This research builds on the minimal extant sport psychology literature which adopts a discursive psychological approach. Existing discursive psychological research in sport has explored attributions (Faulkner & Finlay, 2005; Locke, 2004), emotion (Locke, 2003), and concept of 'the zone' through which optimal performance is to be achieved (Locke, 2008), reconceptualising these notions

154

and offering alternate understandings of these concepts and the implications thereof for athletes. This research adds to the limited existing literature, expanding to include an exploration of identity, as well as choice around retirement, and practices around body regulation. The sport psychology literature remains largely embedded in a mainstream realist epistemology, with alternate approaches not readily accepted by many in the field. However, critical approaches such as discursive psychology, which challenge existing ideas and offer additional understandings and insights, are useful in furthering enquiry in the field. The use of critical approaches may also allow for new ways of working with athletes, especially when they are experiencing distress.

Moreover, sport psychology research has typically relied on questionnaire methods or content analyses of interview data, despite critiques of both for being reductionist and missing complex detail (Locke, 2004; Wilkinson, 2000). To date, the use of naturally occurring data and, especially, interactional data remains rare. Interview and questionnaire approaches treat the individual as informants on their own experience, yet, reliance on the individual has been criticised for overlooking the discursive practices in which athletes' identities and experiences are constituted (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b). Naturally occurring data allow for insight into the discursive practices in which identities are constructed, thereby avoiding the problems associated with questionnaires and analyses of interviews. Moreover, it has been argued that the interview context can limit and restrict the answers produced in and for the social interaction (see Potter, 2003; Potter & Hepburn, 2005), thus, the use of naturally occurring data also overcomes these limitations of interview research. Therefore, the use of naturalistic data may allow for insights that might not otherwise be gained in traditional approaches to sport psychology research. Although, for example, athletes might be able to answer questions on a survey about their experiences of body regulation, or be involved in an interview discussing such practices, it is unlikely that questionnaires and interviews would have highlighted how practices of body regulation are normalised within interactions occurring during routine practices of body regulation, nor would the ways in which athletes are positioned within the interaction as needing

to engage in ongoing improvements have been evident. Thus, the use of naturally occurring data may be able to offer additional knowledge not otherwise accessible to the field of sport psychology.

Moreover, the present research also offers new ways of understanding career transitions. Traditional sport psychology research, for example, suggests that involuntary retirements or those where the athlete has limited choice over the decision are the most difficult to adjust to (Grove, et al., 1997; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Wylleman, et al., 2004). However, through an exploration of the discursive practices surrounding retirement, this research challenges current understandings of choice around retiring by presenting alternate ways of understanding how choice might be related to career transitions. The present research has also highlighted the return to competing in elite sport as a potentially difficult transition in athletes' careers. Yet, to date, this transition has been overlooked in sport psychology research and has not been included in models of athletes' lifespans and transitions (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman & Reints, 2010). Moreover, the transition into elite sport has received minimal research attention (Bruner, et al., 2008; Stambulova, et al., 2009) and this exploration also offers some insights into ways to understand the transition into elite sport.

7.5.1 Implications for Athlete Identity Research

As Locke (2004) argued, a discursive psychological approach to research within sport psychology can challenge existing theoretical assumptions which drive research practice. Within sport psychology, athlete identity has typically been conceptualised using role theory, with the majority of identity research employing the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (Brewer, 1993) or content analyses of interviews. Athlete identity is considered an important construct (Brewer, 1993), yet a role conceptualisation of identity (and the associated research methods), which has formed the basis for a large body of athlete identity research, has gone largely unchallenged and unquestioned. The research presented in this thesis has offered an alternate conceptualisation of identity, frequently employed in the social psychology literature, to build on the existing body of athlete identity research.

In applying a novel theoretical and methodological approach, additional understandings of athlete identity are gained, particularly around the social contexts in which athletes may experience distress. In mainstream sport psychology research, level of identification with the athlete role has been related to difficulties during retirement (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Lavallee, 2005; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Lotysz & Short, 2004). Yet, an alternate approach offers different insights into this relationship. From the current exploration, it is evident that the identities of athletes are constructed such that athletes are positioned as needing to play sport due to emotion, passion and a calling in life, with alternate actions and motivators harder to access. When positioned as needing to retire, alternate identity positions are not necessarily available or accessible to athletes. Moreover, the relationship between identity and disordered eating established in the sport psychology literature (Jones, et al., 2005; Papathomas & Lavallee, 2006) can also be understood differently, with athletes positioned as necessarily unquestioningly engaging in ongoing self-surveillance and improvement in body composition. In building on mainstream athlete identity literature by understanding the ways in which athletes are ascribed identity positions that limit and constrain behaviour, athletes' experiences can be understood in different ways. Different understandings can inform practice when working to maintain the psychological well-being of athletes.

In challenging existing theoretical assumptions, traditional understandings of identity in the sport psychology literature can be built on and different methodologies aimed at broadening understanding can be employed. Further discursive conceptualisations of identity may be valuable in offering sport psychology additional insights into athletes' experiences, especially given the strongly established relationship between identity and psychological distress (e.g., Brewer, et al., 2010; Brewer, et al., 1999; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007). As such, the use of discursive psychology may build on, and benefit, research within sport psychology.

7.6 Implications for the Sociology of Sport

Sociological research in sport has typically explored broad cultural discourses around elite athletes and performance, which come to gain currency within elite sporting contexts and in society. However, how such discourses are produced and reconstituted such that they become dominant has not typically been a focus of exploration in the sociology of sport. Adopting a fine-grained discursive approach to exploration of the reproduction of such dominant discourses and ideals can add to, and complement, existing sociology of sport literature. Moreover, analysis of the reproduction of discourses also demonstrates how disciplines of power and power differentials between sport staff and athletes that are identified by sociological research are reproduced in practice in athletes' everyday interactions.

In this thesis, analyses of both media and interactional data are presented, the use of both of which has been limited in sociology of sport research. Increased understanding of how versions of athletes that are dominant in sport settings were reproduced at a societal level and become reproduced as common sense versions of being an athlete was able to be gained through exploration of media representations. This media exploration also builds on the limited use of media data in the sociology of sport literature (e.g., Gardiner, 2003; Wachs & Dworkin, 1997), which may be a valuable source of gaining insight into the reproduction of societal discourses and common-sense understandings. The interactional data allowed for insight into how athletes and sport staff reproduce dominant discourses within everyday interactions. Accordingly, the use of both data types may also add value to sociological explorations of discourses in elite sport.

7.7 Discussion of Methodological Approach

Within this thesis, two different data types (media and institutional interactions) were analysed in order to offer a broad exploration of the differing discursive practices within which athletes are located. The analyses of media data and interactional data generated different insights into athletes'

158

experiences. Moreover, the different data sources also made different levels of analysis possible. A more fine-grained analysis of the sequential organisation of talk and what each turn is designed to accomplish was carried out with the interactional data, and an exploration of the constructions of dominant versions of athletes and the rhetorical tools through which such versions are created and reproduced was possible with the media data. The benefits and limitations of each data source, as well as the use of multiple data types, are discussed below.

7.7.1 Media Data

The media exploration highlighted the discursive practices in which athletes are located and their identities constructed, as well as the actions and behaviours that are, accordingly, deemed appropriate or not for athletes so positioned. As such, how the positions made available to athletes limit and constrain choices around playing and not playing sport was able to be explored. Media data can be seen as advantageous, because they provide the opportunity for a broad insight into dominant discursive practices within a given society. Such exploration is not necessarily possible from other data sources, such as interactions occurring within specific contexts. An additional advantage of media data is that they are easily accessible in large quantities.

However, an analysis of media has been argued to be vulnerable to the imposition of researchers ideas on the data (see Schegloff, 1997). Analysis of media data also does not allow for insight into how the versions of athletes that gain dominance are reproduced in specific settings and interactional contexts. In particular, how versions of athlete identities are constructed within the sport setting is not accessible. How athletes negotiate these broad societal constructions and how they themselves construct and produce their own identities is also not able to be examined from an analysis of media. Moreover, identities have been argued as needing to be understood within the interactions and discursive practices that produce them (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b; Davies & Harré, 1999). Although media analyses give insight into the broad discursive practices in which athlete

identifies are constituted, how identities are co-produced in interaction and the conversational sequences through which athletes identities are negotiated cannot be explored.

7.7.2 Interactional Data

Interactional data from within an institutional setting offered insight into the production and construction of athlete identities within a unique sport setting. The interactional data allowed for exploration of how athletes and sport staff co-produced identity and, moreover, how discourses identified in sociology literature are reproduced within the local interactional context. A more fine-grained level of analysis is possible when using interactional data and this analysis allowed for insight into the sequential organisation of talk and how these sequences produced and constructed identities, as well as made athletes' accountability to the institute visible.

The field of discursive psychology is increasingly moving toward focusing on interactional data (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2005), as this data allows for exploring the moment-by-moment understandings of participants and how the interactions within a specific context organise and construct the social world (Schegloff, 1997). The preference for interactional data does, however, make accessing data more difficult, with institutions needing to offer access. Within the institutional context examined here, support for data collection was strong in principal, however, data collection relied on multiple others to gain and give consent to recording interactions. Moreover, within the context examined, schedules frequently changed depending on the demands of new and competing training and competition schedules and changes in staffing. Accordingly, gaining access to interactions to analyse was difficult.

Furthermore, although the analysis of interactional data allowed for insight into how dominant discourses were reproduced in interaction, analysing specific interactions did not allow for insight into the broad and dominant cultural versions and constructions of athletes or the discourses that are dominant both within society and within a sport setting. Moreover, although analysing interactions occurring within a specific institutional setting offers in-depth understanding of how identities are co-

160

constructed and co-produced within the specific interactional context, how such interactions and identity constructions may play out in different (even if similar) institutional contexts remains unknown.

7.7.3 Synthesis of Qualitative Approaches

Therefore, both the broad and fine-grained approaches to analyses of media and interactional data added specific insights into constructions of athlete identities. The understandings gained from each data source and level of analytic detail together give increased insight into the identity of athletes. The two different approaches for exploring different sites of athletes' potential distress, allowed for differing understanding of each site to be gained and also allowed for the findings of each study to complement each other. That is, the media analysis highlighted how athletes are positioned, while the skinfold data allowed for understanding of how such positionings were co-produced within the sport setting.

Pluralism in qualitative research and the use of a synthesis of multiple qualitative approaches is increasingly becoming a focus of research debate (e.g., Frost et al., 2010; Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). The use of one isolated approach leaves open the question of what different approaches might have offered and when different approaches are considered together, a variety of perspectives are accessed, which may provide a more holistic understanding of the topic of study (Frost, et al., 2010). Wetherell (1998) has called for a synthesis of analytic approaches to qualitative data. The different levels of insights gained in this thesis from media and interactional data are both useful in understanding contexts in which athletes may experience distress. Knowledge gained from both approaches also uniquely built on the existing athlete identity literature, adding insights that could not be gained from the other data source and level of analysis. To explore athletes' experiences from a fine-grained analysis of interactional data, or purely from a broader analysis of media data, would have been to miss additional insights and perspectives on athletes' identity and experience. Rather, the use of multiple levels of qualitative analysis in this thesis has offered a more holistic view of athlete

identities Thus, as Wetherell (1998) argued, a synthesis of approaches to complement findings from each level of analysis may be best used to explore and understand the social world.

While pluralism in qualitative research has recently being championed because it offers multi-layered perspectives on the phenomena under study (Frost et al., 2010), the focus of debate has typically centred on the analytic approach employed. In the present thesis, a pluralism of data was also utilised. Differing data sources are more amenable to different analytic approaches, hence, the use of different data types allowed for different levels of analysis. Therefore, a synthesis of data types may also offer a more thorough insight into psychological constructs and phenomena.

Accordingly, both data sources and approaches to analysis adopted in this thesis have advantages and limitations and, as such, a synthetic approach allows for such limitations to be overcome and the benefits of each to build together to produce a comprehensive insight into discursive practices which constitute the lived experiences of individuals. Accordingly synthesis of data sources and analytic methods may enhance future discursive and qualitative research.

7.8 Limitations

There were, however, a number of limitations in the present thesis. The media data analysed in this thesis comes from a limited time period of Australian newsprint media. Within Australia sports such as cricket, Australian Rules Football, and rugby dominate media coverage. Accordingly, data collected were largely focused on these sports. Moreover, in the Australian media male athletes and male sport receive the majority of media coverage, resulting in the media analysis focusing almost exclusively on Australian male athletes competing in a limited range of sports. Although no differences in reporting were noted in the data collected that reported retirements (and comebacks) of female athletes, non-Australian athletes and athletes competing in other sports, analysis is largely focused on a limited sample of athletes. Whether the versions of athlete identity dominant for male athletes within the Australian newsprint media are representative of dominant versions of athletes more generally is

162

not known from this exploration. Moreover, the transition into elite sport was not reported in the media. Although retirement and comeback accounts constructed reasons for competing in sport and transitioning into elite sport, analysis did not specifically explore identity constructions during the transition into elite sport.

The skinfold testing sessions were recorded within one Australian Sport Institute/Academy Network. Thus, while practices of body regulation are commonplace throughout elite sport (Bouchard, 2007; Wilmore, 1992) and so such practices may be similar in other sporting contexts, how similar practices of routine body composition testing and the interactions occurring during them may or may not be to other sporting contexts is not clear. Therefore, this analysis offers insight only into this particular institutional context; how the findings from this study might apply to athletes more broadly awaits further study.

7.9 Directions for Future Research

The present research adopted an alternate methodological and theoretical approach to researching athlete identity. Given the limited extant literature exploring athlete identity from alternate perspectives, additional research to build on the present findings would be beneficial to the field of sport psychology. The present research explored only Australian newsprint media. The findings from this research could be built on by exploring media accounts in other countries to see if similar versions of athlete identities occur across cultural contexts. Moreover, additional media sources, such as online news and television broadcasts, might also be useful in expanding the media findings. Similarly, the interactional data study undertaken here explored only one source of interactions within one sport setting. How dominant discourses are reproduced and how identities are co-constructed in talk in other sport settings would also offer further understanding of athlete identity and athletes' experiences. Exploring if and how such discourses around athletes are also reproduced in other interactional contexts beyond body regulation would also build on the present research. Moreover,

how practices of body regulation are carried out and how identities are co-produced during body regulation practices in other sport settings would offer increased understanding of athletes' experiences more broadly.

Given the limited knowledge around the transitions into elite sport and back into elite sport following retirement, additional exploration of culturally dominant versions of appropriate motivators for athletes can also inform future research into experiences of athletes. Given that accounts of the transition into elite sport were not produced in the newsprint media, alternate methods and data sources for exploring the transition into elite sport would be of benefit to offer further insight into this transition. Although the aim of this thesis was to explore identity within two contexts in which athletes are vulnerable to experiencing distress, building on the insights offered from this exploration by exploring identity constructions in additional contexts that may be potentially distressing for athletes, such as injury, would be beneficial. Furthering knowledge around athletes' experiences would also provide additional insights, which could inform practice and be used to promote the psychological well-being of athletes.

Moreover, as has previously been discussed, the use of critical and alternate approaches to research within sport psychology is rare. Additional use of discursive psychological or other critical approaches to research in sport psychology, especially researching identity and the social contexts in which athletes experience psychological distress, would be valuable to the field of sport psychology. Building on the limited explorations using discursive psychology would offer further challenges to traditional sport psychology assumptions and research paradigms and may offer the field new insights and understandings of constructs considered to be of theoretical importance (such as identity), as well as informing practice when working with athletes. Further work championing the use of critical approaches in sport psychology is needed.

Additionally, future research could also further explore pluralism in qualitative research and the use of differing methods and data sources within qualitative exploration. In the present thesis, different styles of analysis (with different data sources) offered unique insights into athletes' identity and

experiences. Building on the use of differing methodological approaches and synthesising the findings from each may, as Wetherell (1998) argues, complement research findings and allow for more detailed understanding and knowledge of athletes' experiences to be gained. As was evident from this research, two different data sources and analyses complemented each other, resulting in a more detailed knowledge of constructions of athlete identities. Similarly, the use of multiple qualitative approaches in other research settings may also offer more comprehensive understanding.

The use of different methodological approaches to suit differing data sources may also shed additional light on contexts explored in this research. For instance, using a more fine-grained approach to analysis exploring interactions around transition, such as sport psychology consultations with athletes struggling with transition, would build on the findings of the media accounts around retirement offered in this thesis. Likewise, exploration of media data, for instance around body regulation and athletes' bodies would add valuable insights to the findings from the interactional data study. Although eating disorders and constructions of ideal bodies have been explored in the media (Ferris, 2003) and popular magazines (Whitehead & Kurz, 2008), constructions of athletes' bodies and of disordered eating amongst athlete populations has not been explored within the mass media. The addition of exploring interactional data around transitions and media data around body regulation would complement the existing research and allow for an even more in-depth understanding of athletes' experiences of distress within these contexts to be gained.

7.10 Conclusion

Through adopting an alternate theoretical and methodological approach to exploring athlete identity, different insights into identity, as well as additional insights into the contexts in which athletes are vulnerable to experiencing psychological distress were able to be gained. Athletes are positioned as needing and being compelled to compete in sport and to continue doing so until a vague and externally determined 'right point' in time is reached. Thus, choice, although privileged in media

accounts reporting retirements, is ultimately constrained. Moreover, athletes are positioned as needing to engage in ongoing self-regulation and improvement around their bodies, with such body regulation reproduced as non-problematic and normalised. Such an exploration has added to the existing athlete identity literature within the field of sport psychology, with the alternate understandings offered from this research providing additional implications for those working with athletes in contexts which may leave athletes at risk of developing psychopathology and experiencing distress.

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Appendix A: Skinfold Information Sheet

What it means to be an elite athlete

The Project
The aim of the study is to explore what it means to be an elite athlete and how athletes identify themselves as athletes. The study will examine a wide range of circumstances within SASI to see consistent themes in how SASI staff and athletes understand and make sense of what it means to be an elite athlete.

What is involved?
Participation will require you to allow your body composition testing to be tape-recorded.

Do I have to participate?
No, participation is entirely voluntary. You may also request the recording to be turned off at any stage during the testing if you wish and if you later decide you do not want your testing session to be used in the study you may request for it to be erased.

How will the information be used?
The study is not interested in looking at individuals and your testing results. Specific details regarding your individual results will not be considered (and will be omitted from any transcripts), rather the focus is on exploring broad patterns and themes that emerge across all the sessions relating to the way athletes and sport science staff discuss the testing and how it relates to what it means to be an elite athlete.
Recordings of the body composition tests will only be available to the researchers. Identifying information will be changed in all transcripts and reports of the study produced and testing results will not be individually traceable to you.

Contact Details
If you have any questions or require any further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Suzanne Cosh (primary investigator):
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Ph:

Matt McGregor (SASI Psychologist):
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Appendix B: SASI Information Sheet

Understandings of athlete identity

THE UNIVERSITY
OF ADELAIDE
AUSTRALIA

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

What is the study about?

The study has 2 broad aims:

1.   to explore how athletes, coaches and sport science staff make sense of what it means to be an elite athlete

2.   to examine the ways in which particular psychological attributes are assigned to elite athletes, especially within a sport institute setting

What will participation involve?

The process involves agreeing to have some of your interactions within SASI (e.g., psychology sessions and workshops, ACE sessions, or meetings) tape-recorded for later analysis by the researchers. If you are willing to do this all you need to do is to sign the attached consent form. The recordings will be analysed in order to examine common patterns relating to how people make sense of elite athletes, and what they think they should be like. The focus of analysis will be on patterns that emerge across all the recordings, rather than on the particular circumstances of individuals.

Can I be identified from the recordings?

No, the recordings will be treated as *strictly confidential*. You will remain **anonymous**. Any names or personal information mentioned will be omitted from transcripts of any recordings and from any published research findings. All tape recordings will only be listened to and transcribed by the responsible investigators.

Do I have to participate in the study?

No, participation in the study is completely voluntary.

Can I change my mind if I decide not to continue?

Yes, if you wish to stop the recording at any time, or withdraw your consent to record, you may do so. Any recording that has already taken place can then be deleted.

Is the study being undertaken with permission?

Yes. The study has been examined and approved by The University of Adelaide Human Ethics Committee.

Who can I contact if I want any more information about the study?

If you have any questions or require any further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Suzanne Cosh (primary investigator):
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Appendix C: Transcription Notation

Derived from the system developed for conversation analysis (Jefferson, 2004)

[ ]	Square parenthesis is used to indicate the beginning and end of overlapping talk
=	Signals utterances between which there is no interval (but also no overlap)
(.)	Indicates pauses in talk of less than 0.3 seconds
(0.6)	The number enclosed in parenthesis indicates the length of the pause (to the nearest tenth of a second)
a::h	Denotes an elongation of a sound (the more colons used indicates the longer the sound)
°that°	Speech within degrees signs is quieter than surrounding talk
↓	Indicate rises and falls in intonation
((coughs))	Double parenthesis enclose descriptions of details
hhh	Indicates audible exhalations (the more h's, the longer the exhalation)
.hhh	Indicates audible inhalations (the more h's, the longer the inhalation)
an-	Dash denotes an abrupt cessation in speech
e<u>ven</u>tually	Underline indicates emphasis in talk
>kind of<	'Greater than' and 'lesser than' signs denote that enclosed speech is noticeably faster than surrounding speech
<I enjoy>	'Lesser than' and 'greater than' signs denotes that enclosed speech is noticeably slower
ye(heh)ah	Laughter embedded in words