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Hunt, Jane E.

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(Re)constructing sport memory with women: From having ‘muscles on your muscles’ to ‘feeling pretty special’ and beyond in early Australian triathlon memory

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Jane Elizabeth Hunt 
Bond University, Australia

Abstract

Contributions to Australian triathlon magazines and newsletters of the 1980s evoke competing images of the sport as macho and extreme, and organised and inclusive. Interpreting niche media texts as acts of social memory, this article aims to show that both themes in triathlon memory are discursively characterised by gendered and ageist athletic hierarchies. Positioning contemporary feminist histories by sportswomen as subjective acts that (re)construct networked sport memory with earlier sportswomen across time, this article adapts Frigga Haug’s notion of memory work in search of understanding of the disconnect between traditional notions of sport as immersive experience and the ways in which women subjectively construct themselves as triathletes. Drawing on feminist narrative and discourse analysis methodologies, it interrogates the ways in which many texts, as acts of social memory, contest the meaning of triathlon, including its gendered meaning, with cumulative impacts on triathlon memory and implications for triathlon as a sport.

Keywords

feminist memory work, sport history, sport memory, triathlon, women and sport

An unnamed novice woman triathlete declares in the ‘Finger on the pulse’ page of the July to August 1990 issue of *Multi-Sport Magazine*, an Australian publication, that a woman cannot be both ‘a triathlete and a mum’ (*Multi-Sport Magazine*, 1990: 4). In the same magazine, an interview by 32-year-old age-group triathlete Sheryl Macrow-Cain with 1990 Australian female Ironman champion Sally Belyea describes the athlete as a dedicated, quiet, warm, ‘Ironmaiden’ who successfully ‘juggle[s] home, career and training’ (Macrow-Cain, 1990: 9). Also in the same issue, the magazine editor, race director, school teacher and occasional triathlete Barry Voevodin, describes Australian triathlete Liz Hepple’s ‘stunning’ 1990 World Cup win as an ‘amazing performance’. To Voevodin (1990: 3), Hepple ‘transcend[ed] the normal boundaries of endurance racing’, ‘blowing away the opposition in mind boggling fashion’, in a feat that was comparable to that of the sport’s

Corresponding author:

Jane Elizabeth Hunt, Bond University, Robina, QLD 4226, Australia.

Email: jhunt@bond.edu.au

legendary ‘Big Four’ male athletes. In contrast to the female authors Voevodin presents one of Australia’s top women triathletes as a serious athlete who belonged within the highest public ranks of the sport. The magazine contents thus seem to contradict patterns in gendered authorship and representation observed in scholarly studies of other niche sports media, such as Margaret Henderson’s (2001) landmark work on surf magazine *Tracks* in which male authors consistently present women as objects of desire rather than athletes. In *Multi-Sport Magazine*, the female authors (also athletes) appear to have discursive agency. The difference between *Tracks* and *Multi-Sport Magazine*, and between male and female authors within the triathlon publication highlights the need for attention to the negotiation and evolution of specific discursive frameworks in niche sport media, with methodological implications for sport historians seeking to (re)construct sport memory with a woman-inclusive framework.

This article recognises the contents of magazines and newsletters published during the first decade of triathlon in Australia as acts of social memory (Osmond, 2008; Phillips, 2004; Thorpe, 2010). Drawing on feminist memory work as an under-valued aid to working with stories of remembered experiences by women (Clift et al., 2023; Michell et al., 2017; Onyx and Small, 2001), and feminist narrative and discourse analysis methodologies (Adams, 2012; McLachlan, 2009; Summerfield, 2004), this article identifies key frameworks in triathlon memory that women writing for niche Australian triathlon media in the 1980s appear to draw on as they construct themselves as triathletes. As ‘minor’ attempts to ‘save history’, such texts form part of the network of triathlon memory used to inform subsequent rememberings of the sport (Osmond, 2008: 328). This article thus aims to investigate the relationship between dominant frameworks in Australian triathlon memory and the apparent traces of subjective self that women contributors to niche triathlon media reveal, with implications for triathlon memory and historical understandings of triathlon as a sport.

Researching women in sport memory: towards a feminist approach

While social memory is widely used as a term to refer to the ‘shared remembrances of group experience’, in contrast to the broad identities usually constructed in collective memory, the extent to which shared remembrance relates to individual realities, as well as their transmission and recognition as representative of group experience, continues to intrigue memory scholars (Steinbock, 2013: 7). Many suggest that memories articulated through everyday practice and conversation are abstracted and conceptualised with embodied, material, sensory, and linguistic cues serving to evoke recognition for both individuals and groups (Steinbock, 2013; Tanabe and Keyes, 2002). Of note for studies of sport memory, the body, as ‘a repository for memories of past experiences’, can play a role in this process of memory conceptualisation (Tanabe and Keyes, 2002: 3–4). Subsequent rememberings are framed in relation to new contexts, leading to further conceptualisation and re-encoding of the cues as relevant surrogates for experience (Besley, 2016). Enthusiasts seeking tangible cues for remembrance of Hawaiian surfer and swimmer Duke Paoa Kahanamoku secured approval for stamps and statues by highlighting his career as a surfer and his place in Australian surf mythology. As a network of social memory, such acts ‘in turn define, carry, and perpetuate’ highly conceptualised and mythologised aspects of the athlete’s experience (Osmond, 2008, 2016: 71). While many studies focus on memory in creative or institutional practice, Osmond (2008) interprets postage stamps as ‘modest monuments’ (p. 313), Phillips (2004) reasons that rugby league annuals, yearbooks, and commercial histories of rugby league ‘install social memory’ (p. 54), and Thorpe (2010) shows that ‘cultural memory . . . is cultivated via an array of mass,

niche and micro “media of memory” (p. 120). Social memory cues thus have relevance but are abstracted and conceptualised in a variety of formats and contexts over time, leading to further remoteness from the personal, physical, subjective and experiential roots of the memory.

Some studies focused on lack of fit between memory and subjective female experience build on Frigga Haug’s notion of feminist memory work (Michell et al., 2017; Onyx and Small, 2001). Two recent Australian studies recognise, with Haug, that while a ‘matrix of forces’ shape the context in which female experiences are initially recorded and later recalled as memories, the act of remembering may be personally political (Clift et al., 2023; Michell et al., 2017: 178). As Haug explains, ‘everything remembered constitutes a relevant trace’ because it contributes to the ‘construction of self’. To understand how the self is constructed in relation to and hence ‘reproduc[es] social formation[s]’, Haug proposes that researchers and participants work collaboratively with memories, or stories of remembered experiences, as data (cited in Onyx and Small, 2001: 774). Recently, Clift et al. (2023) applied this strategy to advance the ‘much needed task of negotiating feminine subjectivities forming within movement-based practices’ (p. 450). Seeking to explore the tension identified by Iris Marion Young between universalised male understandings of movement as ‘immersive experience’ and the ‘repressive immanence’ imposed by culturally defined ‘version[s] of femininity’, they conceptualise memory work as collective ‘sharing, speaking, (re)writing, reading, and thinking’ (Clift et al., 2023: 451, 453). Like Haug, stories of remembered experiences represent data, though not records of fact, which researchers and participants (re)construct collaboratively in order to understand the ‘notable liminal sites’ between highly conceptualised immersive sport memory cues, and subjectively remembered traces of female experience (Clift et al., 2023: 451, 452, 461).

While feminist memory work has been ‘taken up’ in a range of disciplines including psychology, and studies in emotion, education, and pedagogy, it presents challenges for sport historians (Clift et al., 2023: 452). This article responds to the ‘unavoidably impositionalist role of the historian’, the difficulty of reconvening in real-life groups of people whose paths intersected over 30 years ago, and the seemingly static nature of the already existent archival records on which historians typically rely, in this case private collections of niche triathlon media, by reframing feminist sport history as collaborative work with female contributors to networks of sport memory across time (Phillips, 2004: 62). Boncori and Williams (2023) make a case for understanding family histories as memory work, with ‘narratives built and shaped over time within a group’ (p. 24). While not focused on gender, Thorpe (2010: 125) uses the case study of debate in niche snowboard media over the sport’s early years in New Zealand, to suggest that cultural memory is dynamic and results from an unfolding process of ‘co-narration’ between the producers and consumers of narratives. Adopting Booth’s (2004) suggestion that ‘deconstructionist histor[ies]’ (p. 105) should be understood as interpretations this article frames the subjective interest and questions of scholarly sportswomen in the present as contributions to dynamic and evolving networks of social memory over time. They neither represent complete truths about the past nor the final word on women in those pasts, but rather function as memory work through which they actively ‘bring the past into the present’ in a manner that is ‘contingent on elements in the present’ (Marschall, 2019: 1661).

With feminist memory workers, feminist historians employ a range of strategies aimed at destabilising ‘assemblages of power’, and ‘challeng[ing] experiences’ (Cahn, 1994; Clift et al., 2023: 452; Hargreaves, 1994; Marschall, 2019; Schultz, 2014; Vertinsky, 1990). Some investigate the ‘disciplinary power’ of magazines for women and girls, with varying valuations of the extent of ‘liberation’ afforded by such publications and the communities they foster (Eskes et al., 1998; Schultz, 2014; Suzuki, 2021: 9). Others recognise the shadow of the researcher in the (re)production of oral narratives about women in the past (Adams, 2012). Summerfield (2004) recognises misremembering, confusion, emotion, fragmentation, and other forms of narrative rupture as signs

of the narrator's struggle to reference and deploy discourse that is recognisable to the historian. McLachlan (2009) proposes the inclusion of personal contradictions, flaws, and messiness, of 'significant and insignificant moments and multiple and shifting meanings of the gendered, athletic self' (p. 2157), in the '(re)writ[ing] and read[ing]' of narratives about and by sporting heroines. Some feminist sport scholars draw explicitly on Foucault's work on the 'intimate operations of power' and suggest that individuals exert power when 're-positioning themselves in relation to hierarchies that are already part of sport discourse', including gender, by utilising some discourses to normalise their behaviour and critically reconstructing others (Wickman, 2011: 386, 391, 397). Others draw on Foucault's notion of genealogy, which implicates the body as a record of resistant conduct, 'because events are inscribed upon the body' (cited in Bert, 2000: 51). Researchers may also 'interven[e] in the power relations which are at stake' by 'decipher[ing] the discourses which articulate the imprint of history on the body' (Bert, 2000: 51). Brought together, feminists historians seeking to work across time with contributors to female sport memory might recognise female subjectivities by looking for representational messiness and rupture as the sign of discourses that do not fit experience, identifying the challenges to discursive hierarchies apparent in constructions of self, supporting the possibility of resistance apparent in critically deconstructive and reconstructive narratives and deciphering the signs of historical events 'inscribed upon the body' (Bert, 2000: 51).

This article represents the subjective intent of a scholarly sportswoman to identify and problematise dominant themes in the network of triathlon memory. It reflects on the ways in which Australian women subjectively shape that memory through written contributions to niche print media in the mid-to-late 1980s. Two contrasting discourses emerge in triathlon publications from around the world in the 1980s: triathlon as masochism and triathlon as a stable, well-governed potential Olympic sport open to everyone from novices to elite athletes. An analysis of the contributions authored by women triathletes, as acts of social memory, reveals the contradictions, inconsistencies and messiness that characterise their engagement with dominant triathlon memory, as well as their use of discourse that has no place in that memory. The possibility that these contributions represent resistant memory is supported when considering the narrative traces of the physical experiences inscribed on their bodies, and the original constructions they present of themselves as athletes. This article thus seeks to reveal the gendering of triathlon memory as fluid and multifaceted, and to co-create feminist knowledge about the experiences of women triathletes of the period, by working across time with a handful of female contributors to triathlon memory.

The foundations of triathlon memory: a gendered language of extremes?

Modern triathlon emerged in the 1970s out of cross-training experiments within the running, military, and surf lifesaving communities of Southern California. Imitating mainstream media representations of these multisport novelties, a community of enthusiasts emerged in Australia in the early 1980s. In Australia, the foundations of triathlon memory were laid in the newsletters of the first state administrative body, the Triathlon Association of Victoria (TAV), edited by triathlete Geoff Frost, and magazines produced by enthusiasts seeking to report on or promote a growing number of local triathlons. Alan Mitchell, an early amateur athlete from Sydney established *Triathlon Sport* in 1984 to report on local events, while Barry Voevodin, a participant in the first proper Queensland triathlon, became so enthused with the new sport he organised further races, and produced small booklets and eventually a magazine *Multi-Sport Magazine* (1988–1991) to promote his and other events. Before the processes of commercialisation and professionalisation

gathered momentum in the 1990s, grass roots media typically reflected and informed triathlon oral tradition, mediated through content that editors solicited from fellow members of the triathlon community, who usually reported on events they participated in themselves (Hunt, 2014, 2019).

Early acts of triathlon memory, including oral traditions and items published before the emergence of triathlon media, drew on a broader cultural discourse about the pursuit of human limits. Pierre de Coubertin nominated pentathlon as the ideal Olympic sport, believing it epitomised the sporting impulse to exceed personal limitations (cited in Allison, 2012: 25). Tim Noakes (2003: xi) rationalised the appeal of running in terms of the human struggle ‘to keep moving forward’, ‘to push the limits’ and ‘to find out what makes us what we are’. Marathons appealed to a student of the Sri Chinmoy Marathon Team as they go ‘far beyond man’s preconceptions and imagination’ and promote ‘continual reaching out towards the limits of human endeavor’ (Bennett, 1980: 19). A participant in the 1974 San Diego event widely recognised as the first in the modern triathlon movement, the Mission Bay Triathlon, recalled that ‘people were scared of what their bodies would do after all that racing’ (Tinley, 1998: 9). Early triathlon pioneers evoked the appeal of pushing those limits, ‘with a kind of wild-eyed wonder in your heart, [you] let it all hang out . . . and went home thinking how wonderful that suffering had been’ (Tinley, 2015: n.p.). Some described triathletes as ‘gods or fools’ (Plant, 2017: n.p.), or, as the first Australian to travel to Hawaii to participate in an Ironman triathlon (consisting of a 3.8-kilometre swim, 180-kilometre cycle and 42.2-kilometre run) put it, they were ‘self-confessed masochists’. A *Fun Runner* (1982) magazine contributor likewise suggested that multisport had become the new ‘masochist’s event’ (p. 28; *Gold Coast Bulletin*, 1982). Voevodin also adopted the term ‘masochist’ in his race reports and established an event management business named Multi-Sport Masochists (Multi-Sport Masochists Pty Ltd., 1990; Voevodin, 1982). A 1999 amateur club history affirms the continued use of the term to evoke excessive physical exertion and a sense of daring to confront the unknown: ‘In the “good old days” triathletes didn’t know any better. . . . It was a real masochist who entertained the idea of doing something like this’ (Choate, 1999: n.p.).

Evoking the notion of masochism, and venturing into the athletic, psychological, and scientific unknown, triathlon narratives produced in Australia and elsewhere in the early to mid 1980s deploy a language of excess, with references to extreme courses and conditions, survival, and super humanness. Triathlons, especially ultra-distance events, took place under the worst circumstances: the ‘sky[s] w[ere] dark and angry’ and the ‘raging headwinds’ were ‘devastating’, ‘bitter, strong, [and] gyrating’ or ‘blizzardly cold’ (Black, 1984: 23; *Triathlon Sports*, 1984c: 36). Competitors persisted through their ordeals, ‘grit[ting their] teeth’, ‘endur[ing] wind gusts’ and ‘struggl[ing] onward’ (*Triathlon Sports*, 1984c: 36; Voevodin, 1986: 20). They became ‘oblivious to the pain’ and ‘agonising heat and exhaustion’ (Black, 1984: 23). An advertisement for bike wheels proclaimed that ‘Only the Strong Survive’, while a Victorian race promoter branded his event, the ‘Survivor’ (Ramon Sports Promotions, 1985; Woolly’s Wheels, 1984: 11). Australia’s first Ironman imitation race, the 1984 Triple M Triathlon, was ‘the world’s most gruelling event’ (*Triathlon Sports*, 1984a: 5). Training for the Hawaiian Ironman triathlon through 6 months of the Melburnian winter was also ‘gruelling’, but necessary; Ironman was not simply ‘tough’, it was the ‘toughest event of all’ (Stephens, 1987: 1; Triathlon Association Victoria (TAV), 1987b: 10).

Acts of triathlon memory also characterised the people who engaged in such events as excessive. At the very least, it ‘seemed like a crazy thing to do’ and ‘your friends don’t understand’ (Brown, 1987: 62; Stephens, 1987: 1). Participants in the 1984 Wiseman’s Ferry Triathlon might not be ‘classified as Wisemen or have the wisdom of Solomon’; and another ‘wonder[ed] whether the jokes about yourself and the frontal lobotomy’ might be true (Fraser, 1988: 38; *Triathlon Sports*, 1984b: 24). Writers often evoked something beyond the human: Hawaii was ‘an Adventure Into Hell and Back’ (Black, 1984: 23). Ironman laid bare the real self: ‘where normally we can mask

failure and fabricate achievement, the Ironman allows no luxury. It is an exposure, a test, with no excuses, nor corners to hide in' (Stephens, 1987: 2). Ironman was about the prospect of 'becoming even greater', about 'the feeling of greatness' and 'allows normal people to taste elitism' (Stephens, 1987: 1). Returning to Hawaii to compete in another Ironman was a 'ritual' or 'pilgrimage', leading to an 'experience [of] the full delight of existence', even transcendence: 'You are a triathlete, not a mere mortal' (Brown, 1987: 62; McCoy, 1987: 44).

Triathlon storytelling featuring notions of excess frequently demonstrated casual sexism, specific perceptions of women and equally specific male-centred understandings of sport. Niche print items of the period are mostly by male members of the triathlon community, focused on the actions of men and often use a language of force to characterise those actions as strong, fast, aggressive or combative. At Wiseman's Ferry, athletes reportedly 'blasted through the bunch', 'attacked the first steep hill', 'hurtled into the changeover area' and 'executed a triple somersault with 1 ¼ twist' rather than simply falling off a bike. There were also 'threats of punch ups' (*Triathlon Sports*, 1984b: 24). At the Saratoga Quadrathon, 'the gun sounded' and 'combatants surged'. The leader 'leap[t] off his surf ski and pounded back out'. He and his rival 'battled it out', until eventually one 'defeated' the other (*Triathlon Sports*, 1984c: 36). Reportage on the 1988 Devonport Triathlon stands out for its combative language: the reigning triathlon 'king', Steven Foster, passed the leaders on the cycle leg 'as if they were cardboard cut-outs flapping in the breeze by the side of the road'. His adversaries 'power[ed]' after him, and 'battled' each other, but 'the damage was done'. Seemingly searching for a relatable analogy, the author declared that 'Foster did to the opposition and the Devonport course what the American bombers did to Hiroshima in WW2', showing '[n]o remorse, just sheer, killer instinct' (Sim, 1988: 6).

Women included in the male-focused narratives of athletic daring and conquest often appear as supporters, a moral force or the focus of sexual interest (although women were more often sexualised in posed magazine covers and advertisements than text). One triathlon club update reported the activities of male athletes and coaches and thanked 'the girls for provid[ing] a lovely tent full of food' (La Trobe Valley Triathlon Club, 1987: 34). Stephens (1987) 'drew strength' from the presence of his wife at the 1986 Hawaiian Ironman, and 'felt hollow without her' in 1987 (p. 2). An all-male team at the 1987 Ironman Japan behaved well enough to make 'even their mums' proud, but at Hawaii male members of the team boldly and possibly successfully propositioned local women, leading to awkward encounters when their partners arrived closer to the race (TAV, 1987a: 2, 1987b: 10). Reporting on a Sydney race widely remembered for its unsafe conditions and poor planning, Voevodin (1986) recalled running up a steep hill in Kings Cross, a suburb known for its brothels:

an attractive relay runner expressed everyone's thought succinctly as she loudly gasped that magic 'F' word. I turned to tell her that it was a mighty friendly suggestion and not out of place in the Cross but I was too buggered and a happily married man. (p. 21)

The race commentator at a Victorian triathlon urged the sponsor to 'slip the tongue in' as he gave a platonic kiss during the female awards presentation (TAV, 1988d: 46).

Women most often appear as athletes in text, but race reporters usually allocated one paragraph to the women's races after 3–10 paragraphs on the men, while some paid no attention to the women and relied on the results. After roughly 400 words on the 1984 Gold Coast Triathlon, a reporter, 'T[ook] a look at the fairer sex' but 'had to go down the list to 58th spot' to find one (Yarwood, 1984: 29). A 1000-word blow-by-blow account of the men's open and veteran races at the 1987 Nepean Triathlon simply noted first woman Sue Turner's 'great effort', and observed that she finished, 'looking bright-eyed and full of running' (Ross, 1988: 8). Reporters who followed the

women's races often used the language of force to evoke their performances: at Wiseman's Ferry Gaylene Clews, 'annihilat[ed] the womens [sic] section' (*Triathlon Sports*, 1984b: 25). At a 1987 Mornington Peninsula biathlon, 'an almighty tussle' took place between Virginia Bell, 'the fastest female cyclist on the Biathlon Circuit', and Karen Schultz, who twice won a regional Queen of the Mountain cycle race and represented a real 'threat' (White, 1987: 12, 13). Bell simply 'dominat[ed]' at the 1987 Geelong Endurathon (TAV, 1987c: 42). The elite women at the third race in the 1987–1988 Repco Series 'put on a fine show of muscle and sinew' (TAV, 1988a: 16). As with Stephen Foster, reportage on Carol Pickard's race at the 1988 Devonport Triathlon stands out for its metaphorical references to lethal force: it was a 'repeat of Foster's slaughter' as she 'play[ed] the role of the executioner' (Sim, 1988: 7). As with Voevodin's 1990 celebration of Queensland triathlete Liz Hepple, displays of female triathletic ability were thus rendered meaningful and recognisable in triathlon memory of the 1980s through discursive reference to the strength, power and aggressive capacities typically associated with male athleticism. Before considering the extent to which the narrative was meaningful for women triathletes themselves, and reflective of the realities of their triathlon experience, it is necessary to outline the foundations and features of a competing narrative in triathlon memory that appeared to include women and featured a discourse focused on moderation, knowledge and order.

The foundations of triathlon memory: a less gendered language of order and moderation?

A second thread in international triathlon memory emerged in the early 1980s and increasingly contested the discourse of masochism from the second half of the decade. The interest in moderation and order grew out of a collective ambition to secure Olympic recognition for triathlon, an objective that entailed increased participation rates, inclusive stable governance, and formal rules and regulations (TAV, 1988c: 34). Except for Marc Evan's, 'Turbo Power', a small, privately produced training manual, the first books on triathlon shifted the discursive focus away from notions of excessive physical performance (Plant, 2017). Sally Edwards (1982), endurance runner, pioneer woman triathlete, and key participant in the first 5 years of triathlon governance in the United States, published potentially the sport's first proper book, *Triathlon: A Triple Fitness Sport*. Countering the popular perception of triathletes as 'crazies and eccentrics' with a personal history of the 1981 Hawaiian Ironman, Edwards (1982: 15, 19) presents herself as a regular person, normalises the sport as a pursuit for anyone, and offers guidance for the uninitiated. In 1985, leading figures in emergent British and European triathlon governing bodies Hunter and Kirschbaum co-authored a book that also evoked the idea of a safe, accessible sport with a how-to guide for would-be triathletes. From the mid 1980s Australian niche media, the narrative of order co-existed with the male-centred discourse of extremes. A *Triathlon Sport* editorial reported on the formation of the New South Wales Triathlon Association (NSWTA), which was already 'showing insight into the promotion and organisation of triathlons and safety guidelines' (Mitchell, 1984: 4). Paying attention to safety concerns, the magazine revised its assessment of the 1987 Dubbo Triathlon 'as Australia's safest triathlon' following participant complaints about the negligence of the race director (*Triathlon Sports*, 1987: 65). The third race of the Repco Series run by Tri-Sports Promotions featured 'staggered starts to reduce congestion in the swim', 'draft busters on motorbikes' and Victorian Police representatives monitoring intersections to ensure 'a well-spaced, safe and legal cycle leg' (TAV, 1988a: 16).

Proponents of the emerging new order directly countered the language of excess with a discourse of moderation. As TAV board member and *the fourth event* contributor, Louise Halloran (1987b), explained,

Slowly but surely we are shaping our image away from the masochist who struggles over mountains of kilometres to collapse exhausted at the race director's feet, to a sleek athlete who is dabbling amongst state level times in each leg of the event. (p. 40)

The language of moderation suggested that top race contenders were 'determined to outride the pack' or attempted to 'narrow the lead' of an international champion, while the visitor simply 'appeared to glide effortlessly' away (TAV, 1988a: 16; *Triathlon Sports*, 1987: 65). As triathlon seemed to necessitate 'going beyond the boundaries of normal living', articles on balanced training and lifestyles began to appear, advocating honest personal assessments of the feasibility of triathlon goals, planning to include quality sleep, diet and social interaction, and maintaining the integrity of the 'three pillars' of life, 'work, family and sport' (TAV, 1988b: 30). A 1987 sport science business advertisement was disguised as an account of the transformation of a masochistic triathlete into an informed, strategic and methodical athlete with an effective, personalised training programme (McCoy, 1987: 44).

Women were more often linked with the language of moderation than the language of excess in Australian triathlon niche media of the period. Even in acts of memory featuring the discourse of excess, they appear as agents of moderation, whether as real or remembered wives or mothers. Much like the article about Australian Ironman champion Sally Belyea published in the July/August 1990 issue of *Multi-Sport Magazine*, women were characterised as capable but balanced athletes. A profile on Barbara Fay, one of the top female athletes in the early Victorian triathlon community, explains that the talented, 'meticulous[ly] organised' Fay is, 'a fine testament to the value of consistent, moderate exercise and a sensible attitude. She does not live off beans and mega-miles' (Stephens, 1986: 34). Likewise, 'quiet yet articulate, cooperative and friendly' top South Australian female triathlete Heather Ashcroft, may not have realised her potential due to an unfortunate incident, but commented moderately on her injuries saying that the outcome 'could have been worse' (Vaughan, 1988: 15).

Belief that triathlon offered equal opportunities to men and women was a central theme in moderate triathlon memory, but memory-makers struggled to discursively assimilate the principle. Over the 1987-1988 Australian summer, they debated the underrepresentation of women in triathlon. Most agreed that gender equality was important to the sport's future: it promised more paying competitors and unpaid volunteers, and it would enhance the sport's appeal to the Olympic movement. In December 1987, *the fourth event* editor, Geoff Frost, asked why the numbers of women triathletes in Victoria remained at around 5%. He opined that triathlon 'is truly an equal opportunity sport' with no 'barriers to prevent women competing in equal numbers as men' but wondered whether there might be 'hidden' barriers, and how women might be encouraged to take up the sport (Frost, 1987: 22). Male and female triathletes responded, mostly addressing prize money, time constraints and confidence as key issues. Many highlighted a need to replace the intimidating 'perception of our sport as being one for masochists only' with an alternate view of triathlon as a fun and 'healthy way of life' (Frost, 1988: 1, 2). But articles seemingly intended to encourage female participation sometimes overly moderated the language used to report on women triathletes. The 'ladies' participating in potentially the first all-woman triathlon in Australia, were reportedly 'nervous', wanted guidance on what to wear and kissed loved ones 'farewell'. Instead of a 'gun' starting the race, the 'starting hooter' 'screamed'. After finishing the swim, the first athlete 'skipp[ed] out onto the cycle course', and other participants 'trotted' across the finish line to the sounds of the famous Cyndi Lauper song, 'Girls just want to have fun' (Voevodin, 1988: 45). The article comprised part of *Triathlon Sports'* attempt to join the conversation with a purportedly 'themed' issue on the topic.

Frost published responses to his 'Women in triathlon' editorial in the following issue of *the fourth event* including letters from three male readers that reveal the diversity and fluidity of discourses shaping the debate. A member of the Geelong Triathlon Club race committee wondered about the justice in women receiving equal prize money when they represented 5%–9% of the field. Like the race reports that included women as an afterthought, the race director also casually suggested that women start 30 minutes before or after the men, in an 'almost separate race' (McBride, 1988: 9). The patronising tone of a veteran age grouper's response is difficult to move beyond; he 'thanked heaven for little girls' because it was 'more pleasant being elbowed' by a 'female limb' in the swim. Yet, in contrast to the race director, he did present women as legitimate participants in the triathlons in which he encountered them and reported having a 'higher regard for women in general' because of the women he encountered during the swim, bike and run. He admired their 'gutsy non-fuss commitment [sic.]' and 'friendly dedication' (Stansfield, 1988: 9). A third male respondent did not address women directly, because he 'suspect[ed] that the "intimidating" aspects of triathlons were the same for women and men' and contested the continued media focus on elite competitors rather than age-group athletes. With a disapproving nod to masochistic triathlon memory, he added that 'we should try to emphasise the human side of the sport, rather than the superhuman' and 'demonstrate that participation in triathlon is within the reach of most people' (McLeod, 1988: 6, 8). Advocating attention to the everyday aspects of triathlon lifestyles, or what Haug (cited in Onyx and Small, 2001: 774) may have intended when referring to 'relevant trace[s]', he observed that regular triathletes like 'flashy gear', the camaraderie, 'people thinking' they are 'super fit', and making fun of their purported athletic seriousness, as in the case of Jenny McInnis, who joked that triathlon offered an excuse to drink champagne (McLeod, 1988: 8). Brought together the male responses reveal a lack of consensus about women triathletes, and a tendency for male age groupers but not race directors to craft acts of memory based on relevant experiences.

While gender thus emerges as a key element in competing versions of triathlon memory, it does not discursively separate the two in the niche media of the 1980s. Both masochistic and moderate triathlon memory applies a male-focused understanding of athleticism with deep historical roots. The ordered and participant strands of moderate triathlon memory play down gendered athletic discourse through claims of inclusiveness and evocation of a supposedly genderless reality flagged by traces of everyday triathlon experiences, but do not contest it. All three strands reflect additional co-existing, intersecting and dynamic discourses, including amateurism, Olympism, and national and regional identities and preoccupations, all of which warrants separate scrutiny. However, the final section of this article considers the extent to which women engaged with these themes in dominant triathlon memory, destabilised them, contested gendered athletic hierarchies and attempted to reconstruct triathlon memory to create space for their own lived experiences.

Female subjectivity in acts of triathlon memory: feeling special, familiar and forgotten

Women reporting on their triathlon endeavours or on other women triathletes acknowledged the same experiences that prompted the language of excess, but frequently deployed the language of moderation, potentially as a vehicle for more closely representing their own experiences. Using a neatly presented, moderately expressed, contextualised narrative in third person, with an almost even number of words for the men's and women's races, West Australian elite triathlete Carol Pickard (1988) shared a story about the collective performance of the professional women at the 1987 Bermuda International Triathlon. In the men's race, athletes 'fell behind', 'ran into second

place', or 'tired on the run'. Australian Greg Brown passed 13 other men to make it into the top 10. In the women's race, Australians Pickard and Kim Hicks 'followed' the first woman out of the water, Pickard 'took the lead', and maintained it 'until mile eight when Kirsten Hanssen blew by'. To give relevance to the 'extraordinary' performance, Pickard (1988) avoided the combative analogies of the language of extremes and contrasted it to a performance recognised by her elite female peers: Hanssen 'did to this field what Erin Baker had done in Perth' (pp. 21–23).

Below the professional ranks, representations and self-representations of Victorian women triathletes use moderate, yet critical, serious and personally meaningful terms. TAV board member Susan Charlton's (1986) account of the 1986 Ironman triathlon includes satisfied reference to her appearance prior to the race, but flags the incongruousness of an unknown spectator's suggestion later in the day, that 'I was still "looking beautiful"(?!)' (p. 18). Affirming the seriousness of her endeavour, Charlton cites the advice of well-known athletes, books, and articles in her rationale for sensible decisions, references the brands and functions of her triathlon equipment in specific terms, notes catching up to, passing or running with male competitors, and concludes with the final proof of her commitment: 'I had finished the race. I was an Ironman!' Volunteers assisted and escorted Charlton (1986) once she crossed the finish line, a 'relevant trace' that she shared with a select population of fellow Ironman finishers, leading her to report that it 'made me feel very special indeed' (p. 20; Haug cited in Onyx and Small, 2001: 774). An interview with top female Victorian triathlete and 1987 Ironman finisher, Virginia Bell, by triathlon journalist Kate McGready (1988) reveals both women using moderate terms but likewise affirming the seriousness of Bell's athletic endeavours. Overtly constructing a narrative of seriousness, Bell describes her novice performances as 'forgettable' and recounts a process of methodical training until she 'felt better prepared for longer events'. Her 1987 Hawaiian Ironman was simply an 'experience', and its completion an 'achievement'. Where her early triathlons did not warrant remembering, the Ironman did: it was Bell's 'most memorable to date' (McGready, 1988: 28, 29). From Bell's perspective, only performances that triathlon memory discursively recognised as serious warranted remembering, and, like Charlton, their worthiness of remembrance was enough to make them meaningful. There was no need for extreme terms and embellishments.

In contrast to Pickard, Charlton and Bell, Louise Halloran composed complex and conflicted acts of triathlon memory, demonstrating narrative discomposure. Reporting on the first race of the 1987–1988 Repco Series, Halloran (1987a: 38) begins with an uncomfortable patchwork of clashing references, borrowing from the language of force but with quotation marks to hint at its alienness and mixing it with the language of science: the "'guns" of last season' had been 'warn[ed]' and 'race times [we]re set to plummet beneath the assault of the new and highly oxygenated blood of this season'. Subsequently retreating from the language of excess, Halloran (1987a) notes measures adopted to ensure a safe swim, justifiably describes the 35 degree Celsius conditions as 'searing heat', and almost overcompensates in the moderation of her language by referring to the male winner as 'the first to return under the finisher's banner' (p. 38). The narrative flows most smoothly when Halloran poses a question often asked in accounts of triathlon experiences of excessive exertion. Although she responded 'Fine, Thanks', when asked, 'How do you feel?' after crossing the finish line, 'underneath, the question so often asked was burning in my brain – "why do I keep doing this?"' (Halloran, 1987a: 38). Halloran (1988b) seems to have found an answer when she competed in the Narrabri Fun Triathlon later in the season. In a less conflicted account, she describes socialising with local triathletes the day before the race. To her, the bike and shoe brands, triathlon jargon and races they discussed felt like shared 'old friends'. For Halloran (1988b: 20), the conversation seems to have normalised 'relevant trace[s]' of everyday triathlon, an activity that otherwise seemed to be 'beyond the confines of normality' (Haug in Onyx and Small, 2001: 774). With her triathlon experiences newly normalised, Halloran (1988b: 20) found a deeply subjective

language to describe her experience of the race the following day: 'the pain' of riding into a headwind was 'as familiar as your belly button'. To return to Foucault's genealogy, Halloran uses her own body as the analogous reference point to understand the 'imprint of history on [her] body' (Bert, 2000: 51). Rather than feeling alienated and distanced from the experience, Halloran emerges as deeply, personally and physically connected to it.

While it seems that Halloran aligned triathlon with her sense of self by eschewing alien narratives of excess, her acts of triathlon memory nevertheless affirm the gendered athletic hierarchies underpinning both masochistic triathlon memory and the governance strand of moderate triathlon memory. Her published response to Frost's editorial on women and triathlon upheld them by legitimising the efforts of the 'minority' of women who were committed to their 'athletic pursuits' and 'possess[ed] the competitive edge' and dismissing the 'majority' of women who 'elected to direct [their] energies toward other activities' (Halloran, 1988a: 8). Halloran suggested male triathletes should encourage their partners, while Martha Beckerleg, another respondent linked to the TAV as the wife of the organisation's President, suggested that parental support and short distance triathlons might encourage girls and women, respectively. While Beckerleg (1988: 6) blamed the lack of female participation on the 'belief that triathlons' were 'for the super fit only', she declared that there was no 'valid reason' why women with older children did not participate in triathlons. The letter of a third woman, age-group athlete Roberta Gordon, suggests that Halloran and Beckerleg were blind to the gender and ageist nature of understandings of triathlon performance. Based on personal experience, Gordon (1988) observed that older age group women 'tend to be forgotten' (p. 4): she won the female 40+ age group at the first race of the Repco Series, without a single mention in the text of the race report authored by Halloran. Not only did Halloran and Beckerleg and the governed triathlon community with which they identified, fail to see Gordon and her peers, their blindness shaped triathlon memory. Their invisibility meant that no one, not even their 'supporters', knew about their 'personalities or performances during the event'. It also did little to dispel the 'macho image' (Gordon, 1988: 4, 5). Implicitly, Beckerleg and Halloran seemed to contest masochist discourse as members of a competing moderate order, rather than as women contesting gendered and ageist athletic hierarchies altogether.

Furthermore, neither Beckerleg nor Halloran seemed to recognise that the prohibitive athletic hierarchy intersected with non-athletic understandings of gender. Gordon's lengthy discussion addressed two broad themes: logistics and representation. A 'full-time mum of two young uns', Gordon (1988: 4) presents triathlon as an exercise in time-management. The ongoing cycle of triathlon training and racing reduced the time available for 'women's jobs', forced changes in family diets and mealtimes, affected sleep, and on individual and shared leisure time with partners and friends. But Gordon's key point concerns the tension between contemporary societal understandings of femininity and the reality for women attempting to include triathlon in a balanced lifestyle. A male member of her triathlon club may have dismissively commented that 'Girls today are more concerned with their looks', but Gordon (1988) argues that 'women are expected to be somewhat feminine' (p. 4). Rather than delegitimising that reality, Gordon presents triathlon's lack of glamour as a barrier to female participation and proposes that press coverage should 'glamorise it more'. Acknowledging the physical imprint of her triathlon history, Gordon (1988) explains the challenge of maintaining acceptable standards of femininity during a triathlon:

a salty swim works wonders on our makeup (yes, we do start off with it on) and tipped, permed hair is then flattened and blow dried to resemble the last (yuk!) hair do. . . . we do try by dashing off at the end for a quick resurrection and wearing a bright outfit which hopefully draws more attention than our bedraggled state. (p. 4)

Beyond the triathlon finish line, especially when socialising during the summer season, ‘triathlete-eye[s]’ proved difficult to hide, as well as the ‘muscles on your muscles’, which inevitably drew ‘derogatory remarks like “God you must be bloody fit” (meaning who the hell are you anyway?)’ (Gordon, 1988: 4). In Gordon’s account, the physical reality of her triathlon experience alienates her from discursively normalised understandings of femininity current at the time, which appear to be meaningful to her. She attempts to address the disconnect not by subjectively embracing the relevant physical traces of triathlon memory, including its prioritisation of athletic bodies over feminine ones, but by attempting to sustain the traces of co-existent non-triathlon discourse. Just as Wickman (2011) found that disabled athletes ‘t[ook] up certain discourses, [but] conduct[ed] others’ (p. 397). Gordon might be understood as taking up the gendered athletic discourse underpinning both masochistic and moderate triathlon but conducting another non-triathlon discourse of femininity.

Conclusion – (Re)constructing Australian triathlon memory with women


By examining acts of triathlon memory by women, with an eye to the dominant discourses informing that memory, the ruptures in memory that flag the incompatibility of those discourses for those women, and by deciphering the embodied imprint of history featured in the alternative memories they compose, this article set out to (re)construct early Australian triathlon memory with women. Roberta Gordon seemingly embraced triathlon seriously, but subjectively countered gendered understandings of athleticism by constructing her sense of self around relevant traces of non-sporting femininities. Louise Halloran embraced triathlon as a hierarchical athletic endeavour and an ordered sport, but subjectively countered gendered understandings of athleticism by constructing her sense of self around her everyday body. Susan Charlton, Virginia Bell and Carol Pickard embraced triathlon seriously, and subjectively countered gendered athletic hierarchies by constructing their female selves as athletes who succeeded in ascending those hierarchies. All of them thus composed triathlon memory as inclusive of female bodies and subjectivities.

With insights from deconstructionist historical methods and feminist memory work, this article set out to work with the remembrances of the above women to (re)construct understandings of gender in triathlon memory and to destabilise the dominant mythology that the sport is inherently inclusive and presents no barriers to women and others who do not conform to idealised immersive, male-centred conceptions of athleticism. Rather than securing recognition for the traces of their subjective experiences, and rendering them meaningful in triathlon memory, the diverse yet entwined challenges to gendered athletic discourse by Australian women triathletes, authors and administrators of the 1980s were readily conceptualised in triathlon memory as evidence of the demise of an excessive, exclusive vision of triathlon and the ascendance of an ordered inclusive one. Yet, not only does the work of the above women display subjective rupture at the individual level, but also, when viewed together, they demonstrate gendered rupture in the network of triathlon memory. It is hoped that this article represents the beginning of a process of (re)constructing that memory with the diverse subjectivities of the women whom triathlon memory supposedly includes.

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ORCID iD

Jane Elizabeth Hunt  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5299-6298>

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Author biography

Jane Elizabeth Hunt has taught Australian Studies, Australian History and Research Methods since 1999. Her research interests include Australian cultural history, feminist cultural history, feminist sport history, sport memory, oral history and women in sport. She has published articles in Australian history, sport history, oral history and women's history, as well as three books in sport history including two aimed at fostering the voice and visibility of women involved in sport. She looks to digital methods to continue her work in sport and memory, in the hope of addressing the structural imbalance in public knowledge about women's sport.