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## Gender Identities and Sexuality in Sport

Modern sport has always been a crucial cultural domain for constructing and reproducing dominant, heterosexual masculine identities. Sports institutions at elite and grass roots levels still typically harbour formal and informal restrictions on women's full participation. Yet, as we shall see, historical, sociological and anthropological readings of sport highlight the critical agency of marginalized social actors, and women are no exception.

Here, I discuss gender issues in sport in four main parts. I open with a preliminary, historical discussion of the gendering of modern sport. Second, I advance a detailed social history and critical sociology of women's experiences and potentialities within sport. Third, I examine the sport position of gays and lesbians. Fourth, I address sociological issues relating to masculinity within sport. I argue that, while gender-based relations of power and domination certainly obtain within sport, we should avoid culturally reductive readings that underplay social actors' critical, interpretative capacities.

### Making sexist sport: modernity and gendered leisure

Gender stratification within sport began early. Up to the late nineteenth century, raucous bachelor subcultures pervaded many pre-modern pastimes such as blood sports like 'ratting' and crude pugilism contests, within cultures of heavy gambling, camaraderie and routine violence (Gorn and Goldstein 1993: 70-5). In America, this 'fancy' comprised unattached, young working-class men, often of immigrant stock; as in Britain and Australia, rakish aristocrats or military officers

also featured. In Britain, traditional masculine practices, like drinking, gambling, carousing and 'whoring', were not displaced from sport until late Victorian times (Brailsford 1985: 126). Early Australian sports were similarly raucous, though less violent than British or American equivalents, despite men's numerical domination within the penal colony (Cashman 1995: 206).

The rise of the British 'games cult' that transformed sports reflected precise gender norms containing strong class and imperial inflections. Late Victorian bourgeois imperialist ideology associated sport and exercise with the 'muscular Christian gentleman', and neo-Spartan virtues of 'stoicism, hardiness and endurance' (Mangan 1986: 147). New sport ethics sculpted disciplined masculine selves. Individuality was subordinated to the team cause. Across British schools and colleges, the most adept at games gained social recognition to aid their spearheading of Britain's industries and empire; for the rest, the sports field instilled generalized qualities of leadership and manliness (Mangan 1981: 129-30). Boys shirking sports were scorned and ridiculed; being overly bookish was associated with a sickly pallor, degenerate physique and effeminate character.

The myth of 'fair play' in sport was invented, promoting 'controlled confrontation' between boys that involved conformity, pack brutality and competitive violence. 'Fair play' helped to sustain international ideologies regarding English elite virtues and the civilizing benefits of British imperialism.<sup>1</sup> Before founding the modern Olympics, the Frenchman Baron Pierre de Coubertin visited several English educational institutions and was left convinced that, if introduced to the *lycées*, these games could reinvigorate France's 'effete' upper class schoolboys (Mangan 1981).

British ideals of 'muscular Christianity' spread across the Anglophone world. In Canadian schools, for example, the influence of these ethics 'cannot be over emphasized' (Metcalf 1974: 69). Different football codes enabled local, creolized emphases on masculine norms to be expressed through play. In Australian Rules football, true men displayed 'courage'; critics of the game's naked violence were disparaged as 'cowards' or 'old women' (Booth and Tatz 2000: 68). Through rugby, the Afrikaaners of South Africa cultivated a distinctive masculine, nationalist identity that emphasized 'ruggedness, endurance, forcefulness and determination' (Grundlingh 1994: 186-7). In American football, leading college teams (Yale, Princeton and Harvard) presented the violent game as a crucial pedagogical instrument for those entering business and public sector leadership (Sammons 1997: 384). Baseball shaped a particular masculinity among the white industrial

working classes, rooted in myths of female and non-white inferiority, political democracy and class mobility, thus sustaining the dominant social order (Kimmel 1990: 64–5).

Accordingly, women and sport participation was normally a *non sequitur*. De Coubertin, for example, insisted that sport engagement would breach women's 'fixed destiny' as mothers and men's companions. 'Respectable' women exercised in private surroundings like secluded tennis courts; noticeable female exertion was linked to sexual deviance. During the *belle époque*, for example, Frenchmen viewed female cyclists according to the 'madonna/mistress' syndrome: as asexual spinsters or 'half-naked, voluptuous and sexually available' (Holt 1991: 125).

These sexist discourses still possess contemporary exponents. The sociologist John Carroll (1985) has advocated women's removal from sport participation. Sport, for Carroll, is a great moral educator, and 'the living arena for the great value of manliness'. Through sporting heroism, Olympian men seek 'divine favour and grace'; by natural contrast, women are compassionate and tender, but graceless in physical exertion, and so must recover their 'provider', reproductive role. Carroll (1985: 93–4) postulates that 'the fundamental feminine anxiety is of inner barrenness, of being dirty, polluted or ruined inside. This anxiety is biologically determined, although its surface symptoms vary from culture to culture.' Re-acquaintance with domesticity helps women dispel this inner turmoil. Carroll complains also that women's encroachment within sport reflects a 'matricidal culture' that corrodes the male's provider role and emasculates the virility and nobility of men. Women's return to the kitchen, Carroll reasons, can repair this damaged culture.

Of course, Carroll's thesis is astonishingly archaic and sexist to the point of self-parody. His analysis succinctly reproduces the patriarchal ideology that excludes women from sport. He assumes fixed biological and psychological 'natures' for both sexes, when all serious sociologists would insist that such differences are, in the main, socially and culturally constructed.

### Women in sport: history, sexuality and political transformation

#### *Women and modern sport: origins to 1945*

Women's struggle for sporting equality is a long and incomplete one. In North America, women's intensive demands for more active sports

engagement extends back to the early nineteenth century (R. J. Park 1978: 32). However, in pre-Victorian times, more influential, middle-class women were least likely to seek participation, and actual sporting pastimes tended to involve traditional activities (like smock races) rather than serious athletic contest (Guttmann 1991: 83–4).

Subsequently, class divisions tended to divide Victorian women in modern sport. In Britain, the moderate, notable increase of women in sport 'was limited almost entirely to the middle class' (Tranter 1998: 80). In North America and Australia, light sports like croquet and archery were adopted before middle- and upper-class women played tennis and golf (Vamplew 1994: 15). Lower-class women's sports involvement was curtailed by lack of finance, social influence and energy (due to the daily grind of labour); and by the wealthier classes' regulation of bodily display and sexuality. In Canada, from the 1870s, the YWCA employed athletic associations to rescue working-class women from 'degenerate' poolrooms or dance-halls. Nevertheless, the Anglo-American games cult did not entirely exclude bourgeois women (M. A. Hall 2002: 34–5). In schools, if teachers permitted, sports like hockey were enjoyed, and facilitated the 'unladylike' pleasures of getting dirty, playing rough and competing strenuously (C. Smith 1997: 67).

Women's advances in sport were often controlled and curtailed by men in accordance with patriarchal norms. Specific 'feminine/diminutive' rules for basketball, restricting movement, were introduced, but often ignored, by female players (Dean 2002). High-contact sports, while prohibiting female players, attracted sizeable female crowds. As spectators and administrators, women contributed significantly to Australian Rules football. In some grounds, gender segregation of spectators was introduced to protect gentle women from expressive masculine behaviour, while the press derided the notion of women as players (Hess 1998: 102–4).

Victorian middle-class women were instructed in the medical model of the 'delicate female' (Jennifer Hargreaves 2002: 56–7). Medics recommended 'gentle exercises, remedial gymnastics, and massage' to strengthen without overtaxing the female frame and its vital reproductive functions. Gymnastic drill was introduced and remained the major regime of exercise pedagogy for young women across northern Europe and the Anglophone world. In the *Turnvereine* (gymnastic clubs) and schools of late nineteenth-century Germany, girls were instructed in free-standing exercises, studiously avoiding movements thought to endanger reproduction (Pfister 2002: 167).<sup>2</sup> In Britain, the Swedish physical trainer Madame Martina Bergman-Osterberg

institutionalized the 'Swedish system' of calisthenics for girls during the 1880s. In accordance with dominant medical and social norms, these non-competitive exercises were intended to promote discipline, health, grace and reproductive powers among women. Bergman-Osterberg rather personified the contradictions of female participation in late Victorian physical culture. She may have been a 'committed feminist who laboured throughout her life to remove barriers to women's progress' (McCrone 1988: 109). Yet she explained her pedagogy in pseudo-Darwinian terms: 'I try to train my girls to help raise their own sex, and so to accelerate the progress of the race; for unless the women are strong, healthy, pure, and true, how can the race progress?' (Jennifer Hargreaves 1994: 77).

Women's greater entry into physical exercise occurred alongside wider legal, political and civil struggles. 'First-wave feminism' began as early as 1850 and lasted until the 1930s, and helped gain women political suffrage, educational and employment opportunities, and resistance to sexual subordination (Walby 1997: 149–52). Some early female athletes were inevitably connected to these struggles, but most were pragmatic in seeking to play games as they wanted.

During the inter-war era, women acquired more energetic roles as America's mass consumer culture promoted youthfulness and fitness, while women's crucial contribution during wartime remained strong in the memory. Women's greater political autonomy assisted their creation and control of separate sports clubs and associations, notably in the UK and North America, although many were dominated by the middle classes and inculcated bourgeois norms of female respectability among working-class members (Jennifer Hargreaves 1993: 138–9). Having allowed female participants since 1900, the IOC grudgingly recognized women's events in 1924. Female Olympians doubled numerically during the 1920s, reaching almost 10 per cent of all competitors in 1928, but distance running, equestrianism and hockey remained prohibited. Successful female athletes still endured conventional gender discourses within the public domain. The star American, Babe Didrikson, was subjected to constant 'tomboy' or 'muscled moll' jibes. Conventionally 'feminine' stars like tennis champion Helen Wills were depicted more favourably (Guttmann 1991: 144–52).

Cultural continuities and differences in the gender/sport relationship were highlighted by social systems outside of liberal capitalism. Socialist societies promoted women's sport alongside official policies of militarized nation building and female industrial equality. In China, the Communist-inspired Red Sport Movement was founded in 1932, and sought to produce more active identities, 'iron bodies' and fresh

duties and responsibilities for women (Hong 1997). The Soviet state valorized female athletes with 'courage, grace, skill, even strength, in the sporting area, winning prestige for club, factory, farm region, ethnic group and republic' (Riordan 1991: 199). In paradoxical contrast, Fascist regimes favoured women's traditional domestication in social policy, while exploiting the national sporting successes of both genders. Germany's Nazi regime promoted female exercise to assist reproduction and racial health, but fielded a large and highly successful team of women athletes at the 1936 Olympics to abet state propagandism (Pfister 2002: 169–70).<sup>3</sup>

### *Post-war sport and women*

During the Cold War, women's sporting participation and exposure increased steadily, albeit mainly in official 'amateur' sports. Limited corporate and media interest arose for commodifying women's team sport as entertainment. Politically, Western nations sought to challenge Eastern-bloc domination in (still amateur) Olympic competition, although that lead had been achieved partly by losing grass roots recreation, and by the doping of young athletes (Pfister 2002: 172–3).

Women's Olympic participation has increased slowly but notably. Of all Olympic competitors, women made up 12 per cent at the Melbourne Olympics in 1956, 20 per cent at Montreal in 1976, around 29 per cent at Barcelona in 1992, and 38 per cent at Sydney in 2000. The women's sporting programme has grown gradually, despite IOC and IAAF conservatism. Women's limited political voice in sport impedes reform. Older and upper-class men dominate sport's governing bodies, in part by building careers through women's exclusion from sports participation or decision making (see Jennifer Hargreaves 1994: 221–2).

At everyday level, women's sports-related involvement is typically domestic rather than competitive. A century ago, women were advised to gain physical exercise through household labour rather than riding bicycles (Lenskyj 1986: 62–3). Today, sport institutions habitually promote women's domesticity through gender-specific work roles. Women are typically allocated 'voluntary' domestic tasks within local sports clubs: preparing food, cleaning kitchens and toilets, overseeing small money pools, washing dirty sports kits, and assisting male sport officials (S. M. Thompson 1999). In professional sports, gender divisions can be equally stark. Partners of male athletes perform wifely, reproductive roles in running households, bearing and rearing children,

tending to the husband's needs, and struggling to conform to dominant cultural definitions regarding youthful female attractiveness.

In North America, politico-legal challenges to male sport hegemony have been important preludes to notable advances in women's sport. In the United States, the 'Title IX' federal law was passed in June 1972, prohibiting gender discrimination within sports at colleges and high schools. In the same year, six female competitors at the New York marathon staged a successful protest against the barring of women from starting alongside men. A year later, Billie Jean King defeated Bobby Riggs in the 'Challenge of the Sexes' tennis match. In 1974, the Little League permitted girls to play baseball and softball. In turn, numerous other 'firsts' for women have been achieved: Janet Guthrie competed in the Indianapolis 500 motor race (1977); the NCAA authorized national championships for women in sports like basketball, golf, soccer, swimming, tennis and outdoor track events (1982); Gayle Gardner became the first female play-by-play commentator on NFL fixtures (1987); Judith Sweet became NCAA president (1991); Julie Krone won a triple-crown horse-race, the Belmont Stakes (1993); Kerri Ann McTiernan became the first female coach on a men's college basketball team (1995); Major League Soccer recruited two female referees (1998); women competed in the same number of team sports as men at the Sydney Olympics (2000); Ashley Martin played and scored in a Division 1 American football game (2001); and Annika Sorenstam became the first woman in 58 years to compete on the men's American golf tour (2003).

Title IX is a controversial piece of legislation. Males continue to outnumber females significantly in joining college sports teams, while colleges still spend lavishly on big-time male sports, mainly American football and basketball. To counterbalance the gender divide and conform to Title IX, colleges spend heavily to attract female athletes into sports; often, this means cutting funds for other, popular male sports activities. Thus, the political Right insists that Title IX must be repealed (Gavora 2002). Liberals insist that Title IX must be enforced whole-heartedly to destabilize long-term gender inequalities (Eitzen 1999: 164). However, the legislation cannot succeed without significant structural changes across education: college presidents must divert finance from American football, while women's sports participation must be nurtured assiduously in childhood.

The potential for gender reform of sport is still significantly hamstrung by class and ethnicity factors. Only soccer has recently achieved a rapid, mass popularization among young American women, notably white middle-class suburbanites (Andrews et al. 1997). Many

private-member golf clubs still provide males, notably the business classes, with a self-enclosed, self-absorbed haven, discouraging female membership or use of facilities. The Augusta National Golf Club in Georgia, which hosts the Masters tournament, is notorious for still excluding women. Although it has grown steadily, the LPGA still advances a rather traditionalist image to avoid alienating television stations and sponsors. Women's golf has become increasingly exclusive too, as the community institutions and facilities that had enabled poorer white and black females to participate have gradually disappeared since the mid-1970s (Crossett 1995: 212–16). The results are evidenced in the restricted class and ethnicity of current American-born LPGA players.

Serious gender divides remain in sport's prize-money and sponsorships, reflecting male domination in sport spectatorship and marketing and the reproduction of patriarchal mores within sport culture. We may consider how unequal rewards connect to both human physiology and sport's objectives and aesthetics. Professional sports tend to prioritize limited-duration and record-breaking performances. Current physiological differences between the genders favour men in meeting these goals. Men are 50 per cent stronger than women in absolute terms, and 25 per cent stronger relative to size; greater upper-body strength assists male superiority in many sports, from weight-lifting to golf. Women are physiologically advantaged over men in less prestigious, long-endurance sports, like extended swimming or marathons (Guttmann 1991: 251–2). While some research indicates that strength differentials can be reduced to 5 per cent, it remains noteworthy that the biggest rewards are available in sports that exaggerate existent male physiological advantages. In golf, regression analysis suggests that earnings differentials between the sexes can be explained by men's higher achievement levels within the game's rules (Shmanske 2000). These inequalities can be challenged only by increasing women's cross-class sports participation, by redefining more fundamentally the objectives of sport beyond achievement principles, and by augmenting the social status of those sports that physiologically advantage women.

#### *Women, femininity and sexuality*

Strong patriarchal gender codes dissuade many women from sport participation. Physical exertion inevitably builds muscle, but traditionalist gender mores connect enhanced muscularity to 'masculinization'. Female body-builders have been prime targets for this discourse, but mixed ideological politics underpin attacks on other athletes. East

European track athletes (like Jarmila Kratochvilova) have long been depicted as insufficiently feminine by Western sports journalists in a blend of sexist, jingoistic and neo-racist comment.

Patriarchal gender codes and the female 'look' of consumer culture certainly objectify women, yet critical agency is still viable within exercise regimes. In women's aerobics, the idealized body-shape is 'firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin', thus fitting hegemonic patriarchal norms, but female aerobicizers display critical ambivalence towards this absurd ideal while enjoying the expressive, emancipatory aspects of meeting and exercising (Markula 1995; Real 1999). Women's exercise regimes have significantly stretched the boundaries of 'permissible' muscularity and female body 'hardness'. Some research suggests that females entering sports in childhood are more prone to pursue 'hard', gender-challenging athletic styles (Mennesson 2000).

Sport's paymasters, such as television networks and corporate advertisers, constitute formidable institutional structures in routinely reproducing patriarchal norms. Sports media focus heavily on attractive female athletes like Anna Kournikova (her constant losses notwithstanding), thereby trivializing woman's athletic achievements. Women's sport is thinly covered by television news, while actual stories tend to emphasize humour and women's objectification (Messner, Duncan and Cooky 2003). Sport's commodification packages female athletes, via off-court endorsements of perfume and underwear, for the heterosexual male gaze. Sexual metaphors and promises imbue sports packaging: for example, since the 1920s, men's golf vacations have been presented as opportunities to 'score' on and off the course. At sports events, voyeuristic camera crews pursue 'honey shots' of attractive, semi-clad female spectators and athletes. Male 'sports' magazines run 'swimsuit issues', and avowed soft-porn media like *Playboy* pay heavily for celebrity athletes to pose nude. Some female athletes (like the Australian women's football team, the Matildas) have posed nude to publicize their sport. Despite arguments regarding self-expression and choice, such measures reflect these athletes' weak structural position within sport: self-sexualization is a desperate strategy to generate male-dominated public interest and corporate backing. Women's objectification within sport extends to the institutionalized sex subcultures involving male athletes and female 'groupies'. In North American sports, 'completely asymmetrical' relationships arise as teams of male players seek no-ties sex with female followers (Gmelch and San Antonio 1998). Several high-profile rape and assault cases involving professional athletes suggest a hidden history of sexual abuse against female fans, and a morally corrupted subculture among many sportsmen (Benedict 1998).

Guttman (1991: 258–65; 1996) provides a nuanced, critical historical assessment of sport, sexuality and eroticism. He dismisses determinist feminist arguments that sexualizing sports athletes causes general violence against women; such an argument simply reduces all males 'to the status of Pavlovian dogs' (1991: 264). Guttman instead evolves a balanced analysis of 'eros' and sports engagement. As a medium of physical expression, sport's erotic component is 'ineradicable', but remains essentially 'sport-specific'. Thus, squeezing female athletes into lingerie trivializes their achievements and corrupts the eroticism within their athleticism.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, to market products, advertisers will inevitably employ attractive females *and* males (including celebrity athletes). Guttman reminds us indirectly that such objectification within sport is tied to other historical processes outside pure gender domination, such as health consumerism and the disciplining of bodies through modern fitness regimes. Furthermore, Guttman encourages more critical feminists to explore (rather than piously deny) the eroticism of sport in its own terms. Some female communities have adopted this more open-ended approach towards sports eroticism. For example, the thriving lesbian carnival around some LPGA tournaments suggests that eroticism and consumerism around sport can move beyond heterosexual male interests. Such practices confirm too that diverse subordinate communities can engage in cultural practices that transgress their structural domination.

#### *Manufacturing contentment: sports policy, gender reform and pro-feminist politics*

Without denying women's critical agency within a historical context, women's sporting experiences would be transformed by the structural reform of sport institutions. This involves following the Canadian strategy of moving from sport 'equality' to 'equity'. Equality policies open doors to disadvantaged groups, including women. Equity policies restructure the sport system *per se* to ensure sport experiences are qualitatively similar for men and women (M. A. Hall 2002: 203–4). Implementing equity, of course, is highly problematic. Would it suit those grass roots female sports groups that thrive on informality and their members' peculiar sporting passions? And what of those major sports institutions that instinctively resist pro-feminist, equitable reforms (McKay 1997: 139)?

This leads us to consider what kinds of sports reform women might favour. Jennifer Hargreaves (1993) outlines three political strategies for women inside sport. First, *co-option* involves women 'catching up with men' in male sporting domains, taking on more of the roles that

men have created and still control. Co-option is advocated by 'liberal feminists', and its implementation tends to be measured quantitatively. It rejects conservative claims that biological differences or traditional gender values prevent women's sports participation. However, by focusing naively on equality and constitutional reform, co-option fails to tackle more fundamental problems in sport like masculine norms that promote violent play and discursive sexism. Co-option also puts women on the defensive, forcing them to meet males on male ground and join male sporting rituals. Unless those rituals are radically redefined, women will continue to 'seem out of place' (see Novak 1994: 208–12).

Second, *separatism* involves women's 'self-realization' by organizing sports tournaments or associations independently of men. Separatism is advocated by 'radical feminists', and would enhance women's sports participation while exploring emotional intimacies in sport that masculine values suppress. Separatism politicizes personal life, but crudely attributes sport's problems simply to gender inequities. Moreover, radical feminism slips into essentialism and ahistoricism when it theorizes gender identities in terms of innate norms and inclinations, rather than socialization and cultural difference. Finally, separatism harbours reactionary elements, since it rejects a dialogical sporting model involving both men and women.

Third, *co-operation* between men and women helps establish new sporting models that negate gender differences. Co-operation is advocated by 'socialist feminists', recognizes the heterogeneity of social struggles (to include 'race' and sexuality, for example), and is geared towards liberation. This philosophy assumes that men are not inherently oppressive, but are socialized into assuming and reproducing oppressive roles and practices that damage men as well as women. Co-operation requires feminists to explore sport's possible experiences and meanings for women before developing a radically reformed sporting model. Hargreaves advocates co-operation and identifies implicit support from Paul Willis (1982) and Michèle Barrett (1982) *inter alia*.

While they are categorically distinct, impulses of all three strategies arise within specific sport struggles for women. In Canadian sport during the inter-war years, for example, liberal (if maternal) impulses arose in institutions like the Hamilton Olympic Club, championing women's greater participation while eschewing any appearance as 'man-haters'. Separatist impulses were prevalent among Toronto Ladies, who sought to remove all men from women's sport; other women pursued 'girls' rules' for specific sports, or introduced college 'play days' to assuage the competitiveness and divisiveness of

male-defined sport. Elements of a historically specific co-operation strategy might be located in the emergence of joint sport practices among men and women: for example, regular travel and social contacts through sport were experienced as relatively liberating occasions during that period (Kidd 1996: 111, 120–42).

Evidently, the co-operation policy is the most practically and theoretically sophisticated. Its Cultural Studies influences ensure that it critiques the hegemonic marginalization of women within sport. Such a perspective also enables effective critique of the commodification of women's sport, notably how 'post-feminist' marketing messages still present female physical engagement as essentially passive (Lucas 2000).

### Open play? Homosexual cultural politics and sport

The weaknesses of the liberal feminist, co-option strategy are particularly stark in respect of the sports experiences of gay people. For Lenskyj (1995: 47), 'the situation for women, especially lesbians, in mainstream sport has remained stubbornly woman-hating and homophobic'. In Canada, homophobia and 'dyke bashing' have intensified alongside elite sport's commodification (M. A. Hall 2002: 199–200). Griffin (1998: 55–63) has isolated several myths that serve to demonize lesbians within sport:

- Lesbians participate in particular sports (like golf, tennis and basketball), thus tarnishing those sports' image.
- Sports promote lesbianism by isolating young women within all-female settings.
- Lesbians are sexual predators among young athletes in locker rooms.
- Unwholesome and immoral lesbians constitute bad role models for young women.
- Lesbians are unfeminine, and so have unfair advantages in sport; thus they should compete with men.
- Lesbian cliques control some sports (like softball or golf) and discriminate against heterosexuals.<sup>5</sup>

Unsurprisingly, most gay professional athletes and administrators endure self-estrangement by disguising their sexuality to maintain careers, endorsement contracts and supporter loyalty (Booth and Tatz 2000: 206–7). Sport tournament directors and fellow players can pressurize gay athletes to remain in the closet. The LPGA, for example,

works assiduously to present players as traditionally feminine. Openly gay players are presented as endangering the golf tour's finances, and thus the livelihoods of other golfers (Crossett 1995: 181–2). In women's ice hockey, elite players counteract possible 'butch' or manish (and therefore 'lesbian') images to please image-conscious club managers and national selectors (Theberge 2000). Gay athletes use 'ironic gay sensibility' and other everyday strategies to make their secret identity bearable (Pronger 1990). Lesbian physical education teachers typically 'pass' as heterosexuals to protect their employment (G. Clarke 2002). Fear of the 'lesbian' label dissuades heterosexual women from sports participation. Parents seek to protect their daughters from 'preying lesbians' in sports teams, although male coaches are far more likely to abuse students (Brackenridge 2001).

Some athletes (notably female tennis players like Navratilova, King and Mauresmo) 'come out' often after years of gossip that lead to 'confession'. Perhaps the most prominent gay male athlete has been Australia's Ian Roberts, one of the world's top rugby league players during the 1990s, who received strong personal support from many fellow players and media commentators (Freeman 1998). The UK's most prominent case involved the late footballer Justin Fashanu, who committed suicide after being indicted in the United States for sexually assaulting a teenage boy. However, gay male athletes are much more likely to come out *after* retirement. It remains far more common for other athletes (like football's Graeme Le Saux or baseball's Mike Piazza) to formulate public denials of sports gossip regarding alleged homosexual inclinations.

Media and public discourses on HIV-positive athletes further marginalize gay athletes. The basketball star Magic Johnson and, to a lesser extent, the boxer Tommy Morrison were depicted as men who had been infected by following natural heterosexual instincts and 'accommodating' (in Johnson's phrase) multiple female groupies. Despite lengthy reports regarding their peripatetic sexual histories, surprise was constantly expressed towards their HIV status (Messner 1994: 123). Conversely, when the gay diver Greg Louganis's HIV infection was announced, the media expressed no 'shock', and did not go into exactly how the disease had been contracted. The homosexuality–AIDS couplet remained unchallenged, and served 'to perpetuate the assumption that gay bodies are inherently diseased and immoral' (Dworkin and Wachs 2000: 58).

Gay athletes can employ radical, self-empowering political strategies both within and outside modern sport to advance their interests.

Griffin (1998: 222–7) advocates the public openness of more gay and bisexual athletes and coaches.<sup>6</sup> She praises 'key agents of social change' who have pursued social justice by confronting sport's sexual politics. Griffin insists that all women are in a common struggle, hence unity benefits everyone.

Some gay athletes have formed their own sports clubs, leagues and associations. The 'Gay Games', first staged in San Francisco in 1982 with 1,300 participants, expanded to 3,400 participants in 1986, and 7,200 in 1990. In theory, the Gay Games embody separatist, radical politics; they secure equitable yet distinctive sports participation through celebrating sexual difference. However, the Games neither directly challenge nor resist dominant sports institutions and structures, though they show-case different sport values, identities and associations (Messner 1992: 159). More critically, Pronger (2000) indicates that the Games's sexual dimension and thus their radicalism have been suppressed. The 1998 Amsterdam tournament was presented as mainstream; sexuality and desire were replaced by the banal theme of 'friendship'. Less credibly, Pronger advances more speculative, essentialist claims concerning the sexual dynamics of sport *per se*. Exploring the psychoanalytic extremes of 'queer theory', Pronger's (1999) essay, entitled 'Outta my endzone', brings a whole new meaning to sporting clichés about 'backs to the wall' defending. He argues that contemporary sport contains an emotional logic that is 'phallically aggressive' and 'anally closed': consider, for example, how American football is founded upon violent penetration of the opponent's spaces while rigorously protecting one's 'home' space.

Pronger rightly critiques the attempted normalization of the Gay Games, while his psychoanalytical speculations stretch hermeneutic boundaries within sport sociology. However, his analysis lacks sufficient evidence and plausible sociological theorization. Indeed, we could argue that heterosexual unions (rather than homosexual ones), in sport or elsewhere, reflect more positive emotional relationships since they embrace (rather than exclude) the opposite sex. More seriously, Pronger grossly exaggerates sexuality's role in explaining sport's symbolism. Sport is more than a mass exercise in subliminal gay-bashing. Sport does provide for idioms of comparatively intimate, emotionally charged interaction with fellow males (hugging, kissing) that are otherwise proscribed. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to slip into another post-Freudian trap that depicts such interaction simply as the expression of repressed homosexual desire (Rowe 1995: 127).



## Moulding men through sport: hegemony and diversity

### *Hegemonic masculinities*

Academic critiques of masculinity within sport have concentrated upon how physical culture sustains heterosexual, male domination. Historically, sport's idealized masculine codes have deep affinities with the 'martial masculinity' cults of twentieth-century fascism (Mangan 1999: 7–9). Sport's restrictive masculine norms victimize many 'deviant' others, including women, effeminate or gay men, the old, children and the disabled (Ingham (and friends) 1997: 171). Moreover, sport's masculine mores often cripple men physically, socially and psychologically. Sports media disseminate dominant masculine norms among boys and young men through a 'television sports manhood formula' built around themes of gender, race, militarism, aggression, violence and commercialism (Messner, Dunbar and Hunt 2000).

Pro-feminist sport sociology is heavily indebted to the Australian social theorist, R. W. Connell (1987, 1990, 1995, 2000). Through his neo-Gramscian concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', Connell indicates that strong cross-gender consent is established for dominant masculine identities. Hegemonic masculinity constitutes the 'culturally idealized form of masculine character', centred on 'toughness and competitiveness', women's subordination, and 'marginalization of gay men' (McKay 1997: 17). Yet among all men, hegemonic masculinity may be neither the commonest nor the most comfortable of masculine identities (Connell 2000: 10–11). It is a 'relational', not fixed, identity, disclosing social hierarchies and connections between men and women. Thus, historical and cross-cultural variations arise regarding hegemonic masculine ideals.

Hegemonic masculinity features in numerous sociological studies of sport–gender relations: for example, in critiques of *Sports Illustrated's* 'swimsuit issue' and the damaging consequences of violent masculinities within sport (Davis 1997; Messner 1992; see Connell 2000: 11, 188–9). Klein (1993) adapted Connell's thinking to expose the 'femiphobia' inside body-building subcultures. 'Femiphobia' emerges from 'the fear of appearing female, or effeminate'; it 'fuels hypermasculinity, homophobia, and misogyny', and is manifested through hyper-conformity to masculine norms (Klein 1993: 269–73). Body-building is an obvious refuge for young men who seek to manage their masculine hyper-conformity and subjective insecurities through this 'comic book masculinity'.

Latterly, Connell has built his gender perspective upon a four-fold analytical structure. First, gender *power relations* enable study of patriarchy's survival despite its contestation by various movements. Second, the *production relations (division of labour)* of modern capitalism remain gender-specific, directing women into different labour as and when required. Third, *cathexis (emotional relations)* concerns the politics of desire in defining gendered objects of pleasure and in the distributive justice of pleasure. Fourth, *symbolism* concerns human communication's role in reproducing the gender order.

Each analytical structure can be applied to explain some core aspects of sport. First, modern sport's dominant mores regarding toughness, aggression and competitiveness have promoted patriarchal hegemony, to exclude or undermine women's participation. Second, women's labour has been engaged gender-specifically in (typically unpaid) domestic or clerical work to support male-dominated sports clubs. Third, modern sport advertisements typically objectify women as sexually available. Fourth, males define themselves through tough play or post-match rituals against symbolic others (women, homosexuals).

However, rather than fit sport into Connell's four existing structures, it would be better included within a new, fifth structure that explicitly concerns *leisure (consumption) relations*. This new analytical structure would reflect leisure relations' centrality to gender in postmodern culture and contemporary capitalism. Gender divisions in leisure relations share significant parallels and interconnections with those in production relations. Women's improved labour position provides greater disposable income that can be partly directed into sport-related consumption. As in work, women are channelled into gender-appropriate leisure practices, notably fitness regimes like aerobics. During economic booms, women function as a 'reserve army of labour' without overturning their domestic roles; in sport, women become a 'reserve army of leisure' to fill expensive stadium seats, sit in 'family ends', or purchase children's merchandise (Russell 1999). Meanwhile, as in work, most women are drawn into male-dominated leisure spaces, rather than creating radically different physical cultures.

Appealingly, Connell's thesis is receptive to theoretical elaboration, and can explain the empirical complexity of hegemonic masculinity. Unfortunately, Connell himself is inclined to adopt an inflexible model of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Two cases from Connell's (otherwise regular and important) perorations on sport illustrate this point.

First, Connell (2000: 157–60) argues that, for boys in education, there are three 'vortices of masculinity formation': discipline, boys' subjects and sports. Using Foley's (1990) study of Texas high school

football, Connell argues that sport socializes boys into violent and aggressive behavioural codes, establishes male hierarchies, and constructs female cheer-leaders as mainly unobtainable objects of desire. Other contact sports in Canada, South Africa, Australia and the UK 'play a similar cultural role' in constructing equivalent gender patterns (Connell 2000: 159). However, this loose cross-cultural claim underplays significantly the major identifiable differences in school sports across regions and nations. For example, UK football rarely features cheer-leaders, and ritually represents community in different ways to US college sport.

Second, in his most detailed empirical study of sport, Connell (1990) examines how a professional tri-athlete (Steve Donoghue) lives 'an exemplary version of hegemonic masculinity'. Steve is young, physically fit, aggressive in competition, actively heterosexual, committed to earning money, and lacking gay friends or feminist inclinations. Through interviews with Steve, Connell depicts the athlete in highly pejorative terms. He chastises Steve's 'impoverished social and cultural life', his 'slightly unstable' self, his 'slightly childish language', his 'bleached, featureless world', and the 'pleasure and complacency' with which he accepts 'the cash and the sex'. Connell does not seem to dialogue with Steve or allow his subject to respond to this characterization. He does not interview Steve's coach or sponsors, but accuses both of manipulation; in Steve's answers to questions, 'the coach's presence is clear' alongside the 'borrowed language' of sport psychology (rather than the 'borrowed language' of Cultural Studies). Overall, rather than deploy ethnography to reveal the subtleties of hegemonic masculinity, Connell resorts to simple *dietrologia*: hidden voices and forces control Steve to the extent that one wonders why Connell bothered to interview the athlete.

While the outcome here is flawed, Connell's 'life-history' method has real potential for explaining masculinity's construction. It requires the researcher to explore how gendered agencies are experienced and constructed in relation to social structures. Unfortunately, the life-history method can degenerate into a kind of self-analysis that confuses authorial masculine *angst* for sociological insight. The otherwise excellent analyses by Messner and Sabo are indicative. For example, Sabo (1994: 161–2) discusses his participation in arm-wrestling contests with Afro-American prison inmates, but slides into a confessional series of liberal-bourgeois clichés. Somewhat absurdly, Sabo claims that each bout 'suspends the hierarchical distinctions between free man and inmate'. In the clench, his 'manly juices start flowing again', although 'I want to learn that it is OK to be vulnerable to defeat'. As Messner

and Sabo show elsewhere, critical sociological readings of masculinity can advance without this self-absorption. Sociologists need to find a way between those polarized perspectives on men and sport that incline towards either a fixed identification of hegemonic masculinity or a subjectivist slippage into asocial solipsism.

#### *Masculinities: historical and anthropological perspectives*

Historical and anthropological perspectives serve to reveal the cultural pluralities and contradictions of masculine identity. Historical approaches disclose the critical reflexivity of social actors in constructing nationally diverse masculine mores within sport. In different football codes, these various masculinities are often articulated through nostalgic discourses. For example, just after each World War, American football facilitated displays of heroic, tough masculinity that challenged the 'feminizing' of society, while 'anti-modern' mythologies constructed old 'giant' players as larger than life, inherently tough, and less technically accomplished than their modern peers (Oriard 2001: 332). South African rugby is imbued with a traditional, conformist culture, facilitating white father-son bonding and typically excluding women (Grundlingh 1994: 197–200). In white New Zealand, rugby was originally a social and pedagogical bulwark against 'effeminacy' among white colonists, while contemporary discourses play nostalgically on the idyll of a unified nation, embodied by tough rugby-playing farmers and workers (Phillips 1994).

Anthropology facilitates understanding of how popular cultural rituals connect to nationality and masculinity. In southern Europe, where traditional masculine values relate to machismo, courage, honour and shame, male sexuality must be publicly 'achieved', while female sexuality is deemed to be innate or 'ascribed', thus requiring careful control (Marvin 1994: 143–4). The British anthropologist Pitt-Rivers (1984) interpreted the Andalusian *corrida* (bullfight) as a gendered allegory: the *torero* (bullfighter) enters as a feminine figure, but his masculinity is retrieved by defeating and killing the bull, to acquire its procreative powers. Without advocating a culturally and historically closed reading (MacClancy 1993), women's participation as *toreros* would require the *corrida*'s symbolic reinvention.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, anthropology helps to disclose the complex and diverse ways in which gender mores are reshaped by modernity, resulting in different forms of masculine identity. In revolutionary Cuba, Castro's government engaged sport to produce a 'new man' personifying the socialist virtues of 'modesty, brotherhood, internationalism and a cooperative

spirit' (Pye 1986: 122). In Mexico, the 'traditional' Latino 'macho' culture displays many forms of behaviour (such as public displays of warmth and affection, and indulgence of children) which are otherwise associated with 'femininity' in North America. Moreover, contemporary machismo must accommodate a domesticated masculinity due to structural changes within labour markets and education (Klein 2000a: 70, 83–4). However, institutional and structural forces do not simply determine specific cultural forms of masculine identity; rather, these forces are negotiated in social actors' gender identity. For example, in Chile during the 1930s and 1940s, working-class males were associated with weak family responsibility, rowdy behaviour, heavy drinking and strong subcultures. Different social forces sought to forge a new kind of masculinity, partly through sport. The State envisioned a fitter, more orderly male identity to suit nation-building purposes. Employers sought reliable, fit workers to reduce absenteeism. The political Left favoured sport to advance class solidarity and political education. Yet Chilean males actively controlled the behavioural influence of these institutional forces: typically, after playing football matches or attending union meetings, the men went drinking (Roseblatt 2000).

Eduardo Archetti (1998, 1999) has skilfully explored the complex anthropology of sport's masculinity–nationality relationships. Archetti (1999: 216) argues that the 'idealized masculinity' of elite athletes 'is not just about men, it is a part of a cultural system for producing differences'. He compares, for example, the popular representations of the skiers Vegard Ulvang and Alberto Tomba at the 1992 Albertville Winter Olympics. Ulvang was depicted as 'very Norwegian', undemonstrative, serene and close to nature, whereas 'Tomba La Bomba' became the boastful urban playboy, expressively Italian (loving pasta), and inspiring a new, football-type skiing fan.

More expansively, Archetti (1998) examines how different idioms of Argentinian masculinity are articulated relationally within physical culture. He compares football (involving man–man relations), tango (man–woman relations) and polo (man–animal relations). In exploring the competing, hybrid masculinities in Argentina, he rejects 'ideal typical' notions of masculinity and assumptions that singular gender identities dominate specific settings. The dominant playing style in 'gaucho' polo is 'manly' and risk taking, in contrast to more conservative, English styles (1998: 96, 104–5). In tango songs, alongside the dance's vivid eroticism, gender relations move outside bourgeois domains, reflecting the uncertainties and dilemmas of Argentina's inter-war period; a 'doubting masculinity' in relations with 'powerful women' is revealed (1998: 155–7). In football, the *criollo* Argentinian

playing style promotes individual expression, creativity and technical skill – thereby inverting the modern European values of will-power, organization and courage (1998: 70–2). According to male Argentinian folklore, the *criollo* style is embodied not in the physically large, mature male hero, but in the boy (*pibe*) who possesses a small body, high skill levels, a character filled with cunning, creativity and vulnerability, and a disorderly, risk-taking life-style (1998: 182–4). Diego Maradona is the *pibe par excellence*.

Maradona has some cultural meanings that are uniquely Argentinian, but he is viewed by millions of fans *world-wide* as the greatest-ever football player. His dominant, masculine identity, as a great player, centres on his peerless technical skill and artistry. This popular aesthetic meaning of Maradona stands in strong contrast to sport sociologists' emphasis on the hegemony of violent, aggressive masculinity. This latter emphasis becomes even more misplaced when we survey the most lionized males in different sports histories. The greatest heroes are not the violent 'goons' (in ice hockey) or the destructive 'hammer-throwers' (in football). They are the 'artists' who (like Maradona) are often small and seemingly vulnerable in stature. In football, Maradona is joined by other technical talents like Zico (Brazil), Baggio (Italy), Platini (France) and Best (Northern Ireland). In rugby union, great half-backs like Cliff Morgan, Barry John, Phil Bennett and Jonathan Davies (all Wales) excited the crowds. In ice hockey, Wayne Gretsky is 'the great one'; and in American football, favoured talents will always feature spectacular quarter-backs (like Marino, Montana and Namath) over thunderous scrimmage players. Through sporting dramas, these brilliant players outwit and deceive tougher opponents; physical power and aggression are disarmed, becoming handicaps rather than pre-conditions of successful masculinity in play. Analysis of these popular, gendered aesthetics inside sport helps us to extend beyond the exaggerated emphasis on aggression and violence in masculinity. Such analysis helps us to consider the cultural complexity and aesthetic richness of popular masculine mores inside sport.<sup>8</sup>

#### Concluding comments: towards the critical reinvention of gender in sport

While modern sporting practices have been significant tools in the systematic reproduction of gender domination, sport is not a cultural zone of functional patriarchal closure. Both men and women critically

interpret conventional gender roles and norms, to establish fresh gender identities and diverse aesthetic codes within sport.

Elite groups have sought historically to construct sports cultures in accordance with conjunctural patriarchal and capitalist mores. Women's exclusion from sport has given way to their inclusion as consumers, notably in enhancing their attractiveness before the male gaze. Yet, as a leading authority observes, we should not 'reduce the complexity of history to a monotonously doleful tale of man's oppression of women' (Guttmann 1991: 105). Moreover, there is no single 'shared experience' of women regarding gender roles and identities (Jennifer Hargreaves 1994: 288-9). Female sports contain diverse politico-cultural dimensions: some are regressive, some negotiate class and gender hierarchies, and some are significantly more radical. Bourgeois women's historical role in policing the physical cultures of lower-class women is indicative of the intra-gender contradictions that typically arise under capitalism.

Sexuality in sport generates one sociological space for recognizing the cultural politics of sporting practices. Certainly, the 'making of men' through games was intended, in part, to dissolve auto- and homo-erotic impulses within confined institutional settings. Women's exclusion from strenuous or combative sports represents one cultural extension of men's broader policing of female sexuality. Sport's competitive ethos emphasizes that men in play should 'not be gay', as one of Connell's (1990: 94) respondents put it. Sporting females are always liable to receive lesbian-baiting labels, particularly if they play competitively, show musculature, and engage primarily in high-contact games. Nevertheless, gay men and lesbians have deployed various formal and informal techniques to sustain their sports participation, to realize alternative interpretations of sports disciplines, and to challenge dominant gender codes. The Gay Games are one illustration; so too the growing presence of 'gay and lesbian studies' within sport studies and further education in general.

The poverty of reductive, gendered readings of sport is highlighted when assessing the position of males. Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity can, if used flexibly, capture the contradictions and pluralities of masculinities within sport. Aesthetically, different masculine identities are favoured, most notably among 'artists' who transgress the dominant male mores by displaying grace and skill rather than toughness and power. Overall, I favour a critical, empirically informed cultural perspective that pursues justice within sport. Egalitarian policy measures, such as Title IX, have not gone far enough in realizing equality, never mind equity. Our first task is to formulate a balanced

historical, anthropological and sociological understanding of how social actors construct different gender roles within sport. The structural reform of sport, favouring co-operative strategies, would enhance gender equity, enabling disadvantaged communities to realize their human potentials within play. This necessitates clear acknowledgement of the interconnections between gender and class, focusing particularly on structural measures that systematically exclude women with working-class and/or ethnic minority backgrounds. It also requires challenging the cultural centrality of achievement sport. Less focus should be accorded to sports that reproduce male power by their prioritization of upper-body physiological strength over restricted temporal and spatial durations. Once the forces of domination are fully exposed, we might manufacture a cultural context that substitutes inclusion for achievement, and allows for marginalized groups, particularly women, to experience greater bodily transcendence within sport.