

YOU'LL BE A MAN IF YOU PLAY RUGBY:  
AN EXAMINATION OF  
THE ROLE OF SPORT IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

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## ❧ ABSTRACT ❧

This research project, a case-study of the organised sports programme of an urban New Zealand secondary school, uses a feminist theoretical framework to examine how sport operates as a mechanism for gender replication. Placing the experiences of a group of students at the centre of the research, I present an analysis to show that the sports programme is a strategic site for the development of student subjectivities. I employ a feminist theory of gender identity to argue that we have no essential sense of self, that our ideas of femininity and masculinity do not derive from nature but instead develop through the discourses we encounter. I examine how the students actively construct meanings of themselves through the discourses surrounding their participation in sports. I explore the hierarchy or gender order present and how the students position themselves within it. The contribution that wider societal influences, such as the media, make to this process is included in the analysis. I conclude that the institution of sport is a complex, contradictory site full of tension and ambiguity and that, as agents of our own subjectivities, there is the potential, in part through the insights outlined here, to resist and/or disrupt the discourses encountered and thereby challenge the dominant hegemonic masculinity.

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## ∞ PREFACE ∞

Late in 1998 I made the decision to embark on this research project. I hoped it would complete the masters degree that I had been working on part time since 1995. In that time I had read numerous research reports. The majority followed the traditional linear format. They contained a tidy review of the literature, a carefully crafted research question, a precise statement of the proposed research methods, a well-organised summary of results, some discussion points and perhaps an indication of future research directions. The writing styles were dispassionate, at times written in the third person, and although most were quantitative, some were qualitative.

The approach of all of them seemed to me to be "sanitised" in that there was an absence of problems along the way or at least no acknowledgement of any difficulties. The authors appeared to have experienced the research process in a tidy, logical, coherent and to my mind somewhat one-dimensional manner. If their reports were to be believed, they set off knowing where they were going, tripped lightly through each step and single-mindedly achieved their ultimate destination. I felt alienated in that I was experiencing the research process as anything but orderly and coherent! Perhaps I was simply not a good researcher?

When, as part of my current project, I began reading feminist researchers such as Anne Flintoff (1997), Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993), Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) and most recently, Leslie Rebecca Bloom (1998) I felt as if I had come home. Their experiences of research were my experiences. Anne Flintoff wrote that "whilst actually doing the fieldwork, I experienced considerable uncertainty about what I was doing or where I was going"! Liz Stanley and Sue Wise describe mistakes and confusions as an "inevitable aspect of research". Leslie Rebecca Bloom stresses the importance of recognising "that we are in a process of change and flux and fragmentation as we do our research" and, as researchers, learning to overtly locate our history, values and assumptions in the text so as to be open to critical

scrutiny by our readers. Writing more specifically about gender and sport, Jennifer Hargreaves looks upon it as an area full of complexities, contradictions and conflicts.

Accordingly, I have resolved that my report must reflect how I have experienced the research process as messy, confusing, frustrating, uncertain and above all episodic, as well as reflecting the labyrinthine reality of studying gender issues. In order to achieve this I have experimented to try to find the least constraining form of writing and to not only "engage with postmodern and poststructural feminist notions and analyses of power" (Barbara Humberstone, 1997) but also to forge an idiosyncratic, postmodern style of writing. In recognition that "all knowledge is socially constructed" and that "writing is not simply a true representation of an objective reality" but that "writing creates a particular view of reality" (Laurel Richardson, 1990) I have adopted, in places, a minimalist style of writing where I have juxtaposed diverse voices and left the reader to construct meanings.



## PROLOGUE

### **"Sports - No Game for Me Fortunately": A Gendered Kiwi Childhood De/Re/Constructed**

In explaining why she maps her biography onto her feminist research story, Susan Gilroy (1997) writes that "in studying social life we are studying ourselves. As researchers we can therefore simultaneously be the researched". She outlines how our subjectivity both shapes and is shaped by the research process and that "personal experiences are an important source of knowledge", not to be discounted as they are in more positivist work. That said, she highlights the need to move beyond the purely experiential and to not only let the participants speak for themselves but also to use theory to analyse what is being said.

In a similar manner Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993) urge that the researcher be an "open presence" in feminist research:

The researcher is always and inevitably present *in* the research. This exists whether openly stated or not; and feminist research ought to make this an open presence. To paraphrase a slogan once current in the gay movement, researchers must 'come out' in their writings.

This statement represents my 'coming out'. By recalling how sport contributed to the construction and regulation of my gender subjectivity or, if we subscribe to Leslie Rebecca Bloom's (1998) concept of "nonunitary subjectivity", my subjectivities, the reader is made aware of the lens through which I view the world.

My diary entry for Wednesday 4 April 1962, the year I turned thirteen, is matter-of-fact: "School. Weigh in for sports on Friday. Under six stone team. Set up goal

posts". No other details were necessary. Rugby, that most manly of games, was compulsory. There were no other options.

What the entry conceals though, was my deep dislike of the game. Small for my age and slight of build, I hated the rough physical nature of the sport. Despite rugby being a contact sport, I spent each game ensuring that I did not come into contact with either the ball or anyone else playing the game. I would have preferred to have been off somewhere else, by myself, reading a book, any book.

Thirty-seven years later I can still recall the hurt when a sarcastic teacher publicly rebuked me with the comment that I came off the field as clean and neat as I went on to it. To avoid again being on the receiving end of his caustic comments I always found a convenient moment to fall into the mud before returning to the classroom after a game.

My diary reveals a pattern to my life during that year. Weekdays were school-days, Friday nights were for Boys' Brigade, Saturday afternoons were spent at the pictures and Sundays were for Bible class and church.

The 26th Company of The Boys' Brigade paraded for Drill at the local church hall at 7pm on Fridays. Dressed in pseudo- military uniforms we learned values such as obedience, reverence, discipline, self-respect and "all that tends towards a true Christian manliness". We prayed to God to make us strong, to give us courage, faithfulness in duty and loyalty in friendship. My 1960 handbook stresses the importance of keeping fit, exercise, fresh air and cleanliness. Vigorous games such as "storming the heights" and "bullrush" were played. Physical training and gymnastics were part of each session.

Each month we received a copy of the British Boys' Brigade magazine "Stedfast". Each issue contained a New Zealand page. Sport featured prominently in this section. Don Clarke, the great All Black full back, contributed in April 1965



extolling the virtues of discipline, modesty, tolerance, comradeship and determination.

At secondary school, several days each year were devoted to dressing up in uniforms and taking part in military exercises including a trip to the firing range at Burnham Military Camp. This time my uniform was a khaki battle tunic and glengarry, the same uniform worn by my father in the portrait that hung over the mantelpiece in our sitting room at home. My father at war: one of the Empire's finest sons.

At home the diet of sport and war continued. I was a voracious reader and still have many of the books I was given at that time. British military heroes or sporting heroes were the role models who peopled the world of books into which I escaped: "Reach for the Sky - The Story of Douglas Bader", "Dawn of D-Day", "The Wooden Horse", "Ivanhoe", "Robin of Sherwood".

Each Christmas "Boy's Own Annuals" appeared in my stocking. Stories included: "The Nazi Sea-Raider", "Boxing's Black Prince", "The Royal Navy's Fighting Tigers", "Phantom Fighters", "Bobby Charlton", "Stories of King Arthur".

According to my diary going to the pictures was a regular, almost weekly, outing. We did not own a television until late that year. Film titles recorded include: "The Queen's Guards", "Gunfight at OK Corral", "Zorro The Avenger", "Texas John Slaughter", "Geronimo", "Guns in the Afternoon", and "David and Goliath".

I still have a copy of the fifty year old newspaper that contains the announcement of my birth. The front page is dominated by a photograph of the Headingley Cricket Ground, Leeds and an article on the cricket test match between New Zealand and England due to begin next day. Inside the paper, the editorial previews the same match paying tribute to the "fighting qualities which have been revealed in adversity" by the New Zealanders.

What intrigues me is that despite growing up amid such a pervasive and powerful values system, I resisted the sex-role stereotyping so that my sensitive nature and strong interest in the arts were able to flourish, so much so, that when I received a reference on leaving secondary school in December 1966, it recorded, albeit cryptically:

“Outside the classroom, Ferguson has won medals for ball-room dancing”.

Growing up as I did in the grey conservatism of Christchurch in the 1950s and 1960s and not conforming, as expected, to the dominant social norms of masculinity, there were times when I felt like an outsider. This, together with the concern for social justice that I learned from the church, meant that in later life, after reading Marilyn French and Simone de Beauvoir and studying feminist issues in education, I began describing myself as a pro-feminist male. Obviously unable to experience life as women do, I was able, in part, to identify with concepts such as oppression, subordination, marginalisation and invisibility.

Sport was certainly not high on my agenda even though while growing up it permeated my daily life. How does one resist or construct an alternative to the popular ideas and stereotypes? How is it possible to resist the one-way flow of ideology? In New Zealand, where sport occupies such a hallowed position, just what role does it play in the social construction of gender? What are the current perspectives on gender?

## 2

### METHODOLOGY

I turn off the main road and into the grounds of Godley School (code-name for the school). The drive winds through well-manicured grounds. To my left, through large, mature trees, I glimpse the playing fields. A small stream flows to my right and beyond that a chapel is bathed in wintry sunshine. I am in good time for my first meeting with the first 16 of the 23 students, nominated by the school, who I shall be interviewing as part of my research project.

Earlier this morning a thought had been planted in my somewhat agitated mind:

I wonder what the students at Godley School will make of you?

Already nervous about beginning the focus group interviews that are to form the basis of my research, the comment only added to my doubts.

**oxymoron** *n.* (Rhet.) A kiwi male not preoccupied with sport.

It was made by a friend highly skilled in the area of sports studies and very aware of my lack of involvement in sport. Because of his expertise, I used Jack as a resource, sharing my ideas with him and drawing on his extensive knowledge of sport. In the event, his comment served a very useful purpose in that it shifted the focus from me, as the nervous researcher, to the students, as the researched, and how I might go about establishing a relationship with them that would allow them to “tell it like it is” (Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, 1993).

I park my car and gather up my notes. Anxious about addressing the meeting, I have written down every word I intend to say so that if my mind goes blank, which thankfully has never happened to me before, I have the security of knowing

that help is at hand. Clutching my notes, I walk over to the group of students waiting outside the main building. I wonder which one is the Head student?

*Voice 2* There were definitely those who were physically big and to a certain degree handsome. And they were definitely the leaders. They had everything that everyone else would have wanted. So they would be perceived to be going on to succeed and they were named school prefects and they were named school head boys (*Ex-public school student*).

*Voice 6* Rugby still does play a major role because you can just look like the people ... of those who were in the First XV last year...um... not one of them is not a prefect this year.... That's the kind of person you want to have as a prefect... someone who people look up to because they're in the First XV (*Male Student*).

A tall, personable young man steps forward, greets me, introduces himself, requests that the others follow us and escorts me to the room set aside for our meeting. He makes polite conversation on the way. Turns out he is a rugby player! I am, however, uncomfortable about one thing. He and the other students call me "Sir".

Feminist research questions orthodox relations of power in the research process (Jennifer Hargreaves, 1997). If the students position me as a teacher, a figure of authority to be deferred to, will they tell me their stories in a full and frank manner? How can I locate myself, as the researcher, "on the same critical plane" as those I am researching? (Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, 1993)

I am shown into a small lecture theatre which is a rather more formal venue than I had in mind for this initial meeting. I introduce myself, tell them about my work with students training to become primary school teachers and my part-time study for a Master of Education degree of which this project is a part. I then ask if it would be a breach of school protocol if the appellation "Sir" is dropped and instead they call me by my first name. I am informed that there are no problems with this suggestion.

In fact my first name is used repeatedly during our discussion especially by one student. He begins to sound over-familiar. Maybe it is just the novelty or have I made my first blunder in the opening minutes of my work with the students? Perhaps, as an outsider, a middle-aged, white, middle-class male I should have preserved the distance between us in establishing a relationship with these Year 12 and 13 students? I want them to feel comfortable with me but not unsure. I want to ensure that the interviews will be “as relaxed and as unthreatening as possible” (Anne Flintoff, 1997).

This apparent familiarity did not become an issue during the focus group discussions. The students were, at all times, respectful, courteous, and their contributions were thoughtful and made in a serious manner.

I outline how I responded to an invitation by their school authorities to undertake work in the area of gender issues, and how information is being sought in the light of the decision a few years ago to become a co-educational school after a long tradition as a single-sex boys' school.

I reiterate the details contained in the information sheets that they and their parents received along with the consent forms to take part in this project. I thank them for becoming part of the work and remind them that they may withdraw at any stage. I briefly discuss my research methodology, how I will be using focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and we'll talk about:

1. the sports they play
2. how they first got involved
3. what they get out of their involvement, especially the role that sport plays in their learning about being young women and young men in New Zealand society
4. anything else they wish to discuss and questions which emerge from their responses.

At this stage I have already tested this format by conducting two interviews, one with a cheerleader and one with an English ex-public school student. In the testing I tried to encourage the interviewees to talk about sport and gender and to pick up on topics and issues they initiated so as to allow them a stronger role in defining the content of the interview (Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen, 1992).

In devising this format I was mindful of the need for feminist research to let the subjects speak for themselves, to treat the students as participants with potential to affect the outcome of the research (Jennifer Hargreaves, 1997), and not to conduct a "hit and run" project (Anne Flintoff, 1997).

I then reveal my position (Lesley Rebecca Bloom, 1998) by telling the students that I am not a sportsperson, that I have never been involved in sports and that I regard them as the experts. I stress that it is their individual and collective stories that I want us to tell through my project. I share how it is important to me to create a feeling that we are working together to shed light on the role of school sport in the lives of young people. I explain that the interviews will be tape-recorded, transcribed and returned to them for checking. I reassure them that I will preserve their anonymity by using code names for them and their school.

I invite questions before we arrange times when we will meet to begin the focus group work. I propose lunch-time meetings so as to avoid disrupting their classes. A lively question and answer exchange follows covering who will receive my final report, the importance of the school authorities not being able to identify participants and what preparation the students need to do before their focus group interview. The first of the interviews is set for the Monday of the following week.

I decided on the use of focus groups because I wanted to gain access to the students' "ideas thoughts and memories in their own words"

and I hoped that by listening to and interacting with each other their participation and flow of ideas would be enhanced (Shulamit Reinharz, 1992). I also allowed the students to self select the members of their groups aware of the need “to recruit people who are known to each other” (Lesley Pugsley, 1996) and in keeping with the feminist aim of “developing more egalitarian research methods” (Bev James, 1986).

The students depart for their afternoon classes and I prepare to meet with the Deputy Head to inform him of the arrangements and my requirements for next week. It was he who set up today’s meeting including selecting the students to receive invitations to be part of the research project. I am really excited about the prospect of making a start with the interviews but at the same time a little apprehensive about my ability to conduct interviews that are open-ended and interactive (Shulamit Reinharz, 1992).

A few days later and I meet the students who have opted to be interviewed first. A minor setback occurs, just to add to my nerves, when the room we were to use is occupied. The students suggest an alternative and we quickly settle ready to start. In no time the set questions are over and we are into unknown territory. Three of the students chat easily and there are no awkward pauses but the fourth student is hesitant. I fail to make it easier for him. In an effort to draw him into the conversation, I direct questions to him. Unable to say more than a few words to one such question he shakes his head and makes an aside about not doing too well. When I listen to the tape later, I sound like an interrogator! I will do better next time.

Feminist researchers strive for egalitarian relationships with their respondents by making space for them to narrate their stories **as they desire**; by focusing on issues that are important to respondents...(Leslie Rebecca Bloom, 1998).

The emphasis is mine and guides my next interview. This time the group of all male students is very lively. There is a lot of banter and ribbing amongst the students. I hope the tape is picking it all up. I go from feeling that I over-directed the last interview to feeling that I am running to keep up with this one. One of the students asks me about my sporting interests.

Feminist interviews are dialogic in that both the researcher and respondents reveal themselves and reflect on these disclosures (Leslie Rebecca Bloom, 1998).

I confess to not really having any but add that I have watched a little cricket. He very kindly invites me along to one of their matches next summer. From feeling that I am floundering, I now feel more at home. Sadly, when I listen to the tape later, much of the interplay between the students is inaudible but what I have recorded is full of meaning. I resolve to throw away my questions and to trust the students to tell me their stories as they see fit. After all they are the experts and my role is to listen. When I had a set agenda, I felt there was some tension in that they too had ideas about what we should cover. Taking my lead from them would enable them to express all their thoughts. That is what I was there for.

Several weeks have passed. All seven focus group interviews are complete. The twenty-three students have all had copies of the transcripts of their interviews and we are to meet so that they can participate in the interpretation. If I was rather nervous about our first meeting, I am very anxious about this one. What if they change their views as I indicated they might on reading the transcripts? What if their interpretation differs markedly from mine? What if they withdraw their data?

As it turns out nothing untoward happens, well nothing too drastic. When I read extracts to illustrate themes I have identified, the students begin a guessing game of 'who is he quoting'? Two very revealing quotations, where young women describe how limiting sports has been for them, are greeted with derisory laughter



from some male students. The female student who made one of the interview comments looks flustered. I just hope she will let the comment stand. Perhaps the laughter is indicative of the chauvinism still evident in sport in New Zealand?

What does surprise me, in view of the levity during our meeting, is that when at the end I invite written comments in response to themes summarised, the students all write diligently. Later scrutiny of these responses shows overwhelming endorsement of my suggested interpretations and some further very thoughtful comments and suggestions.

In subsequent days I receive two letters from students who were on study leave and missed the last meeting. Both contain kind wishes for the success of my work. I tackle the on-going research process much encouraged and mindful of the cautionary comment I recently read:

Analysis is never done without preconceptions, we can never be absolutely non-selective in our observations, and where the object of our observation and analysis has to do with gender it is extraordinarily difficult to subdue certain expectations (Deborah Cameron, 1997).

### 3

## **"Religion, desire and fulfilment": Sport in New Zealand Culture**

I feel like an impostor! On an initial visit to Godley School I was mistaken for a parent awaiting an interview with one of the teachers. And now here I am, a researcher, joining the group of proud parents filing into the annual school assembly held to honour the academic success of their daughters and sons. Oh no, there are not enough seats and students are being asked give up theirs.

I'm here to begin preliminary observations aimed at experiencing the atmosphere of the school. No sport today. But no, the Principal has just commented that it is important in New Zealand to acknowledge academic success not just sporting prowess. Two students, both males, address the assembly. There are sporting references in both speeches. The Principal repeats the homily of one. Success at school contrasts with golfing success where luck can be more significant than practice. Is sport so much a part of our culture that it permeates all we do and how we see ourselves?

If there is a unifying New Zealand characteristic, surely a collective love of sport is it. Kiwis are obsessed with the physical challenge and delight when a compatriot from the Shaky Isles beats the best in the world (Nick Smith, 1999).

Rugby football was the best of all our pleasures; it was religion and desire and fulfilment all in one (John Mulgan, 1947).

The college motto, 'Take courage: be a man', was presented to us as something to be proved only on the field of sport (Michael King, 1999).

The sport of rugby football in New Zealand has been interpreted and documented as the country's major passion and religion (Shona M. Thompson, 1994).

When a New Zealander is overseas, rugby, alongside Maori culture, is the piece of nationalistic clothing that most sets you apart and defines you (Tim Watkin, 1999).

Most New Zealand males, from erudite scholars to burly shearers, have experienced the dying fall of the light after a hard match and the liniment scented mateship of the dressing room. It is one of those tribal experiences that has helped to create that unique and underrated species, the New Zealand man (Spiro Zavos, 1988).

New Zealand and sporting success - the two are synonymous. Sport has an important place in the New Zealand way of life, because it is something we do well (John Brooks, 1999).

Sport has become a crucial part of our social fabric. New Zealand's unique passion for sport...gives us a sense of purpose and a sense of achievement (Miriama Alexander, 1999).

New Zealand lives or dies, metaphorically, by how the All Blacks perform. No other sports team or event provides such a national barometer. When the Silver Ferns beat Australia we're pleased and proud. If New Zealand retains the America's Cup there'll be more pride.... But they are mere sports events, something to celebrate but not something upon which the health of a nation depends. Rugby is (Ron Palenski and Phil Taylor, 1999).

Sport is a vital element of colour and excitement in the people's lives. In short it is their religion (Austin Mitchell, 1972).

An opinion poll was recently reported on TV. Asked to name the greatest event of the last century, New Zealanders include the winning of the rugby world cup among the top ten. The losing of the rugby world cup numbers among the ten worst disasters of the last century alongside wars, the bombing of Hiroshima and the holocaust! When asked if the losing of the rugby world cup would affect her chances in the forthcoming general election, Helen Clark answers with a wry chuckle, "You'd think our whole world revolves around rugby". It seems for many that it does!

Given the pervasiveness of sport, any examination of gender and New Zealand culture must centre on an analysis of the role of sport in the social construction of masculinities and femininities and the relations of power between them. But first we need to look more closely at the rhetoric of New Zealand as a sporting nation.

Sue Walker, Jenny Ross and Alistair Gray (1999) report some of the results of the 1997 *Sport and Physical Activity Survey* which was funded by the Hillary Commission for Sport, Fitness and Leisure. "The amount of sport and physically active leisure undertaken by 1518, five to seventeen year-old New Zealanders was surveyed". The results reveal some gender differences in physical activity participation. 74% of boys achieved more than the recommended 2.5 hours of activity per week while only 64% of girls achieved this level, a finding consistent with other New Zealand studies. Overall 69% of New Zealand's 5 - 17 year-olds met the recommended guideline of a minimum of 2.5 hours per week but interestingly the level of activity in the 16 - 17 year-olds (the age group of the students in my project) was the lowest of all groups at only 53%.

In 1989 the results of *Life in New Zealand Survey*, conducted by Otago University for the Hillary Commission for Recreation and Sport reported on the life styles of 5,000 New Zealand citizens over 20 years. 53% of females were not involved in social sport while only 37% of males were not. 69% of females were not involved in organised sport compared to only 50.6% of males.

In 1992 Jan Cameron reported the results of her survey of over 70 New Zealand sports organisations. Her data confirmed that New Zealand sport is predominantly a male enterprise: "69% of all members are male, 79% of paid Executive Officers are male, 80% of volunteer administrators are male, and 89% of elected national directors are male".

These findings suggest that the concept of New Zealand as a sporting nation is masculinist. Perhaps we need to qualify some of these descriptions to read 'sport has an important place in the New Zealand **male** way of life?' Maybe it is just further evidence of New Zealand as a gendered society? The notion of New Zealand as a culture in which masculinity and femininity are central to its formation has been advanced:

New Zealand is, what we term, a *gendered culture*. That is, a culture in which the intimate and structural expressions of social life are divided according to gender. Notions of masculinity and femininity are a pervasive metaphor which shape not merely relations between the sexes, but are integral to the systematic maintenance of other structures of inequality as well" (Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, 1989).

This is the context in which this research is located as I examine the experiences of a group of New Zealand secondary school students to identify the role that sport plays in the social construction of their gender subjectivities.

## 4

### “Women had no place in this world”: Theorizing Sport

As a young person, whenever I showed any reluctance to take part in sport, I was admonished and urged on with that old saw “a healthy mind in a healthy body”. Given the puritanism of the time, I suspect the exhortations were not solely prompted by the believed benefits of vigorous exercise but to keep us from developing any undesirable habits such as harbouring impure thoughts. Whatever the motivation, sport was seen as entirely beneficial both to us as individuals and to society as a whole.

*Voice 12* Exercise, like not losing weight and stuff, but just keeping fit cause when you don't play sport for a long time you feel kind of, a little sluggish and like a big frump and stuff (Female student).

*Voice 19* First and foremost you get fitness and after that it's getting outside, getting out of the classroom, having a bit of freedom and some fresh air and also it's nice to be in a team situation when you're working alongside you know, friends all for a common cause or something, to win (Male Student).

*Voice 5* I get a lot of discipline out of rugby and it's really great being a team with camaraderie and all that stuff and also, it keeps me fit. I mean if I didn't have rugby I'd probably be like a lot less fitter than I am (Male student).

These comments illustrate the positivist functional view of sport: a liberal and democratic view of, sport for all. Since sport concerns the natural area of the physical body and has a life of its own outside other institutions of society, such as politics and economics, it is seen as playful and innocent. Sport contributes to an individual's personal growth, maintains social order, discipline and cohesion and is unproblematic. Students learn to get along with each other, work in harmony and achieve common goals.

Sport was celebrated as a facilitator of physical well-being and all-round personal development, and as a positive reproductive site for the attitudes norms and values beneficial to the functioning of society (Andrew Parker, 1996).

But can the institution of sport be viewed as such a benign force for the good of all? When sport became, only relatively recently, an area for serious study initially the uncritical focus was on male sport only and early sport scientists made only fleeting references to gender differences and explained these away by resorting to biological determinism.

This dominance of male sport in the early analysis of sport probably reflects the origins of modern sport. Much of modern sport originated in the English public schools of the nineteenth century. Here sport served as a preparation for life and British imperialism in particular. The male-dominated value systems of these schools carried over into the wider sporting sphere. One hundred years on and the elitism and chauvinism still remains:

*(Voice 2)* We were going to be the leaders. Public schools produced the leaders of men.... Public schools, Eton and Harrow and places such as that, produced the leaders of England and we produced the leaders of men.

*(Interviewer)* Leaders of Women?

*(Voice 2)* No, didn't even come into it. Good grief no. Gosh no. I mean, Absolutely not. Women had no place in this world whatsoever (Ex-public school student).

When the dispossessed French aristocrat, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, revived the ancient Olympic games, it was to British society that he turned for inspiration. He saw the late nineteenth century British imperialism as a success in contrast to the demoralisation of the French upper classes following the Prussian invasion of France in 1870. He attributed British success to the influence of its sporting traditions, the traditions of the British public school system. So the modern Olympic movement originated in the chauvinism of English public school games (Varda Burstyn, 1999).

<p><i>Voice 11</i> We'd like to think of ourselves as equal but we're not because, um, I'm not sure about the statistics... the truth of it...but you know men will earn at least more than women will earn, you know, women will earn in a lifetime... it's</p>	<p>just a proven fact, and I don't know if it stems from sport but it is like... it mirrors and reflects sport that make the male domination of it all and the women just doing a little bit and that little bit is so insignificant, like netball</p>	<p>compared to rugby and cricket and everything else...it's just so little. It's just a little facet of the whole sport and that's the same for like our lifestyle (Female student).</p>
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Sport is an ideological tool that produces and reproduces images of the domination of men over women in order to naturalise the gendered division of labour upon which the stability of the social order is imagined to depend (Cheryl L. Cole and Susan Birrell, 1994).

When a more critical sociology of sport began to emerge analysis was based on Marxist theory and described sport as a mirror of wider capitalist society embodying the dominant ideology of competition, nationalism and aggression. Class was central to this analysis and gender marginal. But such an analysis is determinist, and situates the individual as a passive recipient of the dominant ideologies.

Sport is an ideological institution with enormous symbolic significance that contributes to and perpetuates cultural hegemony (M. Ann Hall, 1985).

A feminist analysis sees sport as an arena where prevailing views are contested and challenged. How else could we explain historical changes in sport and the emergence of women in sports such as boxing and rugby? A feminist paradigm places gender at the centre, shifts the focus from the individual to the social structure of sport and highlights the role of sport in the social reproduction of gender relations. It avoids a simplified analysis, which fails to acknowledge the complexities and contradictions of the social analysis of sport.

Feminist research into sport seeks answers to important questions such as why women participate or do not participate in sport, what meanings and values sport holds for them and, the focus of this project, the role of sport in the social construction of gender. Feminist research is political, aimed at bringing about social change by creating useful knowledge with which to challenge inequality and promote social justice. Its aim is to increase our understanding of how inequality works and to identify contexts where power relations and images can be challenged. This research is located within such a paradigm.



## 2.5

### Playing the Game: Theorizing Gender Through Sport

I subscribe to the view that gender is socially constructed rather than biologically determined and that, here in New Zealand, sport plays a significant part in this process. I intend to use two scenarios to illustrate the different ways gender has been explained, but basic terms need to be defined first and the distinction between sex and gender clearly established.

Babies have a biological sex when born. That sex is determined by applying socially agreed biological criteria for classifying someone as male or female. Application of the agreed criteria determines the sex category into which the new-born is placed (Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, 1991). Sex then is purely physiological.

Gender, on the other hand, is based on the non-biological aspects of the differences between males and females. So where individuals are born either female or male, they become either feminine or masculine, as encapsulated in the oft-quoted words:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (Simone de Beauvoir, 1972).

Accordingly, femininity and masculinity are not inherent properties of individuals but rather they are inherent or structural properties of society. We need to regard gender as being socially, historically and culturally constructed.

However these definitions set up a basic dualism which oversimplifies the facts. Biologists and endocrinologists studying hormones suggest that sex is better understood as a biological continuum made up of chromosomal sex, gonadal sex and hormonal sex rather than two opposite, mutually exclusive categories. The

popular conception of sex involves then an element of social construction (Judith Lorber and Susan Farrell, 1991).

Similarly, the concept of gender, as the non-biological qualities, traits and activities deemed to be feminine or masculine does involve apparently physiological outcomes such as musculature. "Muscularity and masculinity can be, and often are, conflated" (Alan Mansfield and Barbara McGinn, 1993).

In the realm of sport the chromatin screening and buccal smear tests, whereby all female Olympic competitors were tested to establish chromosomal "normality" and deviance, serve to reinforce the overlaps, uncertainties, ambiguities and changes of sexual identity at all phases including chromosomal, hormonal anatomical as well as psychological and social. Sex differences are not straightforward, absolute and unchanging (M. Ann Hall, 1996. Jennifer Hargreaves, 1994).

During the Victorian period differences between women and men were explained as being predetermined by biology. This ideology of biologism, promoted by medical science, depicted women as weak, frail, passive and emotional, therefore ill-suited to vigorous exercise. Men, were seen as being naturally more competitive and aggressive, and therefore were physically and psychologically equipped for sports. This male superiority was seen as the natural order of things in spheres other than sport (Andrew Parker, 1996). Do vestiges of this still exist today?

Consider the following scenario:

### 1. The Promise of Sport

#### **Dramatis Personae**

Boy, *aged about 5*

His Father

Horsemen

Plains Dancers, *cheerleaders*

*Scene* - Jade Stadium, Christchurch, New Zealand (26.2.99)

*Event* - Super 12 Rugby Competition Crusaders v Chiefs

*The Action* -

A cheer goes up from the crowd as the first strains of the music everyone knows echo around the stadium. "The Conquest of Paradise" heralds the arrival of The Horsemen, a firm favourite with the crowd. The music swells. The Horsemen, clad in medieval costume, circle the stadium. They halt and turn to face a portion of the crowd. Their horses paw the ground. The riders flourish their swords and the cheers swell. Combat imagery abounds, a portent of things to come.

A young Boy in the crowd is on his feet. He returns the salute of The Horsemen. He is wearing a plastic crusader helmet and flourishing a plastic crusader sword. He stands just in front of his Father who looks on admiringly. The ritual continues: Horsemen, cheering crowd, music, and small boys in the company of their adult male relatives.

The tempo of the music changes. A steady beat replaces the evocative strains. Cheerleaders take their place on the sideline. These young women, clad in halter tops, short skirts and bare midriffs, begin their dance routine. Cheers and jeers are heard from the crowd. The small Boy looks on, his sword at his side.

Some of the earliest accounts of gender come from Freudian psychoanalytical research (R. W. Connell, 1995). Reinterpreted from a feminist perspective these accounts claim that boys and girls experience gender in very different ways. Contact with the mother, as the primary caretaker, love-object and object of identification, is the dominant feature of a child's early life. To establish a masculine identity boys must achieve some psychological separation from their mothers while girls are able to maintain a closer identification with the mother (Nancy Chodorow, 1994).

Early immersion in the social sphere of sport, a social world dominated by males is an important part of the process of separation and demonstrates to young boys, such as the one depicted in the first scenario, the privileges associated with being male and the lack of power associated with being female. New Zealand boys and the Godley School male students in particular appear to have experienced the active initiation by their fathers into the world of sport, a male enclave where men "reaffirm their masculinity in an unambiguous male arena". (Philip G. White and Anne B. Vagi, 1990).

*Voice 4* My dad played soccer when he was a child and when he was older as well and so I think just because that was part of his life he introduced me to that (Male student).

*Voice 15* I selected rugby because I had older brothers that were already playing it and it interested me. We are kind of a rugby family. I've got two older brothers that play rugby and I have another younger brother that plays rugby and my dad never got to play any sports so he's really keen on us to play sport so he gets really enthusiastic when we do it so I've always just been brought up on playing rugby and all our cousins and stuff play rugby as well so ... we are what you call a rugby family (Male student).

*Published Voice* "There were times of closeness, father and son, brother and weary brother, waking very early on cold mornings, huddling together under a blanket in front of a wireless waiting for it..." (Greg McGee, 1981).

*Voice 8* With volleyball, my friends played and I thought it would be quite an interesting sport to play, and basketball was just the same, my friends played it and I thought it would be fun. (Female student)

*Interviewer* I never really got involved in sport. I wasn't interested in sport. My father never did things with us when we were growing up. He was absent much of the time and when he was around he was a distant figure. Perhaps if he'd been around more he might have introduced me to sport?

*Voice 5* My Dad, my old man, was throwing me balls in the cradle (Male student).

*Voice 22* A lot of my friends are playing and so, yeah I got into it (Female student).

*Published Voice* "Think New Zealand sport and the next thought is almost automatic: the All Blacks, the rugby legends who make us proud to sing the national anthem and whose achievements send dads rushing out for baby-sized footy boots for their newborn sons (Miriya Alexander, Programme of the 10th World Netball Championships 1999)

*Voice 18* One of my friends was playing hockey and she said "Join the team...

You know... it's fun" (Female student).

Psychoanalytic explanations of gender came to be seen as incomplete and the focus shifted to the concept of sex-roles. This perspective on gender asserts that being a woman or a man means fulfilling the general set of expectations attached to one's sex. Through social learning via socialisation agencies such as the family, school and the

media, individuals were said to learn the skills, values, norms, attitudes and knowledge associated with particular gender roles, for girls and women, an expressive role, and for boys and men, an instrumental role (Talcott Parsons, 1956).

Sport was seen as one institution where the well-defined roles became internalised in a relatively harmonious process, which promoted both mental health of the individual and social stability of society. In the first scenario on page 22 the masculine role is one of action, strength, aggression and dominance while the cheerleaders model the desirable feminine role of supportive handmaidens and attractive, petite sex objects on the sidelines.

Socialisation through sport was consciously understood to be 'masculinizing.' .....I also learned to accept (rather than question) physical pain, to deny anxiety and anger, and to be aggressive in ways that were clearly valued as 'manly.' I realise now that I gained an enormous sense of my own power when I could respond to challenges in this way, for it meant I was not 'like a girl' (Bruce Kidd, 1987).

*Voice 8* When they're doing the dancing, cheerleading thing really well, but .... I don't know, makes them seem so little compared to the rest of the horses and rugby game and everything. It's just like the size difference between them and then all the horses.... just makes them look real inferior (Female student).

*Voice 10* They're not wearing very many clothes, it's just like showing their sexuality I suppose, shows that they can't play football but they can dance and entertain males in the crowd (Female student).

*Voice 22* At the moment the only role models for girls seem to be people like the pop stars on TV and things. We don't seem to get that many sport.... we get pop stars.... That's not much to aspire to really (Female student).

*Voice 1* I think there are a lot of parts of New Zealand's culture and society which hold on to old views and I think the rugby lot are right up there with women as the nasty, dirty, rugby gear washer and provider of food and jumper up and down wearing skimpy clothes and going rah rah, yeah, my man, so I think in respect of New Zealand when it comes to rugby, women are definitely supporters only and if they are players, well they are not viewed as what women should be which is, delicate (Cheerleader).

Role theory and functionalism, that the primary function of gender arrangements is to ensure the maintenance and reproduction of society, have been extensively critiqued especially by feminists. This perspective is seen as too simplistic in failing to account for how gender is mediated by race, class and sexuality and for

minimising the extent to which gender relations are based on power. It reinforces the assumption of two mutually exclusive categories, internally homogenous, that stand in fixed opposition to each other. The socialisation process is depicted as moving in one direction, adults socialise children, those with power socialise the less powerful. It overemphasises the extent to which people's lives and social behaviour are prescribed by portraying individuals as passive rather than active agents capable of resisting, reworking or creating their own subjectivities (Robin Law, Hugh Campbell and John Dolan, 1999; M. Ann Hall, 1996; Barrie Thorne, 1993; R. W. Connell, 1995).

Now consider a second scenario:

## 2. Locating Gender

### Dramatis Personae

Voice 14, Male Student, rugby player

Voice 15, Male Student, rugby player

Voice 16, Female Student, netball player

Voice 17, Female student, basketball player

Interviewer

*Scene* - Godley School

*Event* - Focus Group Interview

*Interviewer*      Okay, now how did you first get involved in your sport, say rugby?

*Voice 14*            How did I get involved in rugby? (*He glances nervously in the direction of the two female students*) I don't think I want to say this but, when I started I played soccer, like I played soccer (*laughter from the two female students*) from about five 'til about under

eleven and then um, just in the youngster's grades... I didn't really... I like more a physical game and so like Dad goes "Why don't you play rugby?" Mum was a bit against it but, yeah, I started playing rugby and really enjoyed my first year... like then made a rep team so from then on I just loved rugby...got a lot of enjoyment out of it.

*Interviewer*      Why would you be reluctant to tell me you started in soccer?  
(more laughter from the two female students)

*Voice 14*          Oh, (laughs nervously, and glances at the two female students who laugh too) no... it's just the image of soccer I mean... I wouldn't like to say that I played soccer openly to a lot of soccer players around the school.

*Interviewer*      And what's the image of soccer?

*Voice 14*          A bit prissy (*Laughter from the female students*) in New Zealand especially it's a bit girlish, I mean, you go over to England and all those sort of countries, I mean, it's the hard nose sport that you play, in the older grades it gets a bit feisty and there's a few fights and that sort of thing, but I mean, I just feel that (*leans back in his chair, looks at the other students and says gutturally*) rugby's a lot more physical game and something that I enjoy a lot more.

New Zealand sociologist Bev James, on the other hand, suggested that interviewing for language is not enough. Instead, we should supplement "verbal communication in interviews, with attention to nonverbal communication, since 'often members of a subordinate group cannot clearly articulate their frustrations and discontents [which] may be expressed in inchoate ways such as laughter' (Shulamit Reinharz, 1992).

The rugby playing protagonist, (*Voice 14*) code-named Will, plays a very different role from that of a passive recipient of a socially prescribed role. Will is in fact working at gender by actively positioning himself within the available discourse of sport. Very aware of his audience, there is a distinct element of performance as he goes about locating himself and constructing his subjectivity.

If we look more closely at what is happening, the concept of doing gender becomes more apparent. Will wants to uphold his image of himself as a rugby player and is initially hesitant to admit that he once played soccer. Soccer is obviously not a game for real men for according to Will it is girlish and prissy (prim and sissy). Having admitted his soccer playing he explains it away as something he did as a mere youngster and as not meeting his need for a more physical game.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things (1. Corinthians 13:11).

Equally interesting, or perhaps even more so, is the fact that Will would not openly admit to soccer players at his school that he once played the game. Obviously it does not fit the image he is constructing for himself in this school environment. Cognisant of New Zealand culture would he do gender differently in another setting? "Soccer is the hard nosed sport that you play in England".

Socialisation into sport is less a process of taking on roles than of actively creating them, albeit within the limits and constraints of social practice (Nancy Theberge, 1994).

His father suggested rugby (which Will went on to describe later as traditionally a big New Zealand thing) but his mother was against it. Will started to play anyway, experienced success and grew to love it. The positioning of girls and women is interesting. His mother's reservations about his playing rugby are overruled and soccer, not physical enough, is associated with girls.



I went on to ask what Will meant by "physical". He replied "one of my coaches said the other week... you want to go out there and dominate the opposition... actually physically dominate them and in soccer you wouldn't do that". He then described the amazement of people in America that rugby is played without all the padding and helmets characteristic of their version of football.

This analysis is supported by the modern sociology of gender, which has emerged since the 1980s. This body of work accounts for gender identity in terms of relations of power and is feminist in origin. Gender as a role or set of traits or mere biologism is rejected and instead gender is conceptualised as "the product of social doings of some sort" (Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, 1991). Through examining the history of how definitions of femininity and masculinity are embedded in institutions and economic structures, gender is shown as not fixed but constructed in social interaction (R. W. Connell, 1995).

Central to this approach is the idea of hegemony. Originally developed by Antonio Gramsci to describe how the domination of one class over others is achieved by a combination of politics and ideology, it is utilised in this perspective to show how a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. It allows for accounts of gender, which highlight how one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally dominant. I intend to develop this theme fully in a later chapter, save to say here that, in this scenario, I believe Will, in constructing the rugby image for himself, is aligning himself with the dominant form of masculinity which is expressed through the sport of rugby at Godley School.

Will's keen awareness of his audience illustrates another key idea of this perspective, that of "gender display". The cultural ideals of femininity and masculinity are said to be socially scripted and played out for an audience. Sport, and its attendant ideology, can be seen as one situation where performances of gender can take place. In this sense gender is not an aspect of what one is but what one does repeatedly in interaction with others:

Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (Judith Butler, 1990).

A very accessible account of this perspective draws heavily on the metaphor of play to show the socially created, historically changing, ambiguous and contradictory process of gender construction. Gender categories, identities, divisions and meanings are shown to be produced actively and collaboratively in everyday life. Play as dramatic performance includes gender as scripted action. Gender is characterised as a complexity of relations with fluctuating, multiple, and contradictory meanings (Barrie Thorne, 1993). As a New Zealander I wouldn't dare to suggest that sport and play were synonymous but sport does seem to offer a setting where gender can be played out.

## 2 6 2

### **“There are other things in my life, but sport is a lot more enjoyable than most of them”: Sporting Experiences**

I am several floors up in a central city office building, Elle greets me and shows me into a spacious office, several times the size of my College of Education study. The walls are lined with bookshelves, which are filled with handsomely bound legal tomes. Tea is arranged. I settle into a comfortable couch ready to try my hand at my first semi-structured interview, the format of which I intend to use when I interview the Godley School students. Elle is a cheerleader who regularly performs on the sideline at Jade Stadium before rugby matches. We discuss her early sporting interests and move on to the contribution sport has made to her overall development.

Since sport teaches boys skills and attitudes that prepare them to compete successfully in public life, the exclusion of girls from sport unfairly blocks their ability to compete with men (Michael Messner, 1992).

Elle is very positive about the contribution that sport has made to her life:

I am sure that it contributed to my confidence and to my ability to manage and coordinate things. It helped me become a good coordinator, organiser and a leader as well. I think it definitely armed me with good skills to become what I have become which is a lawyer. Career wise it gave me good skills.

Competitively aggressive is how Elle describes herself during her early years at an all girls' school. She speculates that the presence of boys may well have curbed the girls' assertiveness. We discuss the rather contentious question of cheerleaders as role models. Elle's explanation of her involvement is positive and forthright:

I just love the thought of getting up there and dancing in front of a lot of people.

As cheerleaders they have very strict behaviour guidelines from their manager: look friendly, no swearing, no drinking, no eating rubbish and no wearing of

uniforms to bars after the game. Elle is equally frank about the messages cheerleaders send to youngsters:

We are supportive of the heroic rugby players and our men and that really we have to look good in order to be supportive. I think we send out messages that young women don't like. There are our hero men, don't we look cute?

Elle describes herself as strong, intelligent, well aware of women's oppression, conscious of the inevitable contradictions in her life as a woman, and unaffected by the sexism inherent in the role of a cheerleader. She sees her choices are few:

You're either a woman rugby player, when you're perceived to be manly and therefore unattractive, or you're a cheerleader.

Interview over and in no time I am out in the afternoon sunshine, deep in thought. I'm pleased that I appear to have the genesis of a format for the focus group interviews but I am left pondering the complexity of the area in which I am working. Autonomy and control are elusive concepts. It seems sport can be, simultaneously, both constraining and liberating? Even when we think we are free to choose, the options may be heavily socially proscribed.

The potential for sport to act as an agent of women's liberation, rather than their oppression, stems mainly from the opportunity that women's sporting activity affords them to experience their bodies as strong and powerful and free from male domination (Nancy Theberge, 1994).

Elle's final comment comes to mind:

That's what sport is about - being strong, fit and having a good time. But how do the students at Godley School experience sport? Is it empowering or disempowering? Just what are their lived experiences?

## Sport at Godley School

*Voice 22* I think sports are a really good area to make lots of new friends. I think the team work, of course, is really good and like learning different skill and strategies and it's really good fitness as well (Female student).

*Voice 7* I've played cricket.. I don't know the word.. yeah competitively, just trying to win (Male student).

*Voice 3* We get real competitiveness out... and discipline as well...It's real fun of course, like yeah it's just enjoyment as well. It's mainly competitiveness and yeah especially like national tournament and stuff, it's just like excitement and anticipation and awesome (Male student).

*Voice 5* I'm a very competitive person and I like competitive sports (Male Student).

*Voice 11* The whole thing of working in a team is quite important. It gives you a sense of belonging and working to achieve your goals (Female student).

I am very wary of reducing any discussion to a simple dualism. I do not want to position women as opposite to and the negation of men and thereby oversimplify the complexities of the gender order. Nevertheless, these statements are representative of the responses when I asked students about the contribution sports made to their overall development.

Both male and female students mentioned the enjoyment they experienced, the fitness and exercise they gained, the satisfaction of representing their school and travelling away to tournaments. However, there was one area of noticeable difference in their responses. Female students emphasised the social aspects of sport, teamwork, friendship, a sense of belonging and co-operation. Male students focussed more on the competitive aspect. They also referred to sport as an outlet for frustration and aggression. How can this difference be explained?

Writers such as Sheila Scraton (1986) refer to the 'culture of femininity' which female athletes have to deal with when competing in the traditionally male domain of sport. Sporting behaviour demands strength, stamina and competitiveness which contrasts with the socially sanctioned concept of femininity as tender, sensitive, passive and fragile. As Elle's experience shows, when it comes to sport, females spectate, support and admire rather than

participate. Perhaps this dilemma is rationalised by emphasising the social and co-operative aspects of sport as opposed to the competition? The ambivalence expressed by one student seems to encapsulate this conflict:

The physical side - we aren't supposed to be too muscly, or you know, go for the bodybuilding type, go into rough sports. We're supposed to be ladylike. I think...I mean, although it's changing... very slowly ... but there's still the kind of ideal that women are supposed to be sweet and clean and yeah ...feminine. They can be tough, sweaty and rude and disgusting, but you know, women can't. They still have to be sweet and kind and gentle (*Voice 11*).

Complementary views have been recorded by writers such as Michael Messner (1992), David Whitson (1990) and Bruce Kidd (1987). They emphasise that because sport was an exclusively male world, masculinity has been equated with competition, physical strength and skills. Girls, it was believed, did not possess these qualities because they did not participate in sports. A social construct became a 'natural' difference.

When I met with the students to share my preliminary analysis, this apparent competition/co-operation difference provoked the most comment. Many students agreed with the observation while others contended that girls and women can be very competitive in sport. One student suggested that girls' sport at the school was more social than competitive. Only one student referred to boys' sport and friendship.

*Voice 24* It's in the male gene to compete for anything more than females. Maybe this is because it has been socially acceptable for males to stand up for themselves for longer than females (Male student).

Girls are more social in sport but not necessarily more co-operative. There can be heaps of arguments in girl's sport (Unidentified student)

*Voice 21* Females are more prepared to be thought of as 'winners' without actually winning. They are prepared to prove themselves without winning over another side and valuing someone else a loser (Female student).

*Voice 3* I think it might be so at a school level but nationally I think women go just as hard (Male student).

*Voice 6* Girls can also be very competitive, but usually only if they have been brought up playing that sport from an early age. Males are able to be social too (Male student).

Boys care more about winning than having fun but girls care more about the friendships they make and the team unity (Unidentified student).

Perhaps these comments are the genesis of masculine hegemony in sport in that when males play sport, in their rightful sphere, they take it seriously and play to win. Whereas females do not really belong and are tolerated as playing just for a bit of fun, just to socialise?

I can tolerate the girls that are in the sport because they enjoy that particular game but it's the number 'maker-uppers' that really annoy me because they are just there to make up the numbers and they're getting awards (*Voice 5*).

Male students at Godley School appeared to participate in a greater number of sports than female students suggesting that sports were of more significance to males than to females. I put this suggestion to the students whose comments seemed to endorse those in the literature where the historical belief in the capacity of sport to turn boys into men has a long tradition and is also seen as the origins of hegemonic masculinity.

Demonstrating the physical and psychological attributes associated with success in athletic contests has now become an important requirement for status in most adolescent and preadolescent male peer groups. Boys who are good at sports have happily profited from this fact and often come to think of it as natural. Meanwhile, other boys - small or awkward boys, scholarly or artistic boys, boys who get turned off from sports (or who never develop any interest in sports) - have to come to their own terms with sport and find other ways to stake their claims to masculinity. (David Whitson, 1990)

*Voice 21* Males are measured more on the extent of their sporting activities than females. They prove themselves on the sporting field (Female student).

Girls not playing sport is not a big deal, acceptable, but a boy looks prissy and may often get hassled in you're gay etc (Unidentified student).

*Voice 5* Males can tend to make up for academic/cultural deficiencies by playing more sport. Sport is so influential, culturally, on males, that it can seem like a high priority (Male student).

*Voice 6* It is socially acceptable for females to play sport, but it is expected of males (Male student).

Guys must play sport to be accepted but girls, it is acceptable for girls to not play sport (Unidentified student).

Here at school there are some girls who take the opportunity to participate in as many sports as possible, but sport perhaps means more to males (Unidentified student).

### **Sport and the Body:**

It is Tuesday 11 January 2000. The setting is the reincarnated Lancaster Park, now known as Jade Stadium, on one of the few gloriously sunny and warm days this summer. Jack and I are enjoying the fifth one day international cricket match between New Zealand and the West Indies. We are surrounded by family groups, family groups with few girls in them, that is. Jack draws my attention to a Pied Piper-like figure making his way along the perimeter of the playing field. All-rounder, Dion Nash, unable to play for New Zealand because of a back injury, pauses now and again to sign autographs for the group of small boys who make up his accompanying retinue.

When he stops near us, numerous small boys clutching pen and paper tumble out of the stand, down to the boundary and hover in the hope of obtaining their hero's signature. Two girls, a little older than the boys, join the group. They remain at the back, slightly apart from the boys. To the mirth of the indulgent crowd, one very confident small boy ventures on to the field of play and approaches a nearby fielder. I am struck by the contrast in the deportment of the boys and girls. The boys confidently occupy space while the two girls, almost apologetically, not only stand apart but also appear to hold themselves in. Imagination?

I muse, momentarily, on the Godley School students. I recall my final meeting with them, which took place in the school's reception room. We were seated around a large table not unlike a company boardroom. There was a swagger and confidence in some of the male students, which contrasted with the containment of some of the female students.

Is the human body, seemingly natural because it is a biological organism, in fact a gendered entity and what does sport contribute to this process, constraint or liberation? Sandra Bartky (1988) is in no doubt about the disciplining of the female body:



There are significant gender differences in gesture, posture, movement, and general bodily comportment: women are far more restricted than men in their manner of movement and in their spatiality.....Woman's space is not a field in which her bodily intentionality can be freely realised but an enclosure in which she feels herself positioned and by which she is confined.

Iris Young (1990) challenges the notion that differences between girls and boys in bodily comportment are due to biology. Drawing on the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, she argues against Erwin Straus's belief that "throwing like a girl" results from a mysterious "feminine essence". Instead observable differences in masculine and feminine comportment and movement are attributed to the sexism of patriarchy where women and girls experience their bodies as objects rather than active free agents. Females move into sport then as already gendered individuals believing that the space available to them is a restricted space so that movement is accordingly restricted.

This gendering, which sport contributes to, is seen as a basic tension at the heart of being a woman. Central to humanity is the notion of agency, transcendence and subjectivity (in the sense of action and authorship as opposed to subjection) while being constructed as object denies that subjectivity and transcendence. This inherent contradictory mode of being is illustrated well in Elle's account of her experiences of sport.

Iris Young is careful to point out that not all women experience the world as so constraining but she suggests that those who enjoy greater autonomy have escaped through accident or good fortune the inhibited and timid modalities of feminine bodily comportment. Perhaps this too explains Elle's ambiguous relationship with sport where, on the one hand it could be liberating and on the other hand, limiting. Similarly if inhibition and containment increase as a girl matures then experiences of sport would alter over time. This may well account for the high drop out rate from sports as girls leave school and move into adulthood?

It seems that men and boys have much to learn about autonomy through the embodiment of power, presence and masculinity, as a result of their participation in sports but for women and girls restricted access to the same range of sporting experiences may deny them that same embodied sense of self.

*Voice 2* To be a very good sportsperson, to be skilful, to be very strong, to be fast, to have those physical attributes that say that person is tall and muscular and strong and fast. Yeah it's almost to put that ideal body on someone I guess and I think looking back you have to say that because you all ended up in the showers at some stage after a game you basically got to see all the bodies and you just went, yeah that's just a huge body, that is masculinity personified, almost (Ex-public school student).

*Voice 11* It just seems that girls have to play either tennis or netball and they are all very girly kinds of sport.... it's not sort of physical sweat like the rugby with all the dirt and mud and everything. I mean the girls sport would never do that.... I mean you wouldn't see like someone tackling anyone or something.... that's sort of male and girly is everything else, I think (Female student).

*Voice 5* I've been through a lot of rugby teams where there's skill and intelligences. I mean today it's a thinking man's game whatever you want to say and the best players are always the smart players.

*Voice 4* But it's still predominantly based around strength.

*Voice 5* Okay, it is the only game that we get to play a lot in New Zealand, I mean I'm not putting down ice hockey, that we get to physically dominate people, that's still true (Male students).

Brian Pronger (1998) describes how through sports boys learn to occupy space and project, what is seen in some quarters as the essence of masculinity, not just physical strength but the potential to dominate and control. And this he says is learnt in games such as rugby where the game revolves around players invading the space of others, dominating the territory taken and guarding against the opposition doing the same to them.

They also learn to move and hold their bodies on and off the playing field. They learn the powerful muscular ways that embody masculine desire: the unyielding occupation of space that communicates the latent power to dominate. The masculine desire to conquer and protect is constructed similarly in other domains.

I was initially intrigued when the male students at Godley School equated masculinity with machismo (p50) but this insight of Brian Pronger into the embodiment of masculinity explains their subjectivity in this respect. Bob Connell

(1983) comes to the same conclusion when he argues that learning to be masculine involves learning to project a physical presence that conveys latent power. And this is why combative sport is so potent in this process because it teaches males to use their bodies to produce these effects and enables them to practise and work at it.

What is learned by constant informal practice, and taught by formal coaching, is for each sport a specific combination of force and skill. Force, meaning the irresistible occupation of space; skill, meaning the ability to operate on space or the objects in it (including other bodies). The combination of the two is a power – meeting Weber's definition, the capacity to achieve ends even if opposed by others.

*Voice 3* Like in ice hockey, we've got girls that play, and if we do our checking drill and nobody hits them then we get press-ups to do and the coach yells and scream at us if we don't hit them (Male student).

Historically the exclusion of women and girls from sport would explain the diffidence I observed in the girls at the cricket but since women and girls are now participating in a greater range of sports including football this explanation is becoming inadequate. Perhaps the prominence given by the media to combative sports like men's rugby and the hero worship accorded to the players of these sports, together with the media's unsympathetic treatment of sporting females, reinforces the notion that sport is still rightfully a masculine pursuit?

There is, of course, the cult of femininity that subordinates and objectifies the female body as passive, weak, dependent, and sexualised as the object of the privileged male gaze. To step outside of this discourse is to invite being denigrated with the label of 'butch' or other forms of homophobic/misogynist vilification. The dilemma facing sporting females was apparent in the discourses at Godley School. Female sports were seen by some as second-rate, as "not the same action level involved that... the pace isn't as fast" (*Voice 3*). And this was reflected in the comment "playing like a girl". When her performance neared or surpassed that of males, the female athlete was seen as "off-putting" because her

achievements violated that of the feminine ideal. It is in these ways that the students themselves, police the acceptable societal norms. However, it is important not to oversimplify the situation and see all male bodies as empowered by sport and female bodies as constrained.

The important point is that there is a discourse which maintains what the ideals are and what male and female bodies are 'naturally' capable of. The process through which this is realised, and the contribution made by sports to the process, is imperfect so the possibility for disrupting it exists. Unfortunately, as will be argued at more length later, the ethos of sport as requiring aggressive body contact, fierce competition and dominating the opposition will not be altered simply by more female athletes entering the sporting arena.

Iris Young (1990) contends that female bodily timidity begins at a very early age when girls are told not to get dirty, not to tear their clothes and that they must be careful in order not to hurt themselves. With age, this subjectivity of herself as fragile, is said to increase for the girl who seeks to assume her status as feminine. It would appear that this socialisation is internalised and in Foucault's terms becomes self-regulating.

We aren't supposed to be too muscly or you know, go for the body building type thing, go into rough sports. We're supposed to be lady-like....sweet and clean and yeah... feminine (*voice 11*).

Before taking up my present position as a College of Education lecturer I was a primary school teacher. For many years I taught new entrant classes. We started each day with a period of free play during which the children chose their own activities. Boys favoured vigorous outdoor games and I well recall the day a five year old girl stood at my side watching this outdoor play and then turned to me to ask, "is that what boys do?"

Barrie Thorne (1993), in observing children in school playgrounds, noted that boy-only groups made use of open spaces and played games that reflected an energetic and vigorous use of the body, while girl-only groups were more contained in their

play, staying closer to buildings in skipping games. Mixed groups played foursquare or periodic chasing games. Casual observations as I arrived at or left Godley School did leave me with the impression that there was an absence of female students on the playing fields and in open spaces. Perhaps this was simply because there were more male students at the school and their presence in the playground was more obvious. The Godley School students were older than the students Barrie Thorne observed and did seem to spend their break-times standing around talking rather than playing games. Nevertheless sport and games do seem to play an important role in how males and females learn to relate to and use their bodies.



## "All Real People at Godley School Play Rugby": More Than a Game

"Rugby, a game of naked aggression, huge men and a little misshapen ball. A sport of passion played in the freezing cold, played by the biggest, toughest and quickest" (The Story of Sport: Rugby).

*Voice 16* Rugby is loved in the school more than some other sports. All the guys love rugby (*Female student*).

*Voice 21* In New Zealand culture you're looking at the All Blacks you don't in a way, you don't get much more **manly** than that (*Female student*).

Rugby definitely has a higher profile although this doesn't stop anyone getting involved in other sports (*Unidentified student*).

*Voice 14* Rugby has always been such a big thing because it's just a big New Zealand thing and it's always been big in high schools cause it's such a big tradition (*Male student*).

Rugby is definitely **the sport** in winter and those guys who play it are well known and admired. It's seen as being masculine if you play rugby (*Unidentified student*).

Rugby is such a physical thing and that's almost the epitome of the guy's sport (*Unidentified student*).

*Voice 17* At this school rugby is **the** high profile sport (*Female student*).

*Voice 25* Those who play rugby like to maintain that rugby is for real men and it's harder to play rugby and more physical to play rugby so they **must** be better and more masculine (*Female student*).

The skirl of the pipes echoes across the sunny, warm Saturday afternoon in late May as I take my seat on the stand amongst the large crowd of Godley School supporters. The school First XV are led on to the playing field by their captain. The Eastgate First XV are huddled in a circle, arms around each other's shoulders. Deep primal grunts are uttered then they break away and take up their positions. A fierce, highly physical haka is performed by the Eastgate team. One of the Godley School players replies and advances to within a metre of the opposition. The challenge has been issued and received so the battle commences.

The language of sport, and rugby in particular, is the language of warfare: "organising the troops", "lines of battle", "counter-attack", "warriors", "crusaders", "the potency of the physical battle", "the battle for the cup of destiny".

The equation with war is evident in the new Adidas rugby jersey advertisement, which uses a well-known World War 1 song as its theme. Presumably this is "aimed at getting our boys to surge over the top" (Coney, 1999).

The aggression and sheer physicality of the haka carries over into the game as body thumps against body. Players are knocked off their feet and scrums go down to the deep throated cries of "Muscle! Muscle! I find myself wincing at each bone-crunching tackle but not so the crowd. They whoop appreciatively as yet another player, the wind knocked out of him on impact, is furiously dumped, especially if it is a Godley School player doing the dumping. At regular intervals shouts from the crowd egg the players on:

Up in his face! Into it! Into it!  
Smack 'em Eastgate!  
Come on Eastgate, hit 'em!  
Get in there, bash 'em!  
Even I could kick better yah fag!  
Run into him, not around him!

In order to prove their manliness, boys are pressurised to demonstrate muscular strength to their peers (Mahony, 1985).

Earlier in the week I observed the Godley School First XV practice. The forward players took turns holding punching bags while other players hurled themselves at them, practising for these tackles. The coach urged them on with shouts of "Hit it! Hit it! Take him out!" To my untrained eye, this seemed nothing short of organised violence. Indeed the whole game I am witnessing now appears to me to be an organised brawl. Clearly these young men are being trained to do more than use their bodies forcefully (Connell, 1983). They are being encouraged to use their bodies as weapons to use against other bodies (Messner, 1990). The language of warfare is not misplaced.

Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all the rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting (George Orwell, 1950).

The game is now deep in Godley School's territory. In an effort to clear his own line and to land the ball behind the opposition winger, a Godley School player kicks for touch. The ball comes off the side of his boot, goes high in the air and appears to be coming down just where I am sitting.

I'm momentarily back in my primary school playground. The ball is coming my way. I'm frozen to the spot. The feelings of inadequacy and fear well up within me. "Oh God, please God, I promise to be good, just don't let it come to me"

And many other men have been humiliated and have suffered a sense of failure of manliness by being incapable of meeting the demands of traditional male sports and have thus excluded themselves from them altogether (Hargreaves, 1994).

The ball lands directly in front of where I am sitting. No ground is gained from the kick. A line-out begins to form. The young man sitting in front of me turns to the young woman he is sitting with and says:

"Even **you** could have kicked better than **that**!"

The ultimate insult - playing like a girl, or in this case not even as well as a girl!

While I've been watching this game I've been aware of other games being played on nearby grounds. As these games finish, players, still in their rugby gear, join us to watch the First XV play. One such player approaches now. His muddied rugby gear contrasts with the pristine sling bandaging his arm.

Fellow students exclaim admiringly:

"Wow! What happened to you?"

He shrugs it off.

"Oh nothing. Its nothing, I still finished the game"

He moves on to continue his lap of honour.



A real man ignores his own pain and pays the price for the good of the team (Messner, 1997).

I'm reminded of a current TV advertisement featuring Alama Ieremia. They run through the list of injuries he has sustained. He is asked whether he has ever thought of "packing it in". He stares incredulously at the camera. The conclusion is obvious. You would have to be insane to even consider that option (Coney, 1999).

Theirs is not to reason why, Theirs but to do and die  
(The Charge of the Light Brigade - Tennyson).

Another three players join the spectators. They sit on the grass near the sideline. Ostensibly, they are here to watch the game in progress. In fact they spend more time facing us holding a conversation with the students I am sitting amongst. The talk is of how they will spend their time after the game and the party they will attend that night. They talk of getting pissed, of having a tab (charging their drinks to an account), and how they are being shouted a keg at the party. No doubt, aware of their large audience, there is a good deal of bravado in their comments. Nevertheless, drinking is not out of place in the discourse of rugby.

The atmosphere in our stand becomes subdued as the visiting team goes further into the lead. The game ends and the crowd begins to disperse. An elderly couple walk ahead of me. Shaking his head the man comments that the opposition were bloody aggressive and intimidating. We pass a banner hanging limply on the fence:

Godley bruises

Eastgate loses

I am sure the gloom will pass. They will do it all again next week. After all similar scenes have taken place in the past:

If sport represented an aristocracy of activities, rugby was king. It was a sport; but it was not just a sport. It was an arena in which we were expected to display manly qualities by being fearless, by going into rucks hard, by tackling hard, by going down on the ball in the face of on-rushing opponents, and by playing as a team. Teams upheld the school's reputation by winning and diminished it by losing. There was no Olympic nonsense about the taking part being

more important than winning. Our team *had* to win - and were dressed down severely if they did not (King, 1999).

And in the future similar scenes will take place up and down New Zealand. But why the absorption with the game of rugby as the leading expression of masculinity in New Zealand?

### **Rugby and Masculinity in New Zealand**

Rugby originated in medieval England in the folk foot and ball games played literally between small towns and villages using either a skull or an inflated animal bladder as the ball. These folk football games came to be played in the public schools. In the mid-nineteenth century rather than ban what were rowdy, unruly and brutal pastimes a civilising process took place where rules were developed and violent practices such as hacking disappeared. Thomas Arnold, of Rugby School, took a lead here. William Webb Ellis, a Rugby school pupil, is credited with picking up the ball so that the modern game of rugby was born. "In the mid-nineteenth century the newly codified game of rugby football travelled with British citizens and immigrants" (Varda Burstyn, 1999).

The masculine values of English public schools with their emphasis on muscular Christianity (the use of sport to create a civilised male animal), the military, rugby and hunting came to be associated with popular ideas of masculinity in colonial New Zealand. A frontier society, which prized physical strength and muscle power and eschewed urban decadence and the feminisation of post industrialisation found much to recommend in the rough, physical game of rugby. Interestingly, the emphasis on the military saw imperial interests as well as economic served by this ideology when New Zealand began sending men to fight in European wars ( Jock Phillips, 1996).

The game of rugby spread rapidly through New Zealand, requiring little in the way of equipment or preparation of playing fields. Unlike in England, where the

game held sway in the public schools, where education catered for the children of the ruling classes, rugby in New Zealand was played across all sectors of society.

As New Zealand moved further into the twentieth century the demand for physical power in the workplace diminished and social changes, such as the emergence of the Women's Movement, saw the sporting arena take on greater significance in bolstering the sagging ideology of male supremacy. Created by men for men, modern sports became one of the last bastions of a separate, identifiably male world (Bruce Kidd, 1987).

I believe that the ideology dominant in my childhood, which I found so oppressive, still forms the basis of the hegemonic masculinity within which the Godley school students search for their identity. The title of this chapter is a comment allegedly made by a teacher, to a student, to encourage him to take up rugby. The Godley School magazine lists more than thirty sports for the students to choose from but are all sports equal, or are some more equal than others?

In certain schools the masculinity exalted through competitive sport is hegemonic; this means that sporting prowess is a test of masculinity even for boys who detest the locker room" (Connell, 1995).

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

As indicated earlier the term, hegemony, was first used by the Marxist, Antonio Gramsci to describe how, in the capitalist system, the dominance of one class over another was maintained by, among other things, the manipulation of ideology. He used this idea to account for the working class acceptance of its lot as natural and right. The dominance of the capitalist class was never seen as absolute though and had to be struggled for and in a democratic systems this occurred through persuasion rather than coercion.

This concept has been employed successfully to explain gender relations and in particular gender relations in sport. Patriarchy has been rejected as too simplistic

an explanation for gender relations in that it fails to differentiate between the experiences of different groups of men. Just as there is not one feminist perspective that can speak for all women so there is not one masculine perspective that can represent the experiences of all men. Although all men stand to benefit from patriarchy, the benefits are not shared evenly.

Hegemony shows how in sport, the images, symbols and ideas associated with a particular version of masculinity become predominant. Through sport this construction of masculinity is idealised, naturalised and legitimated. Rugby is especially important because it is so unambiguously male. It is only very recently that girls and women who play the sport have received any attention. Rugby is rough, confrontational, a real test of physical superiority and in New Zealand fiercely competitive. Because of its status as the national game it is these values that are exalted and seen as natural masculine qualities.

The concept of hegemony has been useful in showing how the dominant views, inherited through tradition, have to be defended as new meanings are struggled for. The complexities of gender relations and the fact that individuals and groups are active in creating new views are exposed. However, it is true that because sport

has been so exclusively male, the hegemony in sport is more complete than in other spheres of society. Nevertheless, the constraints of the past experienced by women and girls can be challenged and sporting experiences can become liberating so that, in terms of gender relations, it is not a simple case of winners and losers (Jennifer Hargreaves, 1994).

Bob Connell (1995) describes how hegemony may involve the creation of masculine sporting heroes who are larger-than-life figures. Through hegemonic discourse the qualities of these figures, actually possessed by few, become the ideals and in this way groups perceived to be lacking the admired traits are

subordinated or marginalised. Complicity with the dominant values may lead to dividends for some groups (spectators at sport). The emphasis here is that these character types are not fixed and the relationships between multiple masculinities have to be negotiated, struggled for and reworked. What is especially significant is that this theoretical perspective accounts for the dominance through sport of heterosexual men over homosexual men, men who are perceived to be less macho, and all women.

In the Godley School setting diverse sporting interests obviously exist and are catered for. The standing of rugby, although strong is not absolute. A gender order exists. The 'ruggerheads' vie for prestige with other sports teams and with, for example, the "drama fags." As in any large school there are complex interrelationships and definite discourses within which these rivalries are played out so that some groups and individuals feel valued and some are made to feel subordinate. The situation is not only complex but also contradictory.

This is rugby you're using. Not just a game, a tradition- (Greg McGee, 1981).

*Voice 6* Its just encouraged when you're young that you want to grow up to be a real man, you want to play rugby, like in my family it was just sort of Oh yeah, you'll be a man if you play rugby (*Male student*).

*Voice 24* Like the whole of society has moved away from the wife beating thing, break the cycle ad. campaigns, and the sports field is a place where you can get physical, guys go out and bash guys up, like amongst the rules (*Male student*).

*Voice 3* I think most men are seen as real men if they play a contact sport. Contact sports than anything is seen as male, more macho, builds you up. You can get hurt but you'll be alright (*Male student*).

*Voice 12* I think if we feel we want to play rugby, want to do something different that we should be able to and it shouldn't be regarded as any less. In a way it's seen if a girl excels in rugby then it's easier for her to do so because there's not as many people playing (*Female Student*).

*Voice 5* You go out and you can hurt people but you hurt people legally, if you know what I mean. You don't go outside laws of the game because there's always going to be injuries in rugby and you're trying to physically dominate them but within the laws (*Male Student*).

*Voice 16* Rugby is a big sport and others are not recognised as a result (*Female Student*).

*Voice 25* You can't have rugby without aggression. It's like saying you can have chemistry without the periodic tables (*Female student*).

Kai Jensen (1996) draws on our literary texts here in New Zealand to isolate the attributes, activities and behaviours linked with masculinity. Playing sport, or **at least** showing a strong interest in it, features in the work of New Zealand writers as an important attribute of manhood. Rugby has received special literary attention when it comes to Kiwi manhood to the extent that other sports have been labelled effeminate. In the literary world there is disagreement about this last point but at Godley School there is a discourse which reifies heterosexuality through sport.

Homophobia and sport is discussed in the section focussing on the media but here I explore the students' awareness of sporting females being seen as 'butch' and the labelling of male students who do not play rugby.

*Voice 5* I'm not sure why I played soccer actually... probably because my mother doesn't like too physical a sport... anyway soccer's for pussies obviously...when I came to Godley School, in Form One, I was under two teachers who were heavily involved in rugby and I was basically coerced into changing from soccer to rugby which happened quite a lot in the prep school (Male student).

*Voice 11* The boys' rugby team... they walk around as though they are gods or something and it's just because it's such a rugby dominated school. I mean even soccer doesn't... although it's quite respected in New Zealand ... they are thought of as poofers or something you know... at this school it doesn't matter that much. Although they're good and stuff, but compared to rugby it's nothing (Female student).

*Voice 25* People who play rugby hassle the people who play soccer as being, you know, poofs or less masculine because they don't play rugby (*Female student*).

*Voice 5* I think it's a myth these days that people who play rugby are appreciated as more manly than people that play soccer. I think it's just a convenient facade for most guys... Oh you're a poofy place... Nobody believes that (Male Student).

These examples typify the sorts of comments reported to me during the focus group interviews, and comments I heard during observations I made of the school sports programme. The male students were dismissive of this discourse of sports other than rugby being effeminate, explaining it as "all in good fun". The female students did not see it as jest. Certainly there was some good-natured banter during the interviews where soccer players were labelled as pussies or poofers. I do not want to overemphasise this point but I do think it is one strand in a

complex web of interrelationships exemplified in available discourses, all of which contribute to masculine hegemony.

Despite his lack of attention to gender relations, Michel Foucault's analysis of power and specifically the role of discourse in the process cannot be ignored. According to Foucault, discourses are made up of statements made by someone speaking from a particular position and by doing so bringing into being a subject position. Where one is positioned and where one positions oneself has a significant effect on how the statements are understood. What the person positioned as speaker intends may differ from what is heard by the person positioned as listener. Discourse analysis involves examining statements to see who is speaking, from what position, what is spoken about and the possibility of creating new statements, subjects and speaking positions (Foucault cited in Jennifer Harding, 1998; Bronwyn Davies, 1989).

Statements made by students who see themselves (and are seen by others) as being in positions of dominance cannot be dismissed as "in good fun" if listeners construe them as otherwise. Statements that position others as outsiders or subordinates can have significant effects regardless of the intentions of the speaker:

Even me, who is heavily involved in music, I begin to think that music isn't nearly as important as rugby and well who's to say but, but there again, music does still have a reasonably good profile at this school (*Voice 19: Male student*).

Given that rugby is seen as **the** manly sport then does it follow that the practices, images and narratives of rugby as seen to be **the** embodiment of masculine qualities? But from whose point of view, that of the rugby players or those outside the sport?

"Masculinity and soccer (laughter) well I don't believe it's the game to try and prove masculinity cos it's based round more skill than strength.... Most people think that soccer players are just gay... but yeah... it's not really developing any macho attitudes to anyone (*Voice 4*).

I believe this statement is a particularly significant one, coming as it does from a prominent Godley School soccer player. Firstly, masculinity has to do with physical strength rather than skill and secondly masculinity is equated with behaving in a 'macho' manner. The game of soccer is not seen as typically masculine or at least not the place to demonstrate masculinity. The laughter came from all members of the group, including the speaker, suggesting that even the mention of soccer and masculinity in the same sentence was seen as something of a joke. But what is of most significance is that this speaker made these comments during a discussion of contact sports, like rugby, being seen as macho. He appears to be positioning himself within the dominant discourse that the sport of rugby is the embodiment of the significant markers of masculinity despite the fact that he is not a player of the sport.

At Godley School there seem to be some structural aspects that contribute to the discourse of rugby as the pre-eminent sport and its values as the embodiment of masculinity. The First XV players, for example, are honoured in the school assembly in a way that players of other sports are not.

*Voice 19* The rugby players get the caps ... no other sports have that. They make quite a thing about it in assembly and I think the First XV get presented with jerseys and things as well (Male student).

*Voice 18* They're not starting new traditions for the girls. The boys have got theirs and we're just meant to look up to them and keep ourselves on the lower level (Female student).

*Voice 21* At one assembly we had the men talking about the rugby team ... the male supporters... getting them up on stage... lining up, getting their caps and everything... I think that's all really good (Female student).

Support for rugby within the school has changed. There was a time when it was compulsory for the whole school to turn out to watch a match and join in school chants on the sidelines. All that has gone but how many schools advertise their rugby games on local television as Godley School does?

A normal rugby game would have, maybe an important rival match, it would command a hell of a lot of people there. They've got the pipe



band playing, they've got the school flags flying and before the match they've got the procession of the important heads...I mean rugby has got a Godley Club, you know, it's an actual club where people pay membership to belong newsletters get sent out. Netball? Nothing. We're lucky if we get a couple of supporters and the First XV have to be told to come to our netball game...they're made to by their coach!

(Voice II Female student).

When I discussed the profile of rugby at Godley School with the teacher in charge, he acknowledged that there had been antagonism between the different sports in the past and that rugby had held pride of place. The school had tried to redress the balance in recognition that the school environment had changed from single-sex to co-educational. Attendance at the rugby matches no longer being compulsory was one such change. There was, however, one fact that could not be overlooked and that was that something like half of all the school students played rugby so of course its profile would be high. But then perhaps the dominant discourse and the high profile of rugby was what attracted the large numbers?

Not all the school's efforts to make changes and to recognise all sports and activities were well received by the students. Rugby players that I spoke to felt that the awards they had worked so hard for, over a number of years, had been devalued when they saw newly arrived girls receiving similar 'colours' and blazer awards for merely turning up and making up the numbers in less well known sports.

*Voice 6* We've always gone and sort of watched the First XV, you know, really admired them. So we know what it's like ... we know what it means to be in one of those teams so I don't think a lot of the girls know what it's like ... especially when they just come in and get their blazer awards and things. They come in and get into the top sports teams because basically there's only

enough for one team. They're getting honoured for those kind of things when really a lot of them are not doing as much as the boys are to earn those awards (Male student).

*Voice 5* I always looked up to the First XV players. They were my heroes but now that I'm in it, it hasn't lived up to what it should. The girls that come to the school, making up

the numbers, getting the award that's looked on nicely in a CV, just for being there to make the role a bit bigger so they can actually play in the team... so that's the thing that disappoints me the most... it really does...(Male Student).

Another structural aspect that really irked one of the female students was the way the teams were known within the school:

With the girls First XI hockey, we're not even allowed to call ourselves the First XI girl's hockey team. The boys say 'No, our team is the First XI, you're just a girl's team', you know, and that's obviously their attitude (*Voice 18* Female student).

What about the attitudes of male students to the sports of female students?

How did these feature in the discourse of sports? Some were progressive in their views, while others were sceptical:

*Voice 3* I think guy's sports are looked on much more highly... like in higher regard than girls. No one's interested, at school level, like cricket.. the girls... it's just not the same action level involved... the pace isn't as fast (*Male student*).

*Voice 24* people have got to make a choice between going to watch the girls play or supporting the girls rugby and supporting the guys rugby and as it is at the moment, they're going to go watch the guys. It's like go and watch the chess team or the debating or go and support the First XV (*Male student*).

*Voice 19* You think of netball as being something much weaker where girls dance up and down the court with the ball. I see nothing tough about netball and of course that doesn't make tough a good thing either, but tough is seen as being something which is good because it's associated with men (*Male student*).

Two of the female students summed up the sports discourse as they saw it:

*Voice 11* The guys who see these girl cricketers and girl rugby players, they look at them in a different way. They don't see them as like females and their feminine side.

*Voice 13* I'd like to think that it wouldn't matter but I'm sure a lot of girls don't get into their sports to start off with... I mean they don't even try because they know they'll be thought of as a butch female or something.

In some ways they saw themselves as being something of a threat in that they might actually outshine the males in their supposedly superior physical prowess. They commented on how males pretended that they were not really trying when one of the female students out-performed them in physical education classes. And that is what makes the insult of playing like a girl so potent. Not only does it

highlight the deficiencies of the male who receives such a gibe but it also reinforces their expectation that girls are not capable of performing physically as well as boys.

Foucault's concept of the panopticon is useful in shedding light on the ways the hegemonic discourse operated in Godley School, for as well as policing the behaviour of others, the students curbed their own behaviour in keeping with the perceived ideology. According to Foucault, those under surveillance in a prison or hospital assume they are being watched all the time and act accordingly. In this way external surveillance becomes internalised and individuals monitor their own behaviour (Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace, 1997). Clearly female students who fear being seen as butch by participating in vigorous sports have internalised the dominant ideology and are monitoring their behaviour accordingly.

Depressingly, hegemonic masculinity in sport is encapsulated in the following comment made about the All Blacks failure at the recent World Cup. Duncan Johnstone (1999) saw rugby as a substitute for war and no place for women, when he wrote:

And the cuddle factor? The presence of so many wives and partners at the World Cup never seemed quite right. Do soldiers go off to war with loved ones at their side? It's a kiss at the train station and a tearful goodbye, hoping they return with their lives and reputations intact.

In framing their subjectivities the Godley School students would doubtless have been influenced by views such as this.

## 8

### “Females do play it, but I remember the guys”: Sport and the Media

Reading the sports pages of the newspaper, tuning into sport on television and scanning the sports magazines were novel experiences for me, but essential if I was to have some sort of context in which to place the stories I was hearing from the Godley School students. Attending sporting events was an even more unfamiliar experience and I actually enjoyed some of them. By far the most bizarre event though, was a bodybuilding contest. Nothing happened. The contestants just stood there displaying their bodies. Even I knew to expect some action at a sporting event!

Another oxymoron, muscular women, but no, gendering placed clear limits on what was acceptable. The women wore pretty, lurex bikinis; ribbons, ornaments and glitter in their hair; make-up; false finger nails and **very** high-heeled shoes.

*Voice 7* Strong women is not really what you expect so you might be a bit offput. No... I'm not talking about just normal, but like ultra... ultra... like the female bodybuilders, if you look at them.. hey.. you'd be a bit sceptical if you went out with them for example... but ... I just think the normal is that people expect women to be weaker and I think that should probably be true for the most part. Not like frail weak but like, nice... yeah (Male student).

*Published voice* The social meanings surrounding the physiological differences between the sexes in the male-defined institution of organised sports and the framing of the female athlete by the sports media threaten to subvert any counter-hegemonic potential posed by women athletes. In short, the female athlete - and her body - has become a contested ideological terrain (Michael A. Messner, 1988).

The body of the woman bodybuilder, then, becomes the site (sight) of the intersection of the discourses of bodybuilding and of gender. Because muscularity has been coded as a fundamentally masculine attribute, its adoption by women has offered a threat and a challenge to notions of both the feminine AND the masculine (Alan Mansfield and Barbara McGinn, 1993).

So the imagery of sports has the potential to become a site where gender stereotypes can be challenged, contested and resisted? Are the heavily gendered images of sportswomen and sportsmen that appear in the media beginning to

change? What media images are the students aware of and how do these images affect their gender subjectivities?

*Voice 13* My brother is a subscriber to the New Zealand Rugby Magazine and on the covers of their magazine and peppered all throughout they've got women in their scanty little outfits and things and the way that they portray them in the magazines and things just seems like it's sex appeal (*Female student*).

*Voice 11* You see in America all the soaps and everything, there's the captain of the football team, and the only position a female can get that commands the same respect is the captain of the cheerleading team and it just seems like a double standard, that's all they can aspire to (*Female student*).

*Voice 25* Men's sports get so much more coverage but then you have to say well look at what people are watching and no-one, there doesn't seem to be the demand, well I don't think, to watch women's sport. Like I might sit down and watch an All Black game or even a Canterbury game but I doubt that I'd sit down and watch a women's game (*Female student*).

*Voice 18* I'll tell you another thing that I found really really patronising, when the women's All Black team won, the publicity they had was just ... I mean the questions they were asking these women were about their boyfriends and their families and it was patronising, it was condescending. They didn't ask about their sports, or their practices or their coaches... it was like a Woman's Day kind of interview and you would never catch the same thing happening to a men's team (*Female Student*).

*Voice 19* I think the message is that women's sports are secondary to men's sports, and I certainly don't think that's true, but I think that's the message that we get from it. I mean the only women's sport which really has any standing is the netball isn't it... the Silver Ferns and they come up occasionally, but clearly, if there was a rugby match on and a netball match on at the same time, the netball match would be in the last time-slot on the news (*Male student*).

*Voice 8* If you look in the newspapers there's always rugby on the front and it's male sports all the time and then there's hardly any female sports but just as many females get involved in sports as males do. The women's cricket is very good and compared to other countries we play really well and reach the finals and beat other countries, so why is there not any coverage in the papers and on the news of the women's cricket and why is there so much about the males when they're not actually doing that well? (*Female Student*).

The power of images is essentially ideological - they reflect a common system of values and meanings. And ideologies about female sports are not just abstract ideas; they constitute a material force, which permeates experience and is difficult to change (Jennifer Hargreaves, 1994).

The students showed a keen awareness of the media treatment of women athletes.

They commented on the lack of coverage of women's sport, the construction of sporting females as unnatural women, the trivialisation, objectification and sexualisation of women athletes and of course the homophobia in sport.

In the students' eyes the media mis/mal/ill/treatment was most evident in women's tennis. This focus may well have stemmed from the controversy surrounding Amelie Mauresmo which appeared in the media at the same time I was conducting the interviews. Fellow competitors, Lindsay Davenport and Martina Hingis, talked in awe of 'those shoulders' and said Mauresmo played 'like a guy.' Hingis told German television 'she was half a man' (Richard Evans, 1999). Headlines and captions such as "Shouldering The Load" and "Shoulder Charge" appeared in local papers. The Australian press described her as strutting round the court like a weightlifter (Sandra Coney, 1999).

*Voice 11* Physically strong? I don't think there is much appeal. I mean when you look at popularity in tennis, the popular figures are Anna Kournikova, Martina Hingis, the young beautiful ones, and Sanches Vicario the more older maybe more muscular, strong types, they don't get a mention. They are not at all popular (*Female student*).

*Voice 15* She (Mauresmo) became known at the Australian Open when she um... She's built like most men and has a serve like most men and is going to the gym every day and doing training programmes and taking creatine and muscle supplements that help her build herself up and she's wanting basically to become a man so she can have the power game, the

game of a man. Well I personally don't think its very... It's not a very attractive thing because she's too muscular and too staunch and big and that is the comment from most other tennis players and most other people around that she's... its not a woman thing to do... they can be musely and be well built and still look nice but this has gone over the top (*Male student*).

Mauresmo is not especially large. Davenport is taller (at 1.89m) and heavier (79kg) than Mauresmo (1.76m and 64kg). Mauresmo is almost identical in height and weight to the statuesque Mary Pierce, who also hits the ball very hard, yet no one has accused her of mannishness (Sandra Coney, 1999).

The homophobia of both the sporting world and the media is clearly evident in the comparisons of Mauresmo to a man and the derogatory comments about her "lumberjack shoulders". The same homophobia which resulted in one of the

students repeatedly scoffing that she was a lesbian while other students discussed Mauresmo.

There had been a number of occasions during these interviews when students had made sexist or homophobic comments. I chose, with great difficulty, to bite my tongue, thinking that if I challenged the students they would be more circumspect in their comments and not "tell it like it was". This was not to be one of those occasions. Twice I rebuked him demanding to know what the problem was with her being a lesbian and if that made her any less of a woman. I spoke so sharply that he looked startled, he physically recoiled and stammered "I was just saying it was interesting...." On reflection (I naturally regret snapping at the student) in the interests of "a true dialogue rather than an interrogation" (Shulamit Reinharz, 1992) I do not think I would let these comments go, instead I would try to find a gentle way of exploring the topics rather than judging, finding the respondent guilty and pretending not to hear.

So what effect does the media coverage have on the developing gender subjectivities of the Godley School students? In the case of the male students quoted above it appears to reinforce their stereotypes that women are not supposed to be stronger than men, powerful, athletic and muscular. They can have muscles but must remain "nice". Presumably "nice" means appearing like Anna Kournikova rather than Amelie Mauresmo?

The reactions of the young women students to the media coverage is equally disturbing:

*Voice 11* Women.... although it's changing slowly, women will never be ... have the same impact as men... I mean they are portrayed as being the powerful ones... they've got the big jobs... big executive jobs and women are housewives and stuff but it is changing... it definitely is and that's a big stereotype, but yeah, I think the majority of women... I don't know... don't have much to look forward to. That's very pessimistic, can't believe I'm saying that. (*laughs*) But it's true... its sad but true.

*Voice 18* I think it's saying men, when they're playing sport, they're tough, they're masculine, they're obviously fit, strong, hardy men. Where women playing sports, they're doing it for a bit of fun, but really their main focus will always be their romances, their family life and that sort of thing.

### **Sporting Heroes**

On January 1, 2000 "The Press", Christchurch issued a millennium souvenir. Noting that it was a time for reflection, readers were invited to sit back and enjoy the writings of its staff reviewing our past and probing the future. Naturally the sports review page caught my eye. "They are our heroes, every one of them. New Zealand has enjoyed remarkable sporting success throughout this century" said the subheading. Above was a male only photograph montage of the sporting heroes. I read and re-read the article in disbelief. One woman, Beatrice Faumuina, was mentioned and then only in passing. If this article was to be believed New Zealand had produced one successful sporting female in one hundred years. The Silver Ferns were mentioned- as failures. Champions such as Susan Devoy, Erin Baker, Barbara Kendall and Yvette Williams did not rate a mention. Media bias? Who do the Godley School students look upon as their sporting heroes? Do women feature?

The question of sporting heroes was discussed in nearly all of the focus group interviews. The students mentioned twelve different athletes who they identified as their heroes. Predictably, ten of the twelve were males and only two were females. Bearing in mind that of the twenty-three students in the sample, twelve



were males and eleven were females might one have expected less of an imbalance? Can we attach much significance to this finding and to the role of heroes in the construction of subjectivity? Two of the students made incisive comments:

*Voice 6* I believe sport allows you to find genuine role models instead of sort of the made up ones that come off TV who are often sort of just characters and actors. But sports people are actually real and you know they are actually doing good things out there (Male Student).

*Voice 5* A lot of it can be a search for identity amongst males like because with today... I mean it's hard to sort of find a male identity around... there are so many contradictions in New Zealand (Male student).

Given the commodification of sport in the era of professionalism, the rampant commercialism that surrounds sports, such as rugby, and the packaging that seems to go hand in hand with team sponsorship, the belief that sports people are real, more real than others, is important. A recent column in *The Press* described the All Blacks as "air-blown, lip-glossed, art-directed, repackaged and sanitised" (Rosemary McLeod, 1999). The institution of sport, its values, beliefs, images, ideology and, in particular, its leading figures, become even more significant if they are seen by young people as somehow more real than the images other sectors of society.

The second comment illustrates the active agency of the individual in the social construction of gender. He refers to searching for an identity, clear evidence that young men and women are not passive dupes in the face of the bombardment of imagery that has become such a feature of consumerism or as another student commented:

*Voice 9* People don't have to believe that image that it's giving... Like if you choose to believe... well that kind of could be your problem (Male student).

The element of choice and the concept of search appear to fit the notion that gender is elusive, constantly sought and hard to attain (Judith Butler, 1990).

Foucault's concept of subjectivity being shaped by discourse as practices that are lived, acted out, spoken and possibly refused is also implicit here.

The qualities that were admired in these sporting heroes varied enormously. The sportsperson had to excel in the sport, be modest, show an interest in younger players, be 'good sports,' and be good communicators when confronted by the media. Rugby players were admired for specific qualities:

*Voice 24* Well he goes out and he gives it his absolute guts and he trains hard out and he plays real hard out as well but he plays within the rules and pushes the rules (Male student).

*Voice 23* On the field he's like an aggressive, hard out and that he's also one of the best rugby players to ever play in New Zealand (Male student).

*Voice 8* I really like Andrew Mehrtens 'cos of the fact that he's a really tactical guy. He doesn't use all his brute strength. He uses his brain a lot and I admire that in a rugby player (Female Student).

## Playing Up: Regendered Futures?

It is 8.30am, the first class of the day and my first year primary student teachers are alert and focussed. In fact, I have not seen them so attentively occupied by their work before today. What is it about this class that has captured their attention? I have to admit that I am not the focus of their concentration. No I am trying something new and it appears to be working.

As a pro-feminist male, I am very aware of the need to connect feminist theory with the world of practical politics. Accordingly, not only do I always share with the students in my classes that my research interest is in the area of gender issues, that I use a feminist theoretical framework, but also, when teaching, especially courses in the sociology of education, I include the topic of gender issues in the course content. Today is one of these occasions.

What has the students all agog though, is that they are viewing, on video, an extract from a recent episode of a popular local television soap-opera. Favourite characters are greeted with approbation. Reactions to known story-lines are vocalised. Approval or disapproval of character's actions results in pockets of animated discussion. There is some friendly teasing of students who are a little too enthusiastic in their response, especially towards actors or characters they find attractive. My strategy of capturing the students' interest has been overwhelmingly successful.

I have chosen to use this video clip as an example of a text taken from the students' first-hand experience. My intention is to have the students analyse it to identify the representations of gender. In short I am teaching them to focus on popular culture and examine the underlying discourses. I want them to see how gender is socially constructed and sustained and to be aware of the inherent power relations. I have collected some curriculum materials commonly used in

schools for similar analysis. Hopefully this will encourage them to think carefully about the materials they use when they are working with children.

The students undertake the work enthusiastically and their earlier application is maintained through to the end of the class. Just as the class is ending one of the young men looks at me in a rather quizzical manner and says "You know, Graeme, I am going to view this TV programme in a completely different way from now on". There is a hint of regret in his voice. Other students support his comment. I ask them to expand on their reactions to our morning's work. They talk about not having 'seen' the gender stereotypes or considered the implications of ways in which males and females are portrayed in the programme. They are very positive about the work and joke about telling friends how they got to watch their favourite soap in an education class. The class ends and seemingly with it some student innocence as they go on their way. Mission accomplished, discourse analysed, consciousness raised, I too go on my way resolved to continue in this way whenever possible!

Some weeks later the same young man who raised the question of viewing things differently comes to see me hoping I can suggest useful reading material for an assignment he is doing in another of his courses. I am intrigued to find that he is investigating an aspect of gender issues and from a feminist perspective although he does not articulate it in these terms. He refers to my class and how it radically altered his thinking. He goes on his way grateful for the readings I have provided and, he adds, thankful for my helping him to think about ideas that had not occurred to him before. What more does a teacher need?

I recall this incident now as I think about future action in the light of this research project.

...Although it's changing slowly, women will never be...have that same impact as men...it is changing...it definitely is...(Voice 11)

But is it? I have just watched the latest television advertisements for the new 2000 football season. Is there a season? It is so pervasive it seems to be constant. Not surprisingly, the men are the players, active and powerful, while young women appear as "young pretty girls not wearing much, dancing about being supportive of our heroes, and that's where young pretty girls not wearing very much should be" (*Voice 1*). Naturally the advertisements glorify the aggressive body contact aspects, the fierce competitiveness, the combative nature of the game, and the ideal mesomorphic male bodies.

It occurs to me that these images as well as those in the printed media would be suitable materials for future classes when we examine gender and popular culture leading on to an examination of gender in educational materials. Popular images of sport should capture the students' interests in the same way that a popular television programme did. Hopefully, when the students begin working with children, they will also consider sports programmes and the potential for challenging dominant ideologies especially in the hegemonic masculinity evident in sports.

As already observed, the hegemonic masculinity inherent in sport is not absolute and can be challenged. Feminist challenge sees one of three possibilities: firstly, greater access for women to existing resources, funds, media coverage and so on; secondly, a separate female-only sporting sphere; and thirdly, a joint venture with men to transform the current model of sport into a more egalitarian one.

Although, as Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) points out, perhaps it is not a matter of choosing only one option when elements of all three could be successfully employed to challenge male privilege and create greater sporting autonomy for girls and women. But just what are the advantages and limitations of each option and what, if any, application do they have in the Godley School setting?

The students were very eloquent in extolling the benefits of sports participation. They valued the exercise, the fitness gained, the sense of enjoyment, the team

camaraderie, the friendships they made, as well as the anticipation of competition and the sense of fulfilment that came with success. There is an assumption in this that sport as it is currently constituted is inherently good. The first option makes the same assumption. Greater access to resources does nothing to challenge the hegemony of the system. All it achieves is that girls and women have been co-opted into a male-dominated sphere and may collude in the perpetuation of the dominant ideology.

Just such a strategy has been employed at Godley School. A female rugby team was formed in 1999. It was reported to me that concern was expressed at the time this move was first mooted and that the concern was that a rugby team took fifteen girls out of an already small population thereby leaving an even smaller pool of talent for other sporting codes. To my way of thinking this debate entirely misses the point. What such a move does is to leave the violent, aggressive and fiercely competitive ideology of rugby unchallenged and to place girls in an aggressive, violent and potentially injurious if not dangerous situation.

Sandra Coney (1999) reports some of the Dunedin Rugby Injury and Performance Project results. In one season there were 569 injury events amongst 357 players. 462 occurred during games and 107 during practices. 22 of the players had been concussed and 40% of all injuries occurred during bone crunching tackles; (tackles that I found so disturbing at the Godley School games and my fellow spectators appeared to enjoy!)

Equally disturbing is the assumption in this strategy that it is the females who are deficient and need to change to fit an acceptable situation rather than examining the context within which the change is to occur. What this amounts to is an 'affirmative action' type of move which may well be pro-female in orientation but it is clearly not anti-sexist in practice.

The second possibility of a separatist sporting philosophy is not new. Early forms of sport and physical education for females only, appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, many in school settings. They tended to reinforce the dominant ideology that differences between men and women were biologically determined. Because the two existed separately it was easy to value them differently and to see women's sport as inferior based on the belief that women were weaker and frail and not suited to vigorous activity. Male Godley School students still value female sport less, claiming it lacks the pace and action of their sport so separatism is not going to challenge such an antediluvian view. Perhaps exposure to women's tennis might?

The shortcoming of a separatist movement nowadays is that it would still leave the control of sport in male hands and the masculinist ideology of sport unchallenged. Rather than countering sexism such a proposal for change puts the emphasis on difference. It is argued that a separate organisation in masculinized sports such as boxing, rugby and weight-lifting, which have vigorously resisted female participation, would at least give females access to these sports. I believe these sports are reactionary, primitive and that sport for females should not, as already discussed, emulate these male displays of primeval aggression.

Recently, when "The Press" did feature an article about Maria McCallum, the New Zealand 57kg boxing champion, we were assured in the first paragraph that she was "the epitome of a Christchurch suburban housewife and mother; 30-ish, planning a second child, working part-time". Author, John Coffey, quoted Maria as saying "I believe boxing is really good for a woman's self-esteem and confidence. It's really quite empowering. You don't feel like **the weak female**". The ambivalence shown to sporting females is clearly evident. Two photographs accompanied the article, one of Maria in her boxing gear, poised for action, and another one of her with her son, Cameron, draped around her neck. As readers, we needed to be assured that she was a real woman. I fail to see just how the separatist strategy will challenge such hegemonic masculine ideology?

A more effective strategy would be to teach students how to deconstruct texts so that, faced with the conventional media representations of female and male athletes, they would recognise the inherent sexism of the media for what it is worth. If students are able to identify the ways in which the achievements of sporting females are undervalued, trivialised and stereotyped, perhaps some of the barriers to greater participation in sport by women and girls may be removed? Better still would be to encourage the students to protest about biased reporting directly to the media concerned, urging the provision of more equitable coverage of women's sport. I believe such a strategy is consistent with the achievement objectives of the new 1999 *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum*.

Students will critically analyse the impacts that conceptions of personal, cultural, and national identity have on people's well-being, for example, by examining social constructions of gender and the body, the changing roles of men and women in New Zealand society, concepts of masculinity that are part of our national sporting culture, and stereotypes in relation to age, culture, health status and physical abilities. (Level 8, Strand A, Number 4)

I have to acknowledge that some of the Godley School students, in particular some of the female students, were very adept at analysing media representations of sporting figures. Others, including some of the female students, admitted that they had not really thought about some of the images and the messages they conveyed. While some anger and resentment was expressed about the media treatment of females in sport this did not appear to have resulted in any form of action by the female students.

Proponents of the third option of a co-operative venture between men and women to transform sport as we know it have advanced seemingly diverse ideas from the conservative to the more radical. Moderate views do not seek to abolish the competitive aspects of sport but rather to simply de-emphasise the 'win at all costs' attitudes, to play down the aggression and violence and in turn accentuate



positive aspects such as the pleasure of participation and the joy that comes from successfully working co-operatively.

A more extremist view has been suggested by Paul Willis (1994):

Sport could be presented as a form of activity which encompasses human similarity and not dissimilarity, a form of activity which isn't competitive and measured, a form of activity which expresses values which are indeed unmeasurable, a form of activity which is concerned with individual well-being and satisfaction rather than with comparison. In such a view of sport, differences between the sexes would be unimportant, unnoticed.

Such a radical redefining of sport is not without problems. While it certainly achieves the goal of shifting the focus from differences between the sexes to the meaning of sport itself, it seems to advocate sweeping away the very essence of what sport is all about? Neophyte as I am when it comes to the joys of being a spectator at sport, even I have thrilled to the nerve-racking exhilaration of those last few overs in a one day cricket match as the number of runs required for victory reduces as rapidly as the remaining overs to be bowled. Another oxymoron, sport without competition and measurement? Perhaps individual athletes could compete against their personal best rather than each other, but then what happens to team sport?

In a school setting an athletics meeting would see individuals competing against personal targets established in the preparation phase rather than competing against other students. Teams of students could work on co-operative tasks where success at any given task was dependent on all members of the team contributing to a solution and competition, if any, could be against the clock. If the teams contained a mix of students with differing sporting capabilities, not only would they learn valuable skills of working together to achieve a common goal, but they would also learn to value those who possessed talents different from their own.

Barbara Humberstone (1990) describes activities such as a confidence course and climbing an artificial wall at an outdoor-adventure centre and how these can form a part of a school programme. Boys and girls work together to complete the tasks and in so doing become increasingly aware of the capabilities of each other. In particular, the boys express surprise at the physical competence of the girls. She advocates the use of such co-operative and challenging forms of activity as replacements for traditional competitive sports so as to create "a structural context in which alternative versions of gender identities and relations could be experienced and constructed". I believe activities such as these have great merit in that they challenge the stereotypes of physical abilities manifest in the traditional competitive sports played in secondary schools at present.

Probably the issue that seemed to cause the most resentment at Godley School was the competition for colour awards or blazer awards. These awards, in the form of a tag sewn on to blazer pockets, went to the members of the top team in each sport or cultural activity. The male students in particular resented what they saw as the ease with which females students were able to earn recognition in this way after a very short time at the school and for taking part in what they saw as a low profile sport. Rugby players interviewed talked of attending First XV matches from their earliest days at the school, developing pride in the school, observing its customs and traditions over many years only to find themselves in the Second XV and missing the award that went to only 20 out of 368 players. By contrast they saw all members of a female sport receive the award when only enough could be found to form one team.

The simple solution would be to remove the element of competition from this process. Instead of awarding colours to the top team only, all participants in each sport could receive colours, as a membership award. Participation would be recognised rather than elite achievement and due recognition given to the role of sport in contributing to well-being, hauora as envisaged by the Health and Physical Education Curriculum.

Bob Connell (1995) describes the third option as 'alliance politics' and raises an important concern. Women and men working together to challenge hegemonic masculinity will be no easy task since what is at stake is the balance of power which favours certain groups of men. Naturally those with the most to lose are going to be reluctant to participate in a process which appears to work against their interests.

I do not think it is drawing too long a bow to see elements of this in the resentment of the male students to the awarding of blazer awards to the Godley School female students. Status obviously goes with membership of top teams and in this way the dominant masculine hierarchy is reinforced. If female students, already stereotyped as 'not physical enough' (Will's comment), receive these awards then in the eyes of the male students, the prestige of earning these awards dissipates.

Bruce Kidd (1987) suggests a number of ways of moving towards what he calls "more humane sporting practices". In particular he advocates changing the tendency to see sports as battles. The origins of this association lie in the classical games of the Hellenic world where Greek athletics were a preparation for battle or quite literally war games. In fact only warlike people indulged in such combative events. Given this as the source of modern sport, the language of warfare is perhaps not misplaced but nevertheless undesirable particularly in the school setting. Kidd advocates alternative imagery, which lessens the violence and where participants see themselves not as enemies but as partners in a theatrical event where the goal is for everyone to play at their peak, in competition but not fiercely so. He supports the development of an ethos in sport where skill, artistry and grace are favoured above winning, especially winning at all costs.

I believe that pro-feminist males, such as myself, can make a significant contribution to a more egalitarian, democratic and co-operative ethos in sports by

analysing male power and documenting its origins, how it is sustained, and how it contributes to the exploitation, marginalisation, degradation and oppression of women and some groups of men. Being male, regardless of whether one is a member of the dominant or subordinate groups and hence relatively powerful or powerless, means possessing particular insights into the workings of male power and privilege. Challenges to dominant hierarchies can occur only on the basis of adequate understanding of their nature and operation. In a gendered society such as New Zealand change depends upon a thorough understanding of the workings of power including the role of sport in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity.

While this research project is a political act in that it attempts to contribute to sexual politics and greater social justice by creating useful knowledge with which to challenge the dominant ideology, the aim of the work is to be of benefit not only to girls and women but also to boys and men. Further work such as this, in spheres other than sport, will add to our understanding of the complexities of the gender and power. Perhaps the greatest challenge lies in working with men to convince them that reforms aimed at more gender equity offer the promise of greater humanity for us all.

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