Sport, Masculinities and the Body

Ian Wellard

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1 Introduction

Reflexive Approaches to Sport, Masculinities and the Body

I have always been aware of the significance of the body in relation to my own understanding of myself and the presentation of my 'self' to others. I was aware of how it could help or hinder me in social situations in many ways. For instance, being male, white, tall, slim and agile I could sense the way these corporeal qualities afforded me status in different circumstances. At the same time, my body could hamper me in many other social situations. For instance, it could be too weak or sometimes too strong, it could be too young or too old. These bodily traits informed my thinking about myself and created various ways in which I could present a social identity. Consequently, throughout my life, and I am sure like many others, I have been constantly aware of using my body to perform in certain ways to present a particular form of identity which I felt was appropriate at the time.

I have always enjoyed sporting activity. My parents were both sports enthusiasts and sporting activity was a big part of my family life. My experiences of team sports at school, however, were not always enjoyable and this influenced my later participation in certain sports. In many cases the emphasis appeared to be more about adopting a 'role' and, in particular, the physical education (PE) teacher's expectation of how I should be acting rather than learning about the physical activity in relation to my own body. I can remember in my early teens returning to the UK after spending several years at a school in Australia where I had been an active swimmer and keen tennis player. Arriving in England in the middle of a cold and wet winter I found that I did not enjoy the physical experience of football and did not have the technical skills which the other boys had acquired. Because of my lack of ability in this particular sport, I initially suffered a degree of rejection from my peers as well as the (male) PE teachers, who made it obvious that their only interest was football. Not only was football the major sport for boys in the curriculum, but it was also the main topic in social conversation. Not just in terms of performances on the pitch, but there was an expectation that all boys should have a broader knowledge of professional football. I can remember making an effort to look at the sports pages of the daily newspapers in order to select a team to support. I chose 'Leeds' for no other reason than I liked the sound of the name and made a point of

learning a few of the player's names and where the team was placed in the league table. This brief and contrived knowledge, helped 'ease' my way into being 'accepted' by the other boys in the school.

Swimming was a subsidiary sport at this school and entailed being bussed to the local pool whereas tennis was played only by girls in the summer. I can remember being quite confident about my body whilst in Australia, but found that initial period at school in England a set-back in terms of my self-esteem. It was strange to doubt my own sporting ability and my first reaction was to concentrate on school work. As such, in a small space of time, my social identity had been reconstructed because of my inability to conform to a specific sporting activity. Things changed later when I became involved in the school swimming team and in local tennis clubs, but I have never forgotten the sense of not being a 'fully-fledged' male in those early days at school.

I can also remember, as a teenager, wanting to play a number of sports but being restricted by my body type and also by my pre-conceptions of what taking part in certain sports entailed. For example, I liked the actual game of rugby, but felt that I was too 'skinny' to play competitively and at the same time was not really attracted to the excessive machismo displayed by rugby players. Not only was a particular type of body required to take part, but there appeared to be an unwritten need to adopt a set social rituals associated with an organised sport such as rugby: heavy drinking, violence and sexism.

At that time, any thoughts of being different were related to my perception of my body in comparison to others. At school I never had cause to contemplate my sexuality. Heterosexuality was a 'given' and I never had any reason to question this. Problems that did occur arose from my own bodily performances, particularly on the football pitch and my concerns to demonstrate that I was just like other boys. I can remember the term 'gay' being used only in relation to 'camp' television personalities such as Larry Grayson or John Inman, but even so, the references were understood more in terms of their effeminate mannerisms rather than specific sexuality.

There is one other significant aspect of my autobiography which I feel has bearing on the later emphasis I have placed upon the role of the body. At the age of eighteen, I felt I was not ready for university and unsure of a direction, so I decided to take some time out to gain work experience. Early efforts in administration for a large department store and a merchant bank were disastrous and led me to take up a position as a student nurse. I still do not know why I did this, but can say that the subsequent two years I spent on hospital wards opened my eyes to many facets of the social and physical body I had never considered before. These were bodies that were ill, vomited, bled, urinated, gave birth, were infirm through age and, on many occasions, died. It was a big learning curve, and made me realise that the constant questioning I did during my time there did not really fit well with the actual role of a nurse as it seemed that the role required more

detachment. However, the experience made me want to return to study and with more of a sense of purpose. As well as highlighting the relevance of the social body, my role within a traditionally female occupation was also a revelation in terms of thinking about gender. The very fact that I was constantly referred to as a 'male' nurse created a sense that my presence in this role was problematic. This was never more evident than when, as part of the training, I had to spend three months on a maternity ward where gendered roles and spaces were clearly established and I felt that I had to constantly explain my 'male' presence to the predominantly female workforce. The literal exposure to the workings of the body and the social dynamics of gender provided a starting point for my thinking and a reason for looking to sociology to provide some answers.

Sport, particularly tennis and swimming, has remained a big part in my life, but this has continued in the form of an uneasy relationship. Much in the way that Brian Pronger (2002) describes his early experiences of sport, particularly in relation to his reluctance to be complicit with dominant versions of masculinity, I too have felt a continued sense of discomfort in performing in expected ways. Like Pronger, I have felt that I have been restricted by the limits imposed upon traditional sporting practices. However, maybe through a real love of physical activity, I chose to continue to be involved with some form of club or team and have always endeavoured to join a local club or gym whenever I moved to another area. This has meant that on many occasions I have had to compromise my own principles and run the risk of being complicit with many of the gendered behaviours endemic *within*. Over the years this has also meant that I have played in many clubs throughout the country and on reflection it is within this setting that I have been able to observe how performances of particular types of masculinity predominate at the expense of others. Initially, my participation was based solely within traditional organised sport which was based around competitive play; swimming galas at school, ratings tennis tournaments as a teenager and league matches at University and in clubs. It was not until I was in my late twenties that I became aware of gay sports groups and thought that these would provide an opportunity to take part in activities where the social would take precedence over the competitive and, consequently, where I presumed the macho, male posturing experienced in traditional (heterosexual) sports would not be considered appropriate.

In hindsight, I can see that any of the difficulties I experienced could not be considered as traumatic as many other men and women, both gay and straight. However, my experiences in sport, as a child and an adult, provide a useful background against which to raise questions about the body and masculinities, such as: Is it better to speak of gendered bodily performances rather than gender per se in sport? Why was it that the PE teachers who taught me appeared to prioritise particular performances of sporting masculinity and specific sports in contrast to other school subjects where there was a greater focus upon teaching to all abilities? Why did some people

continue to take part in sport as adults, despite unfavourable experiences at school? Do those who take part in sport, regardless of sexuality, have to display 'expected' forms of sporting performance?

Consequently, this book sets out to explore the practices in sport which contribute to a general understanding that some bodies are more appropriate for participation than others. The focus is upon everyday sport which could be defined as social or amateur, in the sense that it is voluntary, rather than elite or professional sport where there are commercial rewards and different motivations. However, this is not to ignore the significant impact of professional sport which is often presented as a guide or exemplary model of how it should be played. My experiences in both mainstream and gay sport provide a useful background against which to raise questions about the body and masculinities. The social arena of sport is also an interesting space where the body performances of other men can be observed and considered in relation to broader questions of masculinity and sexuality.

In terms of a more serious attempt to explore sport in relation to masculinities and the body, my autobiographical musings do not provide sufficient explanation for how the social acts upon the individual, whether other men approach their bodies in similar ways or if they see their bodies as influential in the construction of their own masculine identity. Part of the 'foreshadowed problems' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) arise from the personal experiences described previously. However, there is also the need to rethink the generalisability of these individual impressions alongside more detailed investigation which incorporates existing research literature and empirical evidence. Much of the literature written on sport upholds many taken for granted assumptions about those considered most able to participate. These assumptions are generally based upon (continued) unquestioned social constructions of gender and the body. In mainstream sports literature and journalism, performances of the young, professional, male body are considered most noteworthy. It is also within mainstream sociology, particularly areas which claim to describe the sociology of sport, where these assumptions often still remain unchallenged. It is away from the specific location of sport where more reasoned debate has surfaced. Most noticeably in post-structuralist readings of the body, for example, Butler's (1993) Foucauldian account of gender performativity, which has highlighted the problems of continued constructions of gender based upon binary distinctions. Thus my experiences of 'outsiderness' in the context of the maternity ward alerted me to the restrictions placed upon the gendered body in certain social spaces. The social understanding of the 'female' space of the maternity ward provides an interesting parallel to the 'male' territory of the sports locker room and needs to be interpreted through readings of the social and physical body as well as gender.

I have attempted to incorporate my personal experiences into the narrative so that I can consider the extent to which cultural processes have informed not only my status as male but also wider social constructions of

masculinity. Experiences of my own body in conjunction with the social processes to which I have been exposed can be considered as shaping my own identity. Because of this, I have constantly compared my experiences with those of other men and women. Like other men, I too have been exposed to the cultural processes informing my status as a male which, in turn, may have occasionally produced a sense of unease in relation to my body. At the same time I have not always felt comfortable with accepted understandings of what being a 'real' man entails, whilst remaining aware that I should perform particular versions of masculinity in different social contexts. Consequently, while growing up I often had cause to reflect upon my body and masculinity and those reflections inevitably formed part of the background of the way in which I have approached any fieldwork.

Therefore, the points I make above relating to aspects of my own identity, such as gender, sexuality and sporting performances, not only influence my personal life history, but also the whole research process. Recognising the reflexive processes at play means that I can locate the research within the social, historical and political and, at the same time, take into account the effect that these have on the research procedure. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) it is also important to recognise how theory is bound up with the method of selecting and collecting data, analysing it and writing it up. Wacquant, in his reading of Bourdieu, states that theory should not be removed or apart from the research work that nourishes it. He writes

> Bourdieu maintains that every act of research is simultaneously empirical (it confronts the world of observable phenomena) and theoretical (it necessarily engages hypothesis about the underlying structure of relations that observations are designed to capture). Even the most minute empirical operation—the choice of a scale of measurement, a coding decision, the construction of an indicator, or the inclusion of an item in a questionnaire—involves theoretical choices, conscious or unconscious, while the most abstract conceptual puzzle cannot be fully clarified without systematic engagement with empirical reality.
>
> (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 35)

The distinctive feature of Bourdieu's argument is his approach to 'reflexivity' and entails 'the systematic exploration of the 'unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought'(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:40).

A commitment on behalf of the researcher to reflexive approaches, now common in qualitative research, owes a huge debt to feminist studies. Feminist methodologies have been significant in their recognition of the social processes at play which have ultimately shaped the way in which women's lives are experienced. The focus of much feminist research has been the specific social and ideological locations which women have historically occupied, for example, areas such as the home (Oakley 1974); motherhood

(Woodward 1997); sexuality (Petchesky 1986); and class (Skeggs 1997). Much of this research has incorporated a qualitative reflexive approach to fieldwork so that accounts of women's lives can be evaluated in terms of broader social processes which have more often than not determined their subordinate position in comparison to men. Other feminist researchers (for example, Anderson and Jack 1991, Stacey 1991, Stanley 1993) have also advocated a self- analytical approach which should be applied to the research process. This has been productive in research exploring the lives of women but can equally be applied also in studies of men and enables them to not only explore their own lives but the lives of other men. For example, more recently, these approaches have been successfully adopted in exploring men's relationship with sport, particularly in relation to the experience of the disabled body (Sparkes 2002) and the gay sporting body (Owen 2006). Consequently, much of feminist methods incorporates a form of active research where the intention is that, through the revelations which emerge during the research, there is the opportunity for both researcher and researched to gain from the experience. Obviously, this implies that the researcher often has an agenda which is brought into the research. However, it is the explicit recognition of the personal, political and social influences at large within the entire research process which enables more productive enquiry and counters many of the criticisms justifiably directed at solely positivistic or naturalistic studies.

At the same time, a reflexive approach incorporates an acknowledgment of the broader social/political/historical/geographical context. For instance, Connell, in *Southern Theory,* highlights the 'northernness' of general theory and, in particular, what she terms a 'metropolitan geo-political location' (Connell 2007: 44). Drawing upon examples of Coleman, Bourdieu and Giddens, she critiques the lack of recognition of the northern geo-political location and along with it the failure to recognise many alternate ways of thinking or being which derive from non-western cultures. She identifies four characteristic textual moves which have operated to present an unquestioned sense that knowledge generated from the 'Metropole' is superior to others. These relate to: *The claim of universality; Reading from the centre*; *Gestures of exclusion; Grand erasure*. In particular, it is empirical knowledge deriving from the Metropole which constitutes the erasure of the experience of a majority of human kind from having an influence in the construction of social thought.

As much as I support Connell's viewpoint, I cannot escape from the fact that the material generated in this book is located *within* the Metropole that Connell describes. Likewise, the men that I have observed and interviewed have developed their understandings of the world through this particular lens. However, recognition of this position, with the knowledge there are other ways of being, provides an opportunity to analyse the material with a broader viewpoint, much in the same way that feminist research has taught us to constantly take into consideration the gendered dynamics

of social interactions and identity formation. Therefore, I have attempted to remain aware of the limits of the Metropole, especially as the version of sport which prevails does have its roots firmly entrenched in western thinking. Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that the material developed in this book is not relevant, as it seeks to explore issues that have yet to be fully understood. Exposing the constant conflicting interpretations of what sport should be provides a way of incorporating broader ideas, particularly so in the case of school sport and physical education, where participation is mandatory for young people, although the benefits or outcomes are not necessarily the same. What is important, however, is to not take too many leaps forward theoretically and risk losing touch with what is happening at ground level. We need to be clearer about how the developments in knowledge and apparent availability of alternative identities (or ways of being) is formulated and acted upon at ground level. As much as I am excited by the theoretical developments in (post) post-structuralism and queer theory in relation to gendered and queer identities, I cannot escape the caution developed in my sociological training. As pointed out by sociologists, such as Kirsch (2000) and Edwards (1998), some claims do not hold up to rigorous examination and in many cases this is due to the use of less than robust methods. Consequently, I have attempted to 'keep my feet on the ground' and explore the lives of other men in the hope that it will enable me to consider the relevance of 'masculinities' within the context of sport.

SPORT, MASCULINITIES AND THE BODY

In this book, I have set out to explore the extent to which other men perform gendered bodily practices in their everyday lives. Explanations which emerge may provide the opportunity to develop and improve sociological understanding of the processes and practices through which body performance can be said to constitute gender and sexuality. I also consider the extent to which alternative masculinities and body performances reinforce or challenge the current sporting framework which is invested heavily in specific versions of masculinity. Consequently, this book explores whether it is still relevant to consider sport as a significant site for the making and remaking of hegemonic masculinities. It also considers the significance of body practices as a central means through which these masculinities are formed.

It is worth pointing out that the majority of the research has been conducted among adult men, although there are some accounts from younger children in Chapter 7. I am aware of the problems faced by attempting to apply adult-defined notions of hegemonic masculinity to younger children (Renold, 2007). Although, by incorporating sporting life histories which explore early experiences of sport and the body, it is intended that some analysis can be made of these adult readings of their childhood. Particularly in relation to the claim that an adult-shaped world of masculine sporting

bodies ultimately impacts upon the prescribed 'ways of being' presented to young people.

In Chapter 2 I explore theories which have already been developed in this field and the importance of taking into consideration the emerging influence of international perspectives. The works of Sabo, Messner and MacKay have contributed to a heavily North American-influenced account of sport and masculinity and these are assessed in relation to more recent work emanating from the UK and other countries. Chapter 3 continues with an exploration of theories developed outside of sport but which exert growing influence. The ideas developed by Connell (1995) which help us understand the social significance of the body through body practices are central and are explored in relation to more recent critiques of hegemonic masculinities. At the same time, the concept of disciplined and regulated bodies developed by Foucault and incorporated in post-structuralism and feminism is explored, particularly when applied to gender, for example, in the writings of Judith Butler (1993) and more recently in queer theory. Notions of individuality are additionally addressed and the way it can be expressed through the body. I explore the extent to which displays of the body can be expressed in Bourdieu's (1977) description of 'cultural capital' where a particular 'type' of body appears to carry much greater cultural 'weight' and, consequently, needs to be assessed in terms of its importance in the everyday activities of the individual. Applying a concept, such as 'habitus' helps us gauge the extent to which there is any awareness of the body and how prevalent pursuit of the physical is in relation to constructions of masculine identities.

In Chapter 4, I explore mainstream sports participation and how the gendered body becomes a central factor in not only constructing ones 'position' in relation to it but also further successful participation. The focus is very much upon sport at the social level. The voluntary aspect of social sport is significant in that the time and effort invested in taking part is rewarded through less obvious material rewards found in (most) professional sports. By incorporating empirical material collected through ethnographic research (including, participant observation in a range of sports settings, such as team sports, sports clubs and gyms, as well as interviews with a range of men who took part in them) I assess the ways constructions of 'real' or 'natural' masculine performances are played out. Empirical evidence is also used to highlight the ways in which the body becomes significant in the formulation of masculine sporting identities through the performance of an 'expected' version of sporting masculinity and how the practices inherent in mainstream sports settings contribute to this.

In Chapter 5, I focus upon the school setting. For many young people, the school sports and physical education provide the main opportunity for physical activity. Data collected in UK schools may allow for comparisons and contrasts with other 'western' systems, such as the US, Australia, Canada as well as 'newer' systems emerging in Asia. Consequently,

school settings are considered a prime site for constructing understandings of the individual body in terms of, not only gendered identity, but also its 'ability' to take part and continue into adult sport. The chapter incorporates research with young children about perceptions of sport, as well as discussion of the role that school physical education plays in reinforcing particular gendered stereotypes. It is suggested that physical education departments in many schools continue to celebrate specific performances of masculinity (expressed through the body) at the expense of other formulations. Literature which has emerged in relation to the body and prescribed gendered pathways in the context of school sport and physical education is considered in relation to the construction of masculine identities.

In Chapter 6, I investigate further the significance of sport throughout the life course. The early experiences of sport are considered in relation to the forms of participation in relation to the significance of being able to perform expected forms of sporting masculinity. This theme is continued in Chapter 7, where I present material gathered through research into 'gay sports'. This includes evidence collected at the local level and in the context of global events, such as the Gay Games and the Out Games. The data gathered provides the opportunity to explore the concept of 'alternative' spaces to mainstream sporting masculinity and the impact (if any) upon cultural attitudes toward the male body, gender and sexuality. I am, consequently, able to identify and document the ways and extent to which body practices can be said to have been constructing masculinities in specific local practices, together with the meanings participants themselves give to these. At the same time I explore whether the radical potential found in marginalized sports can provide a challenge to the exclusive practices of heterosexual male-based, traditional organised sport. In this chapter, it is argued that a liberal-based agenda adopted by organised gay community sport fails to utilise the opportunity to challenge heterosexual hegemony. I explore the suggestions that liberal agenda merely reflect heterosexual, male values based upon bodily performance and in turn create an exclusive, masculine arena (Pronger 2000) within sport.

In Chapter 8, I attempt to conclude by drawing all the themes together and look towards ways in which the 'limitations' which are created by 'restrictive' or 'expected' forms of masculine performances could be lifted. Assessment is made upon the effectiveness of combining empirical evidence with theoretical debate and the extent to which lived experiences reflect conceptual claims.

2 Sport and Masculinities

Sport occupies a central position in contemporary western culture. Commercial sport is a multi-billion pound industry, but at the same time a pursuit which holds significant meaning in the lives of individuals. In 1986, John Hargreaves stated that 'sport stimulates young men to dream of escape from boredom and deprivation. It is eulogized by educators, philanthropists and social reformers, appropriated by politicians and promoted by the modern state' (Hargreaves 1986: 1).

Sport, in this description, is seen as something to aspire to, or a way out of everyday drudgery and is framed in a class-based analysis. However, Hargreaves was correct to argue that sport is problematic precisely because, in comparison with other institutions seen as directly related to the state, the power relations within it are largely unrecognised or ignored. Whether one wants to regard sport as an 'institution' may be problematic, but an historical overview is useful in terms of tracing the emergence of sport to its contemporary form. Hargreave's particular institutional perspective is located clearly in terms of power relations theorised through a Marxist framework and there has been a tendency for those who have adopted this approach, such as, for example, the figurational accounts of Elias and Dunning (1986), to apply class in a generalised sense. Those who have access to power are simply categorised as white, middle-class men. Although this analysis is instructive, there is little exploration of the conflict and contradictions within this group and there is only passing reference to the role of the individual body or the different versions of masculinity found both within and external to class categories. As McKay et al. (2000) assert, more recent research into masculinities and sport has either adopted a focus upon institutionalised team sports (football, baseball, rugby etc.) or those that could be considered non-institutionalised, such as individual sports like swimming and running or alternative sports such as skateboarding and surfing (when performed outside of commercial settings). Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of the relationship between sport and the formation of sporting 'character' applied to men. The focus for this book, however, is how sporting practices construct masculinities, bodies and sexualities rather than on the historical development of sporting institutions and

power relations between 'opposing' class categories. Consequently, power is considered as more complex and pervasive, operating individually and socially, on bodies, through bodies and between bodies.

Although exploring the historical development of sporting institutions is useful, these accounts often assume class as a 'simple' category and ignore gender and sexuality as problematic within them. However, it is still important to recognise that, historically, there has always been some form of 'sporting' physical activity although it was not until the Victorian era that it really started to take its present form (Haley 1968, Brailsford 1969, Malcolmson 1973, Bailey 1978). The Victorian period can be seen as influential in shaping the way many sports are played today. At the same time, the cultural transformations in attitudes to health and the body in this period can also be considered as contributory factors to the social understanding that sport was, in particular, a space for the healthy, male body (Haley 1978, Park 1987)

What Hargreaves (1986) does provide us with is an account of the way sport developed into its current form and how the ethos of 'Muscular Christianity' was significant in the formulation of what he termed the dominant male ideology in English public schools during the 19th century. It is this construct of an ideal form of masculine behaviour located in action and heroic deeds which has prevailed within sport practice in more recent history throughout the globe and contributes to contemporary idealisations of sporting masculinity. Hargreaves also argues that during the latter stages of the twentieth century with the decline of heavy, manual-based industry and a relative decline in the incidence of large-scale wars, the sports field became a primary social space for displays of this form of masculinity.

In addition to the emergence of organised sport during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a strong relationship between work and leisure time developed (Cunningham 1980). It is arguable that the whole socialisation process for men and women is now geared towards employment where futures are mapped out in terms of a chosen occupation or career. Although this relationship towards employment is influenced by other social factors, particularly gender, race, class and disability, it is reasonable to claim that a large proportion of an individual's life is built around training towards and then maintaining a specific career. Men and women are also categorised in terms of relationship to the workforce; those who work and those who do not, such as the unemployed, the retired, the disabled, children and students. In contrast, leisure time is seen as time 'outside' of work and importantly as 'free' time. The greater historical presence of men within the workplace may also provide one explanation for sport occupying a position as a male space. In the past, men may have experienced a broader distinction between work and play, where sport has been invested in more heavily because of its relationship to leisure. However, in contemporary society, where the majority work in order to provide an income and means of support rather than the pursuit of a vocation, leisure time continues to hold

great significance for the individual. Not only as a means for attaining pleasure, but as a way of expressing an identity (Tomlinson 1990). It is a time which is considered 'one's own', a time to pursue an activity of one's own choosing even though nearly all of the process of participation in leisure activities is organised through either government or commercial directives. Significantly, as Edwards (2006) suggests, the decline of manufacturing has coincided with 'the rise of gym cultures and weight-training as popular activities for working class men' (Edwards 2006:157). In addition the 'technologies of fitness' (Pronger 2002), initially a preserve of the middle classes, have been incorporated into a general orientation towards maintenance of the physical body.

Sport, for those outside professional circuits, has maintained its position in general consciousness as being 'free-time' and as such pleasurable. According to Hargreaves (1986) and Clarke and Critcher (1985), even the blatant commercialism and organisation of contemporary sport and leisure time has not diminished its hegemonic status. However, a more sophisticated reading which incorporates how the individual is drawn into a decision-making process, suggests that developing knowledge of sport as well as developing sporting prowess is a prime area for the acquisition of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977, 1988). The body can provide an initial display to others that one has been involved in sporting activity, not only in terms of 'on court' performances but also through specific bodily gestures and techniques which are associated with particular sports. For example, within contemporary western youth culture, capital is achieved through performances which are directly attributed to 'cool' sports, such as basketball and surfing. Displays to others can be inferred through specific bodily presentations (without necessarily having to take part in a game) such as walking with a stooped gait with one's arms hanging low in the manner of a basketball player. Achieving a particular 'look' (Nixon 1996) requires knowledge on behalf of the performer of the social significance but can also be seen as an indication of the historical specificity related to idealized, bodily presentation and sporting performances. For example, during the latter stages of the twentieth century there was a transformation in male bodily presentation which gave the impression that young men should be socially aware of the need to acquire a specific image. This often entailed maintaining a glorified representation of the 'hard', muscular male body as a signifier of authentic masculinity and can be evidenced in the popularity of films stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone. Their popularity has continued alongside more recent versions, such as Vin Diesel and the current 'James Bond', Daniel Craig. During the same period, in the fashion industry, for instance, clothing adopting a sports theme has proved to be popular and has provided a means to attract men into the consumer market (Edwards 1997). Idealized maleness is generally represented in association with being tough and heroic. However, although there may have been more recent outward changes in the way men present their bodies, the masculine

ideal has remained as that of 'tough guy' and the pursuit of heroism can be traced to what Segal (1997) describes as the late Victorian 'storm-troopers of a new aggressive masculinity' (Segal 1997: 107).

Although I am not aiming to provide an account for the historical emergence of sport, it is still important to remain aware of the social processes which can be seen to have played a significant part in contemporary understandings of sport and, in particular, the construction of masculinities. The consideration, albeit briefly, of historical perspectives provides support for claims that contemporary sport remains a predominantly male territory.

SPORT AS MALE TERRITORY

In 1982, Paul Willis wrote the following about the strong association between masculinity and sport:

> It is also clear that sport is strongly associated with the male identity, with being popular and having friends. Rugby and football are archetypal here. We imagine men to be at their most gregarious, expansive and relaxed in the pub after the match.
>
> (Willis 1982: 122)

However, Willis's identification of an area so 'strongly associated with male identity' did not go far enough to question why sport was considered a male space and much of sociological research on sport within the UK which followed tended to focus on the broader issues of class based power relationships, predominantly in sports such as football or rugby (Dunning 1986, Hargreaves 1986, Williams and Taylor 1994). Similarly, in the USA, the focus has tended to be more upon the power relationships within competitive, professional sports (Messner and Sabo 1990, Messner 1992). To an extent, the experiences of those outside these areas have failed to emerge or have been ignored. Whether this is to do with the social backgrounds of the authors, as there has been a tendency for research in the social sciences of sport to be conducted by those considered having a 'stake' in it. In particular, those who came through the ranks of college sports (US) or through working-class, socialist (heterosexual) male pathways (UK) where football and rugby were considered a 'birthright', as well as part and parcel of authentic 'real' masculinity. Consequently, there has often been a taken for granted attitude within the study of sport that certain activities (competitive, team sports such as football, rugby, baseball) are 'real' male territory or more 'authentic whereas issues relating to gender and sexuality have been left unquestioned or paid lip service. In the UK, many studies have focussed upon typologies of male participants, either players or spectators, in terms of class (Williams and Taylor 1994, Taylor 1995) or authenticity (Fiske 1992, Redhead 1993, 1997) and have been predominantly located

within football. Again, whether this is the result of the predominance of working-class, heterosexual men in sports sociology is debateable, but there has been a distinct lack of reflexivity apparent in other areas of sociology which have been more willing to embrace post-modern and feminist ideas. As Wheaton (2002) has also pointed out, few ethnographies of sport by male researchers acknowledge the researcher's gendered identity.

It is also important to recognise within these accounts of sport that there is a slippage between adult sports and sporting activities for children and young people. The continued debates about the benefits of adult sport (based upon organised, professional, competitive structures) are often made without reflecting upon the impact such activities have on the young person and the different interpretations of sport. These debates have been more critically reflected upon within the fields of physical education in UK and Australia (Evans Davies and Wright 2004, Penney 2002) but have yet to impact upon the predominant 'taken-for-grantedness' of competitive sport processes within US based sports sociology. Connell's (2007) description of the insularity of the voice from the 'Metropole' is endorsed in this case.

The few notable exceptions of work located from within sport sociology which attempt to address this imbalance are tellingly from either gay men (Anderson 2005, Pronger 1990, 2000) or women (Hargreaves 1994, Caudwell 2003, 2006). Although Anderson's focus upon the gay sportsman within elite and professional sites, and in particular how the gay male athlete can be 'just as good as' straight elite athletes could be criticised for overlooking the broader discriminatory practices which many gay men exhibit to other gay men and women, particularly in relation to ability. What is important to recognise is that there remain clear gaps within this field relating to questions of gender, sexuality and bodily performance in relation to participation in social sport *in all contexts*.

In mainstream sport (which includes broader social participation), I argue, a version of masculinity based on a particular kind of bodily performance continues to prevail. This operates not only in organised sport but also within sports groups initially established as alternatives to mainstream (predominantly heterosexual male) practices, for example those involving gay men and women, heterosexual women and disabled people, or aimed at children and young people in the context of physical literacy. As such, contemporary sporting practice produces and promotes an environment where displays of traditional masculinity, those which present competitiveness, aggressiveness and toughness, are seen as normal and necessary. It is the perceived understanding of a traditional, 'natural' version of masculinity which dominates sport and continues to hold immense power. Connell (1995) notes that in many schools a version of masculinity, championed through competitive sport, prevails and consequently, sporting prowess becomes a test of masculinity. Even those who do not like sport, she suggests, have to negotiate, usually with difficulty, a relationship to it.

Participation in violent sports, especially those with a potential for injury, reinforces and naturalises notions of masculinity that value physical dominance. It is worth noting the popularity of many recent sporting heroes, for example, Vinnie Jones, Mike Tyson and Paul Gascoigne, who continue to remain within the public eye even though they have ended their sporting careers. Their sporting performances throughout their playing days were aggressive and dirty and adopted a 'win at all costs' approach to their particular events, often risking injury—whether to themselves or to their opponents. Their aggressive displays on the field were valorised by the media creating celebrity 'bad boy' personalities which were popular even with audiences unfamiliar with the specific sports they played (Whannel 2002). Throughout this process the sports commentator and the spectator are complicit in the creation of the sporting hero by condoning and expecting use of aggression in sporting contexts, particularly, for example during international contests (Whannel 1992).

Physical displays which result in injury provide evidence of masculine performances away from the field. Young, White and Mcteer (1994) show how sporting injuries are seen as battle scars. They link the declining significance of male physicality in the sphere of work to the symbolic importance of strength and force in other social arenas, such as fitness and sport behaviour. As such it has become acceptable to play sport in an intensely confrontational manner. Young, White and Mcteer's study provides a useful comparison to the interviews provided later in this book as they also interview men about sport and body practices. In their case they were able to interview sixteen current and former athletes and ask questions relating to how they entered into sport and the extent of parental influence. They found that the general response to injury and pain was to ignore or carry on until they were physically unable to do otherwise. The injury itself caused a greater effect to self-esteem and sense of masculinity rather than the physical pain or disability. Interestingly, all the respondents found incapacitation difficult to deal with as it was considered that the injury was a sign of weakness and a barrier to them being able to assert or display their masculinity to its full extent. There was a feeling that incapacity rendered them 'less than' male.

What becomes apparent is that the men in Young et al.'s (1994) study regarded their bodies as a central component in the formulation of their understanding of masculine performance and also how they were seen by others. The men's relationship with their bodies also highlights the importance of the physical body in the way that it is experienced and used as an expression of identity. At the same time, there is a 'taken for granted' acceptance of the body where the men accept physical pain and injury as an everyday part of their 'masculine' lifestyle. However, this is not to suggest that management of pain is the sole preserve of men, rather the men learn to 'perform' the management of pain in a particular way. As Pickard (2007) describes in her accounts of young female dancers, pain and injury are constantly present, but

within the gendered discourse of ballet, outward signs of pain are masked in an endeavour to present effortless 'feminine' grace.

Having argued that sport remains a predominantly male social space, I want to explore the types of masculinities found within it and the specific versions which are considered appropriate and inappropriate for participation.

MASCULINITIES IN SPORT

McKay, Messner and Sabo (2000) provide an overview of current research into men and sport. They argue that critical studies of masculinities and sport should continue to embrace feminist theory and take into account the knowledge that constructions of masculinity are interwoven with constructions of femininity. One of the problems, for them, however, of recent critical feminist work on men's experiences of sport has been the overemphasis on the negative outcomes resulting from participation, for example, violence, misogyny and homophobia. This focus has led to a distinction between 'men's sports' and 'women's sports' where male sport is viewed as overly competitive and aggressive in comparison to the more playful, less competitive realm of women' sports. McKay et al. suggest that studies in sport have focused too much on how conservative sport structures reproduce existing inequalities without acknowledging the diversity of sporting activities and their potential for disruption and resistance. They write

> The focus on 'difference' among women (or among men) and on multiple systems of inequality does not mean ignoring gender. It means starting with the recognition that gender tends to vary in salience in different times and at different social locations.
>
> (McKay et al. 2000: 10)

Messner (1992) argues that, what he calls, dominant masculinity promotes an attitude in which the body is used as a weapon or a tool to achieve goals. Domination of the body and the bodies of others becomes important, not only those of opponents but also team-mates, women, ethnic minorities and gay men. He suggests that in sport there is a covert intimacy—a form of doing together rather than mutual talk about inner feelings. However, De Garis (2000) suggests that this presumption of masculinity in sport causes problems, particularly in relation to expressing emotions. Instead of 'covert intimacy', De Garis believes there is a 'somatic intimacy'. In his study of a boxing club he found that bodily actions and intimacy encountered in the 'safe' environment of the gym provided the appropriate place "to express intimacy because the textual representations of boxing as masculine and violent deter allegations of weakness or femininity." (De Garis 2000: 97)

Interestingly, De Garis found that the primary axis for verbal intimacy was age, not gender. The study is useful in that it acknowledges the

problems in addressing the various masculinities within sport but it does not fully address the issue that there is still a particular notion of masculinity which is identified or looked for, which in turn becomes the focus. De Garis argues that the intimate relationships formed between men within the social space of sport (in this case the boxing changing room) reveals greater sharing of personal emotions than is often given credit, especially if applied along with other social factors, such as age. However, because of the focus on boxing and the emphasis within the sport upon physical aggression, his example appears to reaffirm the notion that men are unable to express emotion unless they prove that they are masculine in the first place and, consequently, the expression of feminine traits is still considered unmanly. In this case, displays in the boxing ring prove heterosexual masculinity in the same way that it is acceptable for a football player to cry after losing a highly competitive football match (Whannel 2002). At the heart of this is the underlying conflict between masculinity and the understanding of subordinated femininity. In the case of the crying football player, an un-masculine display of emotion is counteracted by the prior performances seen on the pitch and the general social context of football being male territory. There is the implication that 'proper' masculinity equates with heterosexuality and, consequently, that sporting prowess equates with heterosexual masculinity. Thus, in terms of sport, the feminine serves to establish what is not expected in sporting performances. Presumably, following Butler (1993), the notion that men inhabit 'failed' forms of heterosexual masculinity suggests that we would expect to see them having to negotiate this in some way. Therefore, the accounts of older men and gay men are particularly useful as they could be considered 'outside' conventional sport because they are seen as weaker versions of masculinity but are still able to take part in competitive sport. Thus, comparisons can be made about whether the competitive structures of sport and certain expected bodily performances prevail over other factors such as age and sexuality or vice-versa.

An additional criticism of De Garis's is that he is very much part of the field he is studying. He is a keen boxer and wrestler and it appears at times that he is trying to defend boxing as a legitimate sport. In 1985, Frances Heidensohn talked of the 'vicarious identification' in much of traditional male-based sociology. She was referring more specifically to the sociology of crime and deviance, but as I mentioned previously, this could also be applied to the sociology of sport in which much research has been gathered by men about sports they identify with. It could also be claimed that there is often a sense of reverence in the way many men write about sport in general. My initial focus was upon the body and I attempted to use sport as a means to gain access to the lives of other men. It was during the early stages of my research I began to realise that sport occupied a far greater part in men's lives than I had originally thought. However, although much of the research I conducted was within a specific sport (tennis), I did not set out to

champion its cause. There remain too many conflicting issues which maintain, for me, a love hate relationship. Tennis, like many other organised sports, is still riddled with discriminatory practices not only in terms of age, class, gender, race and disability, but also in its continued reinforcement of a narrow version of masculinity based on aggression, competitiveness and intolerance.

Many sociological studies of sport also tend to focus on the serious or professional male athlete, someone whose career is based on physical performance (for example; Messner 1990, 1992, Klein 2000, Young, White and Mcteer 1994). Often there is a distinction between the player and the spectator or supporter, who has to experience the sport vicariously through the exploits of the player. This excludes the accounts of the majority of other men (and women) who may participate in sport at varying levels and where sport is not a career or means of livelihood, but rather an aspect of their lives which is nevertheless extremely important. The amateur or social sports player, in comparison to the professional player, participates in a voluntary capacity and has less to gain in terms of economic capital, but often the enthusiasm is greater than that of the professional. Whereas much research focuses upon male dominated sports such as football and rugby (Williams 1994, Taylor 1995, Nauright, 1996, Finn 2000, Wagg 2003) broader research has indicated that sports such as tennis and swimming remain more popular as participatory pursuits regardless of gender and age than football and rugby (Bennett, et al. 1999).

Young et al. (1994) also note the irony that athletes are considered to possess the ideal male body. For it is ultimately gained during the self-destructive pursuit of sporting activity through neglect of pain and injury by pushing the body to excess and more often than not administering drugs to enhance performance or mask injury. Not only are young men pressured into conforming to the ideals promoted by traditional mainstream sport, but more recent cultural changes in the representation of the body, particularly through consumerism (Featherstone 1991, Mort 1996), have contributed to a greater expectation for the presentation of particular 'types' of body. Hence the growth of commercial industries based on social pursuits related to the quest for an ideal body and the increased demand for products related to tanning, cosmetic surgery and dieting. Much of the research which focuses on this area concentrates on the pressures experienced by women to achieve the ideal body, for example, Wolf, 1990; Bordo, 1990; Black and Sharma, 2001. However, it is important to look at this in a wider context as pressure can be seen to be exerted on both sexes and particularly the young. For the young person there is a greater social pressure to be part of the youth scene, which, for example, relates heavily to the (dance) club scene. In this environment, semi-naked dancing for both males and females is virtually compulsory and a particular version of body performance is learned together with an awareness of how to display the body in an appropriate fashion (Grogan 1999).

Apart from being a social space which is considered a male territory; contemporary, organised sport also requires from its participants a particular orientation towards the body based upon discipline and regulatory practices.

SPORT AND DISCIPLINED BODIES

Heikkala (1993) regards sport as a prime example of the production of disciplined bodies. He primarily focuses on the professional sports person, but the association with the amateur enthusiast and the popularity of sport and leisure as a pastime for a majority of the population places greater value on these ideas. Heikkala draws upon Foucault (1977, 1986) and applies the idea that athletes are subjects, not only of external authority, such as those exerted by sporting governing bodies, but also through 'their own understanding and reflection relative to the ways they fulfil the plans' (Heikkala 1993: 401). These techniques of the self allow individuals to perform operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being in order to transform their identities within these practices and in turn achieve happiness and/or perfection. This relates to sport well in that although it is evident there is external control and power enforced by governing authorities, there are other factors within the process. Sport is not always compulsory, particularly outside of school there is a voluntary element. People do have an element of choice in joining a tennis club or enrolling at a leisure club in the same way that going to a night-club is seen as an individual choice. As Heikkala explains:

> Sport is not forced labour; it must and does include a strong voluntary flavour. Significantly, the will to do better must also carry a strong internalized feeling of a 'need' of discipline and conformity to the practices necessary for achieving the desired goal.
>
> (Heikkala 1993: 401)

The recognition that there are other factors which influence participation in sport is important. Theoretical perspectives which concentrate solely upon the historical processes in relation to external institutionalised power structures do not fully account for social practices which are not completely compulsory. This particularly applies to those who take part in sport for many reasons other than financial reward. For Heikkala, taking part in sport means, for the athlete, accommodating a will to do better or become perfect, which in turn carries a strong sense of a need for discipline. As well as applying an interpretation of Foucault, Heikkala employs Nietzsche's (1990) concept of 'bad conscience'. Bad conscience is a consequence of normalising techniques and is the instrument of control either internal or external. In the case of the athlete, becoming better or achieving perfection can be demonstrated through victories. Thus, plans are made to make

sure that training regimes and subsequent sporting performances are moving in the right direction towards the goals set. Bad conscience acts as a form of guilt, causing the athlete to reflect upon the negative aspects of not achieving their goals. As Heikkala suggests, it is 'no wonder athletes easily overtrain after a compulsory period of rest, which may have resulted from illness or injury. A bad conscience drives them to catch up with the planned training program.' (Heikkala 1993: 401)

These disciplinary practices cause the athlete to mount a quest for, what Heikkala, considers an unobtainable goal and at the same time is potentially both physically and psychologically damaging. Competition, in terms of success or failure, contributes to this process, causing a constant assessment of perceived progress.

Evidence suggests that such arguments apply to sports at a broader social level, especially if taking into consideration the voluntary nature of the activity and the absence of material rewards. More recent works by Pronger (2002) and Markula and Pringle (2006) have explored further the notion of how the body is subjected to disciplinary gaze. Pronger describes a form of 'body fascism' born out of discourses of fitness and a techno-scientific vision of the body which is contemplated mechanically, somewhat like that of a car being moulded into a desired shape. The individual body can be seen to be contemplated as other, but shaped through formulations of a range of competing and complementary discourses such as health, fitness, identity, consumption, desire—and interlaced with social understandings of gender, age, race and religion. Thus, although individual identities are shaped through a complex matrix of social discourses, patterns can be identified within specific socio-historical settings. Consequently, Pronger is able to articulate a 'technology of physical fitness' which describes a certain contemplation of and orientation towards the body within a specific period in time.

SPORT AND SEXUALITY

The social construction of sexuality is one area in which Foucault (1986) specifically addresses the regulation of the body and the restraints placed upon it. Sexuality provides an instructive example of the social processes which impose upon the physical body and is considered essential in any exploration of sport the body and gender. Particularly in sport, the physical assertion of one's sexuality through socially determined constructions of masculinity is constantly put to the test and for the gay sports player there is often the potential for a conflicting sense of identity. Segal suggests that 'the fine line between "true" masculinity (which is heterosexual) and its opposite (which is not) have been increasingly transgressed' (Segal 1997: 150) by the gay community in its assimilation of hegemonic masculinity. She sees this in the way many gay men have adopted a 'super-macho'

style based on traditional images of the heterosexual male. This has seen increased outward bodily performances, such as body-building and macho posturing and the growth of gay sports seeking to emulate heterosexual sports. For example, towards the end of the twentieth century in England there emerged a number of gay sports groups, such as the Kings Cross Stealers (a gay male rugby club), which started to compete in mainstream leagues. The problem with this, as Segal correctly points out, is that the valuation of this form of masculinity as a powerful identity is reinforced rather than challenged. This is an area which I explore further in Chapter 7 when I assess the position of the gay male sports player in terms of his role within the context of a 'gay' sports club.

Sport powerfully interacts with discourses of sexuality. The popular understanding of the professional sportsman is one of athleticism, strength, virility and attractiveness. This is promoted as the ideal form of masculinity, not only for men to aspire to, but for women to find attractive. The athlete's image is constructed through a discourse of physical and bodily performance. Most professional sports, particularly football, boxing and rugby, are highly physical, often involving contact with other men and there is generally a practical requirement to be physically strong. Often, particularly within the United Kingdom and North America, there are also expectations for exhibitions of hegemonic masculinity, on and off the field, such as excessive drinking and brawling. Sport, therefore, provides not only a site for learning social codes relating to gender but can be considered a prime site where hegemonic masculinities are made and remade. Consequently, sport is a significant part of a social arena in which masculinities and femininities are constructed, learned and structured in relations of domination and subordination (Butler 1993).

In contemporary 'western' history, sport has been considered as a place where the young man learns about the values of competition, valour, gentlemanly behaviour and how to treat those who do not (or should not) possess sporting prowess, in particular, women, gays, the disabled and the old (Park 1987). According to Park, however, the emphasis upon specific masculine performances produces conflict in later social relations during adolescence when the young-male sports player may have to confront sports women or gay sportsmen. The implication is that there is little accommodation for, or acceptance of, alternative gender or sexuality within mainstream sports unless they resemble expected forms. Probyn (2000) uses the example of Ian Roberts, the Australian professional rugby player who 'came out' in public (albeit during the latter stages of his career). On the one hand Roberts was heralded by the gay community as a 'normal' and athletic man who happened to be gay. On the other hand, Probyn notes how Roberts' body was used as a beard for his gayness which for a time was employed as a means to hide the possible shame of being gay. He was large, white, physically strong, working class and played in the position of the forward which is typically the role of muscle in the side and not known for being

sophisticated. It is interesting to consider whether this understanding of shame derives from not being 'masculine' enough. In the case of Roberts, any slur of 'gayness' upon his masculine identity was overshadowed by his ability to perform outward displays of hegemonic masculinity. As such, within sport, the social fear of displaying what is considered to be subordinated masculinity contributes to the continued presence of a hegemonic masculinity informed by heterosexuality.

Probyn relates shame to competitive drive, which in turn highlights the significance of sport's relationship to the body. This is particularly evident within sport where the physical body is positioned as a central means through which social identity is presented. For instance, Probyn identifies the way in which shame and the body often go hand in hand. She suggests that 'it is perhaps more intriguing that sociological accounts of sport in the main refuse to enter into the dynamics of competition, and the bodily experience of shame that so often accompanies sport' (Probyn 2000: 20). The argument expressed here is that competition, or the social value placed upon competition, creates an environment where there is a constant need for individuals to contemplate their bodies in relation to other bodies. This is particularly evident within sporting practices where the body is central to participation. This not only applies to competitive sport, but also to everyday activities such as the use of a public gym or swimming pool. Probyn cites the locker room as a prime example. By applying the notion of shame, Probyn provides the example of how an individual is constantly directed towards contemplating his or her body, either consciously or unconsciously, in terms of successful performances on the field or in comparison to other types of body (for example more muscular or slimmer) in the locker room. Sport, therefore, provides a key component in reinforcing the importance of corporeal power relations. This can, in turn, be directed to gender relations and the continued acceptance of masculine assertiveness and aggressiveness as being socially acceptable. Thus, Ian Roberts, was accepted because his masculinity was not compromised by 'gayness'. His physical and bodily displays are predominantly grounded in western, heterosexual understandings of male performance and the male body. He is left with little to be 'ashamed' of and, in turn, normative presentation of his body negates any shame to be derived from being gay.

Consequently, sport provides a useful setting for exploring masculine identity and understanding of the body. My research draws upon some of these ideas, especially in relation to men and their ability to participate in sport. Responses from both gay and straight men highlight the extent to which the body is central in presenting a normative version of masculinity. Although marginalized in terms of mainstream sport, gay men who participate in gay sports are still influenced by traditional bodily performance-based ideals. This causes conflict with the inclusive aims generally promoted by alternative sport. O'Neill and Hird (2001) describe the problems faced by gay, disabled men within the gay community. The men O'Neill interviewed were discriminated against to a greater extent within the gay 'scene' and in general they

considered other able bodied gay men were less welcoming because of their fixation with the body beautiful. O'Neill's work provides further justification for the focus on gay men's experience of their bodies. Interestingly, the men O'Neill interviewed were keen to identify with being gay rather than disabled, which may suggest that stigmatisation of the body is considered socially more injurious in comparison to subordinate sexuality.

A gay sports group or association, it could be reasonably assumed, is established because of an understanding of collective subordinated sexuality. But in terms of a collective identity, a gay sports club has conflicting ideals. On the one hand, it has been set up to provide an environment away from the oppressive heterosexuality found in general sports clubs. Whilst, on the other hand, the club is based around competitive sport and adopts traditional sporting procedures.

Pronger (2000) suggests the emancipatory power that appeared initially within the Gay and Lesbian community, particularly in its approach to sport, has been quelled in recent years through the attempts to 'normalise' and become part of mainstream sport. This is particularly relevant to the themes in my research as it is in these attempts to adopt 'normal' sport practices that hegemonic masculine performances are often adopted and accepted. Although Pronger acknowledges advances in the cause of Lesbian and Gay movement, in making it more visible and transforming sport from its history of systematic oppression, he suggests there are still only a few high profile openly gay athletes and that there has been no scholarly research that shows mainstream sport to be a significantly welcome environment for sexual minorities.

> I suggest that the progress of L and G community sports, seen in the light of the socially transformative ambitions of some of the historical streams of the G and L movement, has been more about dominant socio-cultural systems (including sports) appeasing, co-opting, indeed diffusing the transformative possibilities of the sexual margins than it has been about increasing human freedom.
>
> (Pronger 2000: 225)

Importantly, Pronger demonstrates how the possibility of challenging discriminatory practices, both within sport and other social spaces, is limited by certain power systems which tend to maintain unfair positions of power. In sport, homosexuality has traditionally been organised as negatively and prohibitively other to mainstream (heterosexual) sport. In gay community sport, particularly in North America, a liberal approach has been adopted which seeks to provide access for lesbians and gays to the mainstream rather than confront or challenge its core ideals. Pronger cites the Gay Games as a prime example of an 'inclusion' approach. For him, gay sports culture is the very model of liberal, inclusive lesbian and gay politics and aspirations. Consequently, it is a very popular form of mainstream gay culture. This expresses dominant gay liberal philosophy where lesbians and

gays are positioned as similar to anybody else, for example, in that they shop, eat, have families and play sports. Gay sports, it follows from this line of reasoning, proves normality in the same way that being a successful business person or doctor proves gay normality. Because of this many gay sports organisations seek legitimisation from traditional sports authorities, for example, the gay tennis group in my sample adhere to the Lawn Tennis Associations regulations, instead of attempting to formulate practices which accommodate the needs of those wanting to take part.

Although Pronger believes that gay sports have provided lesbian and gay people the opportunity to enjoy sports in an inclusive and safe environment, ultimately it has made these people conform to the established norms, particularly those based on oppressive male heterosexual codes. Speaking on a broader level, Segal agrees when she suggests that 'it is now a commonplace perception that gay men have more in common with straight men than gay women, and vice versa' (Segal 1990: 149).

The conflict of interests for the amateur gay male sports player provides an important aspect for consideration. Especially when taking into account the extent to which the promotion and display of a particular form of masculinity, through bodily practices, reinforces the dominant version of masculinity to the detriment of others. This discrimination in sport can be experienced by gay men, women and many heterosexual men alike. By including this aspect, I have explored whether there is potential to be found in the transformative aspects of subordinated, or alternative, sporting practice (such as a gay tennis club) and the extent to which subordinated groups have the ability to challenge current discriminatory practices evident within mainstream sport. This is also why I have attempted assess whether some of the ideas proposed by Butler (1993) in relation to queer acts and performativity, if read in terms of bodily practices and ethnographic research, could be applied to orthodox sport in order to highlight and challenge the discriminatory normative practices which currently prevail. Thus, for instance, within gay sports, is there potential to be found in the acts which 'queer' the performances rather than reinforce the normative?

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how sport occupies an integral, and complex, position within contemporary culture. From a historical perspective, sport has emerged into its current form as both a powerful institution within broader political contexts as well as a social space which continues to be considered male territory. Consequently, sport is a social space where certain expected expressions of masculinity are made and remade to the extent that representations of alternative or 'failed' masculinity are marginalized. The prioritisation of specific performances of masculinity results in the continued discrimination of women, but also those men considered unable to present the appropriate displays. During this process it becomes evident that the body, gender and sexuality are central factors in the construction of contemporary understandings of sport. As such, it is necessary to explore these themes further.

3 Bodies and Masculinities

In the previous chapter I explored a range of literature which specifically located sport as the focus. The intention was to demonstrate the contribution of sport in the construction of contemporary masculinities and how many accounts of sport fail to fully take into consideration the significance of the body, gender and sexuality. Often, within the sociology of sport, these issues are considered 'outside' of what is seen as the legitimate focus for study. Therefore, in order to address what I consider to be important issues, it is necessary to explore broader concepts which relate to the body, gender and sexuality.

Sociology has only relatively recently acknowledged the significance of the body as a central theoretical concern (Turner 1984, Frank 1990, Shilling 1993). The body has been generally disregarded by sociology to the extent that, according to Turner (1984), theories of the body only emerged when the problem of nature versus culture became a major consideration. Turner's materialist theory of the body is important in that it recognises body practices, particularly where social labour addresses both the individual and collective body. For Turner, there is a need to debate the question of nature before developing a theory of the body. According to him, as mainstream sociology did not initially encompass the debate about nature it subsequently failed to develop a theory of the body. Turner suggests that because sociology has its origins in questions surrounding the emergence of industrial society it has tended to privilege the history of economics, law and politics over the history of feelings, emotions and corporeality. Consequently, theories of the body have emerged either outside sociology or in a submerged form inside the discipline. For example, this becomes more evident when taking into account the development of feminist theory which recognised the significance of women's lives and their experience of their bodies in relation to broader social institutions such as the family and work.

More recently, many sociological accounts of the body have attempted to incorporate a broadly post-structural position where the focus has been on the heterogeneous techniques, practices and forms of training which are constructed through discourse and regulate the individual. Much of

Foucault's theory has been influential in these accounts of the disciplined body, especially in the way power is located in knowledge structures (Foucault 1977). However, his arguments which are generated through secondary readings of historical texts, have contributed to a boom in other sociological studies adopting similar research methods. Turner (2002) has described a consequent problem in contemporary social theory as being related to the proliferation of text-based 'descriptive' sociology. Turner suggests that mainstream sociology has failed to develop concepts which relate to the individual. Instead, it has focused on the structures governing individual bodies leaving little room to explore the potential of individual agency. This is particularly the case with Foucault's (1986) exploration of the social regulation of pleasure. Here Foucault provides a convincing exploration of the discourses which construct a social understanding of pleasure and its subsequent regulation. However, it is possible to argue that Foucault fails to take into account the actual individual bodily experience of pleasure. This is particularly ironic when taking into account Foucault's subversive personal behaviour and his predisposition towards sadomasochistic practices (Eribon 1992, Miller 1994).

Nevertheless, it is important not to overlook theoretical work which has placed greater emphasis on social structures. For example, in the case of sports such as football or tennis, it is foolish to ignore the relevance of class structures which have historically played a significant part in their positioning within contemporary sporting structures. This is especially the case when taking into consideration the varying levels of social status which are ascribed to different types of sports. At the same time, as I have described in Chapter 2, gender is significant as a social category which also contributes to the contemporary understanding of sporting practice. As such, I believe that it is important to recognise the contribution of theorists such as Bourdieu (1977, 1990) who describes the relevance of class, in terms of cultural capital and status and Butler (1990, 1993) who focuses upon the discursive limits of gender and sexuality.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND THE BODY

Language structures are the starting point for Bourdieu (1977, 1990) in that speech acts inform and shape the habitus. Habitus, in simple terms, can be considered as cultural background where a multitude of tastes, styles and manners constitute a form of cultural identity. However, for Bourdieu, it also operates as a link between the subjective accounts of the individual and the objective evaluation of the social. As Jenkins explains,

> Social life cannot, however, be fully understood as simply the aggregate of individual behaviour. Bourdieu develops the concept of Habitus in an attempt to provide a bridge between the subjective and the objective,

> which is considered an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted.
> (Jenkins 1992: 95)

Speech acts occur through linguistic habitus, such as speaking properly and a linguistic market which determines what can and cannot be said. Language, and in particular the linguistic market, also provides a link with Butler who focuses upon the role of discourse, as materialised in speech-acts, in creating normative discursive understandings of gender. Bourdieu, however, operates from a more traditional sociological standpoint. He derives much from the works of Marx in his focus upon specific social groups exerting power over subordinate groups. However, rather than the capacity of dominant groups to maintain their power through ownership of the means of production, for Bourdieu, power is expressed through their ability to define what society holds in distinction. It is no longer the means of production which constitutes domination but socially recognised taste which has the capacity to determine terms of distinction. Domination is mediated by 'taste'. Thus, for Bourdieu, the 'habitus' reflects a member's internalisation, as natural, of the taste of his or her class.

In terms of establishing a class position, habitus often involves the social presentation of taste as natural or 'second nature'. The notion of second nature is a predominant feature in body presentation. For example in contemporary society, greater esteem is given to those who are able to present social performances of 'natural beauty'. An individual who has achieved a specific body image through, for instance, excessive training, dieting, steroids or plastic surgery does not carry the same cultural capital as a slender model who can eat anything without gaining weight or the handsome actor born with good 'bone structure'.

Bourdieu is instructive as he describes the social world and the way individuals achieve understanding of this social world through bodily practice. The concept of practice is particularly relevant as it provides a means of acknowledging the role of the individual and individual experience in wider social relations. For Bourdieu, practice is first located in space and in time and secondly, it is not consciously organised and orchestrated. For instance, Bourdieu talks about social relations in terms of how an individual develops 'a feel for the game' through, 'a mastery acquired by experience of the game, and one which works outside of conscious control and discourse (in a way that, for instance, techniques of the body do)' (Bourdieu 1990: 61).

Bourdieu's concept of a social actor learning the rules of the game is similar to Goffman's (1972) sense of theatrical activity. Both acknowledge the role of the individual within social interaction, but Bourdieu develops this further when he refers to doxic experience. This relates to the notion that people take themselves and their social world for granted, that is, they do not think about it because they do not have to. This relates well to the example of gender and masculinity. However, it is interesting to consider

whether some men think less about 'being masculine' and their masculine identity as an aspect of their social world in comparison to other men. For instance, do gay men have to negotiate their social worlds with the constant knowledge that their sexuality is considered socially unacceptable? Unless, that is, the ability to present normative masculinity through bodily presentation is problematic for both straight and gay men alike and there are certain social situations where identity performances (as expressed through the body) are more important than sexuality alone.

Bourdieu's metaphor of social life as a game does have problems though, as Jenkins (1992) points out. Games have rules and are learnt through explicit teaching as well as practice, which is important for social competence. However, in sport, excellence is prioritised whereas only competence is needed for the habitus. The problem with this description is that Bourdieu does not fully account for the difference between competence and excellence. This is a factor particularly in the sports field where competence allows participation, but only to an extent. The social constructions of gender and sexuality create barriers to participation regardless of competence or excellence. Thus, within sport, the continued focus on excellence, in the form of idealized versions of bodily performance, is not fully covered by the concepts of taste and cultural capital when taking into account gender and sexuality.

An important aspect of this relates to Hexus which can be considered as forming the style and manner in which actors perform, such as gait, stance or gesture. Hexus presents a social performance of where the individual is located within the habitus. It also demonstrates the importance of the body in Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the habitus. For it is in bodily hexis that the idiosyncratic (the personal) combines with the systematic (the social) and mediates a link between an individual's subjective world and the cultural world into which he or she is born and which she or he shares with others. Thus, as concisely clarified by Jenkins,

> For Bourdieu, the body is a mnemonic device upon and in which the very basics of culture, the practical taxonomies of the habitus, are imprinted and encoded in a socializing or learning process which commences during early childhood. This differentiation between learning and socialisation is important: the habitus is inculcated as much, if not more, by experience as by explicit teaching.
>
> (Jenkins 1992: 76)

In habitus, power derives from the taken for granted aspects of the performances. Socially competent performances are produced through routine, in the sense that the actor's competence is demonstrated in their not necessarily knowing what they are doing. For example, many men, I would suggest, may perform hegemonic masculinity competently, but would not necessarily be able to recognise their actions clearly or describe the concept of masculinity.

As previously suggested, Bourdieu moves from an orthodox Marxist reading of class when he develops the concept of distinction, which is a

broader analysis of lifestyle. A key characteristic within this is taste and its relationship to social identity. Bourdieu is able to recognise the complexity of cultural relations where more abstract forms of distinction can be learnt from available social structures and performed through the body via hexus. Thus, if this concept is applied to explorations of the body and masculinity, one can assess the various forms of cultural capital which operate within these areas and the extent to which performances of the body maintain existing constructions of gender and sexual identity. At the same time, Bourdieu acknowledges the importance of the political agenda established within these concepts as they invariably highlight many forms of inequality, particularly in relation to gender, sexuality and the body. Therefore, central to Bourdieu's argument is that struggles about the meaning of things and specifically the meaning of the social world are an aspect of social struggle. Throughout his work, Bourdieu provides the same argument that social reproduction of the established order is largely secured by symbolic violence, a process of cultural reproduction. This is particularly evident in contemporary society where male domination of women continues (Bourdieu 2001). Applying arguments which have arisen from subordinated groups, such as the women and gays provides the opportunity to challenge some of the existing and taken for granted aspects of contemporary culture. Consequently, Bourdieu's ideas remain relevant because they acknowledge that study of gender and the body, particularly if applied to the performance of subordinated gender, is a means by which we can challenge existing discriminatory practices.

Feminist studies (for example, de Beauvoir, 1972; Firestone, 1979; Wolf, 1990; Butler 1990, 1993; Segal, 1997) have highlighted the problematic nature of masculinity and how certain forms of masculine performance have maintained their cultural dominance. It is also these prevalent forms of masculinity which continue to provide the formula through which men construct an understanding of their bodies and gender identity. Assessing the extent of male bodily practices in the construction of gender is only apparent if we are aware of these dominant forms. Feminist readings of the gendered body also allow consideration of the extent to which gay men identify with subordinated interpretations of their own masculinity. As such, it is important to acknowledge feminist accounts which identity the conflicting nature of gender relations. For example, Segal (1997) is critical of the dominant versions of masculinity which preside at the expense of women and alternative forms of masculinity. In these, there is a social understanding of 'manhood' which still carries greater symbolic weight in comparison to 'womanhood' and one of the problems resulting from this is a constant focus on the divisions or differences between men and women. Constant focus on heterosexual masculinity causes an emphasis on presenting a distinction between male and female behaviour and, in turn, presents to others the accepted version of gender. The use of binary distinctions of gender creates a distorted understanding of what 'being' male or female entails. For example, within sports there is the constant assumption that

men are more able to take part than women. Often in this setting, the language used to describe sportsmen is presented as powerful and dominant, whereas for women it is weak and subservient (to men). Consequently, forms of masculinity considered subordinate within this construction offer the potential to challenge these taken for granted assumptions and also provide the opportunity to expose the inequalities and limitations of positioning heterosexual masculinity as the model form.

Men, in general, still have greater access to cultural prestige and political power compared to women, but it is only particular groups of men who occupy positions of power. For Segal (1997), class and race are the chief factors for inequalities between men, but it is gender and sexuality which present the major threat to hegemonic masculinity. The position of power occupied by heterosexual men is justified through a biological determinist understanding of gender based on natural difference. These power relations are continually reinforced through institutional practices such as heterosexual marriage. Consequently, gay men pose a threat in terms of their blurring of these gendered binary distinctions. As such, according to Segal

> There is nothing at all surprising about homophobia and the reassertion of men's rights and traditional masculinity operating in tandem. Both are a defence of the dominant form of masculinity enshrined in marriage, a 'masculinity' which is—despite its rhetoric—less a state of mind or body, than the various institutionalised routines for preserving men's power over women and over men who deviate from masculine ideals.
>
> (Segal 1997: 158)

Segal analyses masculinity in order to assess the relationships of gender in contemporary society and how constant reinforcing of gender binaries establishes an uneven balance between the sexes. There have been attempts within post-structuralist feminism to move beyond the limitations of these binary distinctions by highlighting ways in which normative assumptions can be disrupted. Butler (1990) does this by focusing more specifically on alternative sexual practices as well as gender. Her ideas resonate because of their focus on the body and bodily performances and also because of the potential impact to be achieved by challenging the whole sex/gender matrix. This can be applied particularly in the male dominated world of sport where these ideas could be incorporated in order to challenge existing discriminatory practices, not only in terms of gender and sexuality but also in relation to social definitions of the able body.

SEXUAL BODIES

Butler (1993) describes how normative gender is produced through language and how, in consequence, bodily performances create a social demonstration of normative behaviour. However, rather than being a theatrical performance

or reproduction of learnt existing, set social practices in the interactionist sense (Goffman 1972), these bodily performances constitute a discursive 'act' and, as such, for Butler, power is formed within these acts. For Butler, performance presumes a subject is already at hand or in existence whereas performativity contests the very notion of the subject and has the ability to create meaning. Butler starts with the Foucauldian premise that power works in part through discourse and to produce and destabilize subjects but goes on to contemplate performativity (particularly in speech acts but also through bodily performance where she uses the example of drag as a means of highlighting performances where gender is questioned) as the aspect of discourse which has the capacity to produce what it names (Butler 1993: 225). Performativity is based on an expectation of what is considered gendered behaviour. The expectation ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates. Butler also notes that performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition or ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body.

Butler (1997) also draws upon some of the theories of Bourdieu in order to explore further the role of the body. She focuses on how the habitus is formed over time and how this formation produces a belief in the reality of the social field in which it operates. Through this process of formation there is a sense that bodies are being animated by social conventions and in turn reproducing and ritualising these conventions into practices. For Butler this means that the habitus is both formed and also able to form

> In this sense, the habitus is formed, but it is also formative: it is in this sense that the bodily habitus constitutes a tacit form of performativity, a citational chain lived and believed at the level of the body. The habitus is not only a site for the reproduction of the belief in the reality of a given social field—a belief by which that field is sustained—but also generates dispositions which "incline" the social subject to act in relative conformity with the ostensibly objective demands of the field.
>
> (Butler 1997: 155)

Butler applies Bourdieu's concept of bodily hexus and doxa where the notion of the taken for granted world located in the doxa corresponds, to an extent, with Butler's interest in normative practices. Both theorists are keen to explain the relevance of ordinary language and the way in which the body is invested more heavily in ordinary or everyday language. However, Butler is critical of Bourdieu in that his suggestion that the individual is coerced into acting into conformity reduces the potential of agency.

> In Bourdieu's account of performative speech acts, the subject who utters the performative is positioned on a map of social power in a fairly fixed way and this performative will or will not work depending on whether the subject who performs the utterance is already authorized to make it work by the position of social power she or he occupies.
>
> (Butler 1997: 156)

For Butler, the social performative is not only a central part of subject formation but a factor in the ongoing 'political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well' (Butler 1997: 160). This presents the possibility of a speech act as an insurrectionary act. This aspect is important, but it could be claimed that Butler does miss the opportunity to go further in acknowledging the role of the body. Both Bourdieu and Butler recognise the relevance of ordinary language as opposed to philosophical or intellectualised language in the construction of normative power relationships. However, the significance of the 'bodily act'—not only in terms of expressing language but also as a means of expression and experience for the individual—is not taken far enough.

However, Butler's concepts are important because she puts forward the idea that sex has the power to destabilize gender. As a gay woman, she is also able to draw upon personal experience in order to question the complex ways in which gay people respond to their sexuality

> I sought to understand some of the terror and anxiety that some people suffer in 'becoming gay', the fear of losing one's place in gender or not knowing who one will be if one sleeps with someone of ostensibly 'same' gender. This constitutes a certain crisis in ontology experienced at the level of both sexuality and language.
>
> (Butler 1997: xi)

However, the condition of being gay is understood in terms of the social regimes of signification that describe it. The 'fear of losing one's place in gender' provides a legitimate context to account for the discourse which describes the social understanding of gay but does not fully account for the participation in the physical experience which resulted in the terror and anxiety suffered by the individual. Terror and anxiety also relates to a bodily terror, in the way that Sartre describes in his novel, *Nausea*, and in his philosophical essay, *Being and Nothingness* (1956). His descriptions of the impact of becoming aware of one's existence (and meaninglessness) affect thoughts, ideas and feelings as well as the physical body. Terror (or nausea) is at the same time a psychological and physiological manifestation which acts upon the body.

Butler presents the argument that in the case of heterosexuality, or any other dominant form of ideology, crafting or determining a sexual position always involves becoming haunted by what is excluded (Butler 1994: 34). The more rigid the position and greater reluctance to accommodate alternative forms creates a problem that the stance needs to be defended and invariably becomes hostile to those alternatives. Thus, for her, the greater the binary distinctions which promote social understandings of male and female as separate, opposite gender positions the greater the intolerance generated through these practices. For Butler, this can be seen in contemporary heteronormative practices and in the way institutional practices shape

social understanding of the body. For instance, the social understanding of pregnancy, which is associated with a biological understanding of gender rather than a discursive framework, produces acceptance of it being a feminine space (Butler 1994: 33). The same could be applied to sport, where the discursive framework rationalizes it as an arena where male physical activity and performance is considered natural in comparison to women's sporting performance. Butler is critical of the discursive framework which positions heterosexual men in a binary opposition to women. The binary also positions gays as opposite to heterosexual men and alongside women. This distinction creates a normative understanding of the heterosexual male as superior to women and gays.

For Butler, transformative possibilities are to be found in queer acts which provide the opportunity to oppose and de-stabilise normative understandings of gender behaviour. According to her, the concept of performativity is the aspect of discourse which has the capacity to produce what it names. Through repetition and continued citing, in the case of speech acts, this production occurs. Thus, performativity is, for her, 'the vehicle through which ontological effects are established' (Butler 1994: 33).

Therefore, in terms of sport, a gay tennis club, for instance, presents the initial opportunity for what could be considered a queer act. This is because the understanding of sport is established within heterosexual discourse where gay is equated with feminine or failed masculinity and, consequently, not considered a part of it. A gay tennis club initially causes reconsideration of the broader understandings of sport and gender in the same way that Butler provided 'drag' as an example of a performative queer act. However, as Butler states, the performative only works if it is constantly repeated and recited. Therefore, in terms of the gay tennis club, queer acts would have to destabilise the performance of tennis as well as gender because the act of a gay man or woman playing tennis would not necessarily call into question the ontological effects already installed within sport discourse.

Another problem is that these acts are located within language which leaves little room in Butler's argument to make the transition from queer (abstr)acts to bodily-based acts of subversion which actively engage the individual or groups of individuals. Thus, the example of a queer act, such as drag, could be considered as too subjective in that the overall view of drag as a performance does not fully take into account the social processes through which the individual came to engage in an act which is already understood as subversive in some way. According to Kirsch (2000), Butler, along with many other strands of current queer theory, fails to take into account other social factors, such as class and, ultimately, fall into the trap of 'forgetting that observable norms do exist, and are enforced through socialization, and are fundamental to the exercise of power' (Kirsch 2000: 18).

Butler's reliance upon exclusively linguistic sources is also problematic. Edwards (1998) offers a reasoned critique when he suggests that

> As an analysis within the discipline of literary criticism per se this seems perfectly appropriate; yet to propose that this then forms the mainstay of contemporary sexual politics or even, perhaps more appropriately, the foundation for a queer cultural critique is overstating its significance and fraught with difficulties, not least of all the extrapolation of social and political developments through an analysis of elite cultural texts.
>
> (Edwards 1998: 475)

Butler's arguments contribute significantly to contemporary debates about the continued status of heterosexual masculinity. She also acknowledges the importance of considering the body and body performances within the process of constructed gender identities. Butler's arguments are also helpful, particularly in terms of her application of sexuality to the gender debate and her recognition of the potential of transformative aspects found in subversive 'queer' acts. Although I do not entirely support Butler's theoretical standpoint, her arguments relating to queer acts are important to consider, especially when attempting to explore the potentially transgressive spaces occupied by gay sports clubs. Bourdieu is instructive in terms of his reconfiguration of class which incorporates a broader acknowledgment of lifestyle and culture and the way these can be expressed as cultural capital. However, although they agree that there remain forms of gender domination, whether this is through, heterosexual hegemony (Butler) or masculine domination (Bourdieu), it is their contrasting methodological approaches which generate most criticism. For some, these approaches are incompatible, but I feel that their claims relating to contemporary formulations of gender need to be prioritised. As such, it is through their shared ground that consideration must be given.

MASCULINITY AND THE PHYSICAL BODY

As I have indicated, Bourdieu and Butler do acknowledge the importance of the body within their arguments. However, they overlook the corporeal aspects (or the nitty-gritty elements of the 'lived' body) which ultimately influence the way an individual develops a sense of his or her own identity. I mentioned above that this was a criticism of Foucault, and part of the critique lies in the focus solely upon social structures and, in particular, discourse. It is important to take into consideration the ways in which men create understandings of their own bodies and in turn develop understandings of their own masculinity and others. Consequently, I have been drawn to theoretical positions which acknowledge the role of the body in shaping external social practices. As such, I believe the works of Connell (1995, 2000) are more instructive within this context as she is more able to apply a social constructionist approach which incorporates the physical body within these social processes. As Connell suggests,

> Bodies, in their own right as bodies, do matter. They age, get sick, enjoy, engender, give birth. There is an irreducible bodily dimension in experience and practice: the sweat cannot be excluded.
>
> (Connell 1995: 51).

Obviously, there are discourses which seek to explain social understandings of areas such as bodily health and sickness but all too often they do not take into account the individual, corporeal experience of the body. Maybe there are fears of moving towards biological essentialism, but this need not be the case. Connell is relevant as she argues for a stronger theoretical position, than those which focus solely on either the individual or discourse, which recognises the role bodies have in social agency and the influence they have in generating and shaping social conduct. For Connell, the body is the central means through which gendered identity is constructed. However, she argues that it is still important to recognise other external factors which influence directly or indirectly the construction of gendered identity. For example, she suggests most research on sport emphasises the ways in which disciplinary practices produce gender and thereby fails to capture the individual pleasure gained from the actual physical pursuit itself (Connell 1995: 61). In addition, she notes that the ways in which individuals experience their bodies vary. For example, an organised competitive tennis match, between two players, produces different emotions and feelings in comparison to the pleasure gained from hitting a ball to another person in a park or on a beach. Each can be considered physical, sporting pursuits but at the same time, the individual participating in them does so for contrasting reasons. This suggests that social factors interact with individual experiences of the body. This in turns creates a need to recognise not only the social forms and practices which underpin the individual's ability to take part in sport but also the unique experiences or physical thrill of bodily-based expression. For example, social codes may dictate the appropriateness of an individual taking part in an organised sport event but this does not necessarily take into account how the individual enjoys the experience. In a similar manner, it is difficult to understand from a purely Foucauldian perspective the individual enjoyment experienced by an elderly woman or an elite athlete when taking part in physical exercise or, for that point, why an individual who is excluded from an activity at the normative social level would want to continue to take part on his or her own or with other excluded people.

Also, on a broader level, Foucault does not fully account for individual bodily experiences, such as those associated with homosexuality, which are socially defined and socially regulated but continued even in the face of social exclusion. I described in the introduction how I enjoy sporting and physical activities, but have had to manage and negotiate my sexuality in order to continue taking part in mainstream sport. Thus, the bodily pleasures experienced through sporting activity have to be managed within a

social understanding of the discourse of sexuality, which in this case may diminish my ability or willingness to take part.

It is here that I believe Connell's arguments have continued resonance as they form the basis of an understanding of the importance of the body and bodily practices. Connell attempts to incorporate the role of the biological in the social construction of gender and also applies a sociological reading of the social world where social actors are exposed to the restrictions created by social structures. She explains that

> With bodies both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined, we face a pattern beyond the formulae of current social theory. This pattern might be termed body-reflexive practice.
>
> (Connell 1995: 61)

Body-reflexive practices are, she argues, formed through a circuit of bodily experiences which link to bodily interaction and bodily experience via socially constructed bodily understandings which lead to new bodily interactions. As a result, Connell argues that social theory needs to account for the corporeality of the body. It is 'through body-reflexive practices, bodies are addressed by social process and drawn into history, without ceasing to be bodies. . . . they do not turn into symbols, signs or positions in discourse' (Connell 1995: 64).

As such, materiality continues to matter and practice makes the world. Connell incorporates the corporeal to cultural definitions of gender in order to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of masculinity and femininity.

> Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex. Bodily experience is often central in the memories of our own lives, and thus our understanding of who and what we are.
>
> (Connell 1995: 53)

The acknowledgment of the relationship of the individual to his or her body is what distinguishes Connell's argument from others. She demonstrates how this corporeal relationship is at the same time influenced or governed by social definitions, for example, especially in the case of gender where there are classifications of masculinity and femininity. The body then is the starting point through which social definitions of gender can be read and, at the same time, as the individual experience of the living body is recognised there is the potential for a form of agency in the form of practice. Connell suggests that human practice makes the reality in which we reside and by acting within it, 'we convert initial situations into new situations. Practice constitutes and reconstitutes structures' (Connell 1995: 65).

I have also located the body as a central factor as it is implicated in gender enactment through various techniques, practices, forms of training or modes of comportment. Any questions relating to gender construction, sexuality, sporting participation and performance, I argue, need to incorporate the role of the body within these social processes. It is important to stress that, like Connell, I am interpreting the body from within what might broadly be described as the theoretical position of social constructionism. The acknowledgment of the physical body is important as an aspect of a neglected area within this position. However, and equally important, this concept does not in any way embrace biological determinism.

HEGEMONIC BODILY PRACTICES

Connell's theoretical position does also derive from an interpretation of Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony which, in turn, provides a more sophisticated reading of orthodox Marxist class relations by arguing that ruling groups maintain power through the consent of the masses rather than their coercion. Connell attempts to apply this to readings of Foucault, psychoanalysis and feminist theory in order to explore gender and, specifically, masculinities. She writes

> Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.
> (Connell 1995: 77)

More recently, criticisms have been made about research which engages both Gramscian and Foucauldian analyses. Pringle (2005) suggests that in many cases there has been a blurring of the two concepts without taking into account the conflicting theoretical starting points. Although, I believe that hegemonic masculinity still remains a valid concept, particularly when exploring and explaining the continued prevalence of male- based practices in sport, the term 'hegemonic masculinity' has become 'loaded' precisely because of its Marxist origins and the initial premise of a binary distinction based upon power. However, there is the possibility of, once again, a shift in thought where the dismissal of the ideas of Marx and Gramsci are being questioned (Thomas 2007).

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), in their response to more recent criticisms of the concept, hegemonic masculinity was developed in the eighties and was informed through a range of interested parties—such as gender, feminism, race, gay liberation, psychoanalysis and sociology. They explain,

> What emerged from this matrix in the mid-1980s was an analogue, in gender terms, of power structure research in political sociology—focusing the spotlight on a dominant group. Hegemonic masculinity was understood as a pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue.
>
> (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832)

For them, hegemonic masculinity operated at the expense of subordinated masculinity and although not assumed to be normal in statistical sense, it was considered normative.

> It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.
>
> (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832)

Thus, hegemonic masculinity provided the opportunity to recognise ones relationship to this form of masculine dominance, particularly in terms of complicity/support and whether the ability to do so was regardless of gender or sexuality.

Commendably, Connell is ready and willing to take on board criticisms of the earlier formulations of hegemonic masculinity, in particular, those coming from Post Structuralist and Realist positions. Similarly, it may be reasonable to suggest that Foucault, had he been alive today would have refined his ideas. For example, there has been particular interest in updating his latter work relating to 'technologies of the self' as evidenced by recent interpretations, such as Markula and Pringle (2006).

For Connell, hegemonic masculinity as a concept in the twenty-first century remains relevant. The basic premise of the concept 'remains the combination of the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 846). However, she makes the point of rejecting from earlier formulations the simple model of pattern of power (i.e., the global dominance of men over women) and hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type.

Although Connell implies that there is a prevailing hegemonic masculinity, there are also particular masculinities which could be considered hegemonic within specific local groups. For example, in sport, the body is used by the player to present the opponent with signs of strength and power. In this case, it is often exaggerated forms of heterosexual masculinity related to displays of strength and power which are considered most appropriate for success. Consequently, bodily displays which signal weakness are to be avoided or masked. Weakness is equated with feminine performances with the effect that hegemonic masculinity dominates at the expense of those who are considered unable to perform in the appropriate way, namely: women,

gay people and the disabled. Thus, in the case of the range of masculinities, hegemonic masculine oppression 'positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men' (Connell 1995: 78).

Although gay masculinities are the most conspicuous of subordinated masculinities, Connell acknowledges that there are heterosexual men who are subordinated by their bodily performance (sissies, wimps etc.). This she sees as a 'symbolic blurring with femininity' (Connell 1995: 79). The relationship between sexuality and bodily performance is an important aspect as I have focussed upon the interplay between the body, understandings of gender and the subsequent different levels of status conferred on them. There is, however, a problem which Connell does not fully clarify when she talks of 'gay' masculinity. Although other social factors such as race or class are taken into account, Connell falls into the trap of categorizing gay men as a singular group which is problematic in that there are many openly gay men who are still able to present hegemonic masculinity. Although some gay men are subordinated in the broader sense of the term they could be considered relatively successful in comparison to other heterosexual men. In this way, it is hard to generalize that all gay men are subordinated in the same way. On a broader level, the concept of hegemony, because it stresses contestation, allows us to think about competing masculinities, many of which become (temporarily) hegemonic in specific local contexts.

Within sport, it may be more relevant to talk of subordinated homosexuality as there are few openly gay professional sports players. Once again, though, there are exceptions. Ian Roberts, mentioned above, the former Australian rugby player, is a prime example of a successful sportsman who has come out as gay. However, popular interest in Roberts tends to focus on his presentation of normative masculinity through his body rather than his gayness. It is again hard to suggest that Roberts is subordinated in the same way that women who enter sport are. Similarly, Meyer (1991) describes how the movie star, Rock Hudson, was able, throughout his career, to present an accepted version of masculinity which masked his sexuality. This was achieved primarily through the physical presentation of his body and keeping his sexuality hidden from the general public. In certain circumstances, gay men are able to comply with hegemonic understandings of normative masculinity, particularly in areas such as traditionally male-based employments (Nardi 2000).

Although Connell demonstrates the importance of recognising a variety of masculine identities, these tend to be more related to a reading of heterosexual masculinities. Gay sexuality is defined in terms of a version of masculinity rather than as a complex range of identities to be found within the description of gay. Therefore, if the concept of hegemony allows us to think about competing masculinities, it needs to be applied to gay masculinities. Thus, in terms of gay men taking part in sport, there is a range of experiences which need to be acknowledged before it can be asserted that all gay men are subordinated within sporting practices. In terms of bodily

practices, many gay men are able to replicate hegemonic masculinity within the context of sporting practice.

The central focus of this book is the body and the understandings of bodily performance related to representations of normative masculinity and femininity. As such, Connell's hegemonic masculinity is best interpreted as a manifestation of bodily performance where the idealised version of masculinity is based on traditional heterosexual male expression at the expense of subordinated femininity. Providing examples of the variations in the experiences of gay men, in comparison to heterosexual men, is a useful way of evaluating the importance of body practices. I would suggest, then, that the gay men who are more likely to be subordinated are those whose bodily performances display feminine characteristics. As Segal (1997) suggests

> Although the persecution of homosexuals is most commonly the act of men against a minority of men, it is also the forced repression of the 'feminine' in all men. It is a way of keeping men separated off from women, and keeping women subordinate to men.
>
> (Segal 1997: 16)

Connell acknowledges a form of complicity among men in his version of hegemonic masculinity, where, even though only a small percentage of men rigorously practice it a majority of men still gain from it. They profit from what he calls the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell 1995: 79) and I would suggest that many gay men, based upon their ability to perform hegemonic masculinity, are also complicit with this. They are able to gain from the patriarchal dividend to the extent that they can achieve relative success in material terms. However, successful performances of hegemonic masculinity and returns from the patriarchal dividend are achieved at the expense of any momentum in the quest for gender and sexual equality.

Overall, Butler is helpful in terms of her contribution to queer politics and the way in which she provides a possible bridge between the concept of hegemony and Foucault. Equally important is the effort to develop an understanding of queer acts in relation to queer sporting practices. Particularly if applied to mainstream sport, Butler is more radical than Connell because she is more determined to dismantle the apparent presumptions based on gender and sexuality and is quick to dismiss notions of naturalness in relation to gender. For Butler, and those employing these arguments in sport contexts (Caudwell 2006, Eng 2006) queering language provides the opportunity to highlight existing assumptions of gender and sexual practice and expose the limitations of heteronormative gender-based discourse.

Butler produces some compelling arguments, particularly in relation to the notion of performance and queer acts. Reiterative acts constantly reinforce the normative and maintain understandings of (hetero)normative sexuality. Butler, like Foucault, although acknowledging the 'terror' of queerness, to an extent, ignores corporeality and individual consciousness,

by allowing constructions of gender to be dictated by discursive structures. However, Butler is relevant to analysis of sporting bodies because she employs sexuality as a means to highlight the normative practices found in understandings of gender. For her, and importantly for any critical analysis of sporting structures, homosexuality demonstrates a contrasting performance of accepted gender and with it the idea that alternative sexual practices have the power to destabilize heterosexual hegemony. She writes

> Certainly, I do not mean to claim that forms of sexual practice produce certain genders, but only that under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is used as a way of securing heterosexuality. (Butler 1999: xii)

The production of normal or 'normative' gender is a central concern for Butler and part of this involves establishing a link between gender and sexuality. In terms of the focus of this book, I feel that Butler's arguments in relation to gender performances and queer acts provide additional weight to Connell's concept of bodily practices. The notion that the policing of gender contributes to reinforcing heterosexuality is a valuable argument and gains greater resonance if applied with Connell's description of the circuit of bodily reflexive practices. For it is within this circuit that the policing of the social operates at the same time as the policing of the body.

Overall, I suggest that Connell's positioning of the body as more central in the construction of gender provides a more instructive account of contemporary masculinity and presents a greater insight through the incorporation of empirical evidence. I attempt to provide support for the claim that body practices are central in producing social understandings of gender and sexuality. This, I feel, becomes more evident when incorporated with analysis of sporting practices, gender and sexuality.

4 'Expected Masculine Performances' in Mainstream Sports

Serious Competitors, Natural Athletes and Casual Enthusiasts

In this chapter, I explore mainstream sports participation and how the gendered body becomes a central factor in not only constructing ones 'position' in relation to it but also further successful participation. By incorporating empirical material collected through ethnographic research (including, participant observation in a range of sports settings, such as team sports, sports clubs and gyms, as well as interviews with a range of men who took part in them),[1] I assess the ways constructions of 'real' or 'natural' masculine performances are played out. Empirical evidence is also used to highlight the ways in which the body becomes significant in the formulation of masculine sporting identities—and how the practices inherent in mainstream sports settings contribute to this.

I start this chapter by providing observations made at a mainstream (straight) tennis club.[2] These descriptions were taken from field notes compiled throughout the research. The intention is to provide a picture of the social practices which were in operation at the club, specifically in relation to gender and bodily performances. It is here that I identify a range of techniques and practices located within a particular form of masculine performance, one that is clearly part of a wider hegemonic formation but which places particular emphasis on bodily performances, which I examine through specific examples. I then provide observations taken from a gay tennis club in order to investigate further the ways in which expected forms of masculine performance prevail. I conclude this chapter with further observations made at a large health club as additional support for the arguments presented.

GENDERED PERFORMANCES AT THE STRAIGHT TENNIS CLUB

The tennis club provided a range of contexts in which different versions of masculinity were enacted. Taking part in a tennis club, like many other sports clubs, entails encountering and accommodating a range of people of different ages, sex and playing ability. These encounters had to be negotiated both on and off the court and at varying levels. For instance, the

expectations based upon playing ability were greater in a competitive league match in comparison to friendly games played during a social 'club' session. However, there were differing expectations depending upon whether a match or game was men only or mixed pairs. At the same time, off court social encounters had to be managed and practices both specifically related to tennis etiquette and broader social requirements needed to be managed by those who took part. Consequently, the participant observations at the tennis clubs provided the chance to explore the implications of these social encounters and the extent to which particular versions of masculinity were enacted and whether gender binaries were reinforced.

Throughout the summer season (May to September) the club held social tennis evenings, twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays. The intention was that all levels of players could come together to play each other in a relaxed and friendly setting. Playing games was organised by using a rotational format. Pairs (single-sex or mixed) would play seven games and then come off court so that the next four could go on. Only doubles was played during these sessions as it was considered more sociable and allowed for greater use of the courts.

During these social tennis sessions, there was a concerted effort to 'balance' the games so that more able players, in terms of their tennis ability were not matched against less-skilled players. This was achieved either by selecting mixed-sex teams or balancing good players with 'weaker' ones. It was interesting that all members appeared to learn their position within the hierarchy of playing ability and there appeared little dissent. However, the attempts to balance the play on closer observation did not always conform solely to playing ability. In many ways the structure favoured the adult male players who were under the age of fifty. The next in line were the elderly men, followed by women and juniors. The men who played in the A team were considered the highest standard followed by the men's B team (the elderly men formed the mainstay of the B team). The women's A team was next, although there were two women who were able to play at a higher standard than most of the men in the B team. Consequently, most status was afforded to the men in the A team. This was continually acknowledged in the selection process for games when pairs were decided. I often heard, 'You're much to good for us', or 'You can take the three of us on by yourself' to an extent that some of the weaker players openly expressed embarrassment based on the belief that they would not be able to compete at the same level and 'let the side down'. Often when there was an uneven balance of men and women, some of the 'weaker' male players assumed the 'female' role in the pair. Often this happened in small internal, social tournaments when there were usually more men. The role was generally adopted without any complaint, but usually accompanied by some form of humour.

There were also 'unwritten' codes of behaviour when playing in these mixed (sex and ability) pairs. There was an expectation that the good male players would not try too hard which meant, for example, not hitting the

ball too hard or directly at the woman, or not playing a drop shot or acute angle which would be considered to be too far out of the reach of the female opponent. Significantly, there was still an element of concession when men were playing with women of a high standard. Often, in a match situation, the man was automatically presumed to be the stronger player (although not necessarily the case in many pairings) and would always take the lead. Men were generally expected to play on the backhand side, as there was a belief that women would be less able to control a backhand in comparison to men as this stroke required greater strength in the wrist. Consequently, the woman was generally considered the 'weak link' in a mixed pairing, which meant that they could be exploited by opposing pairs. To cover for this, the man was expected to take most of the balls, run for the ball more and generally be more aggressive. The implication was that, even in the context of an informal tennis game, a gender binary was reproduced in which women were constructed as less able, weaker or less able to lead. I noticed how this understanding of gender roles was rarely questioned and women players would also discuss other female opponents in the same manner.

There was only one noticeable occasion when the gender balance was challenged. This occurred in the early stages of the research, when a female player, Sonia, joined the club for a short period. She was an extremely good player, competitive in her play, but also good-natured. She made a point of adopting an attacking style of play and rushed to the net at any opportunity. She was also extremely fit and had recently started competitive weight lifting. In terms of the club and the teams, she was an ideal player to have, but she found it difficult to break into the club socially. The other women did not like her aggressive play, whereas many of the men also felt threatened by her play and did not want to include her in their match practice. She eventually left to concentrate on the weight lifting. The example highlights how established social codes prevailed which, in turn, regulated the interactions of the players. These were produced within the context of sporting conventions as well as broader social discourses of gender. At the same time, disruptions to the established practices needed to be regulated. However, it could also be suggested that Sonia's bodily displays did present an opportunity to challenge some of the prevailing social attitudes of normative gender performance. However, Sonia's experiences also highlight the spaces in which displays of 'female masculinity' (Halberstam 1998) are considered appropriate. Within the context of a sport where men *and* women play together, gendered performances may have different meaning than those within a single sex sport, such as women's football or hockey.[3] Although Sonia's experiences were short-lived, the ability to contest established understandings of normative gender practices which Butler (1993) and Bourdieu (2001) are critical of, is an important aspect and one which I explore further the Chapter 7.

Within the setting of the straight tennis club it was thus apparent that there was an established gender order and, as a result of which, much of the

social interaction needed to be adapted according to the specific gender context. I made a point of maintaining a diary of my experiences throughout the research. After attending one club social tennis evening, I noted in my diary how the tennis club was 'smothered by social etiquette'. The mixed-sex setting appeared to create the need for the men to curb their behaviour and maintain an awareness of the opposite sex and, consequently, curb their bodily behaviour and language.

The observation that the men needed to curb their behaviour in the presence of women was made after comparing their conduct in male-only settings, particularly in the men's league matches. The contrast between the social, mixed-sex setting of the tennis club night and a men's competitive team match was apparent. However, even in the setting of the mixed-club sessions, every effort was made to make sure that there would be time when men could play together. The women would acknowledge their position within the club by endorsing such a move. It was almost as if a men's four was reward for putting up with the women during the evening. Often I heard, 'you deserve a men's four' suggested by one of the women. The implication being that the men needed some form of outlet to let off steam after having to curb their behaviour during the mixed games or as a reward for putting up with inferior players. Much of the curbing of behaviour related to moderating bodily actions. Within the setting of an all male game, it was accepted that more excessive physical behaviour would be tolerated in comparison to mixed-sex games. I made a point of watching the bodily performances of several men playing in mixed games and then compared their actions with all male games. There was a noticeable contrast. In the all male games, they became more physical and animated. They would chase the ball more, attempt to hit the ball harder and appeared more determined in their approach to the game. Winning appeared more significant than in the mixed game, although the performance in attempting to win was just as important. For instance, a ball hit extremely hard and produced through great outward exertion by the player, whether a winning shot or not, received admiration from other players.

The contrast between the mixed sessions held during club social nights and all-male games was even more noticeable in the context of competitive matches with other clubs in the area. The club took part in a series of league matches, both home and away against teams in their division. There were many clubs in the area with differing levels of membership, facilities and standards. I was able to take part in the men's A team which played in both a summer and winter league. During these matches it was interesting to note how the focus shifted from the dynamics of internal club relations to that of a united club taking on an opponent. On many occasions, there were tensions between the opposing clubs based upon previous rivalries. Some of the other clubs had large memberships and better facilities. Many were extremely middle-class in terms of both their geographical location and members. This would often create an added air of competition for the

fixtures. I noticed on these occasions that the men playing for my team placed great significance on winning convincingly, as if they had something to prove. The extent to which the historical background of the straight tennis club as a working-men's sports club placed greater emphasis upon class divisions is debatable, however, my impression was that it provided an initial sense of rivalry which appeared to be part of the match process. At the same time, many of the observations provided evidence for the contrasting gendered performances, particularly if taking into account whether the match was all male or mixed. For example,

> *Opponents quite aggressive during the game. Although extremely gracious in defeat. Pleasant atmosphere after game. . . . During match noticed many times that other men used feminine forms to describe a bad shot. For instance, 'you big girl', 'you woman', 'twat' were all used on more than one occasion.*
>
> (Diary entry. Men's match against B)

The all-male environment in the matches enabled the men to relax (or reconstruct) their behaviour in contrast to situations where women were involved. They were able to be more competitive and aggressive during the match and this included being more physical in the game itself. For example, it was acceptable to hit the ball harder or even directly at the opponent. Sometimes the games would become more confrontational, with questioned line calls and arguments. Admonishing oneself was also a regular aspect during the game. It was interesting that if the remarks were not swearwords, they would often be descriptions of the feminine. Therefore, a bad shot was equated with a failed performance and constructed in terms of subordinate gender.

EXPECTED AND ACCEPTED SPORTING MASCULINITY

In the social arena of sport it is clear that the body plays a central role in determining who the appropriate participants should be. But this is not solely based upon the actual physical ability to perform movements related to the specific sporting event. Bodily performance provides a means of demonstrating other normative social requirements which relate to the prevalent codes of gender and sexual identity. Although I am focusing upon examples taken within a sporting context, it is clear that the men I observed and interviewed also performed gender and sexuality outside the sporting arena. However, by focusing upon the centrality of the body in sporting social practices, I have been able to observe a form of what I have termed 'expected sporting masculinity' which is expressed through bodily displays or performances. These bodily displays signal to the opponent or spectator a particular version of masculinity based upon aggressiveness,

competitiveness, power and assertiveness. Body practices also present maleness as a performance which is understood in terms of being diametrically opposite to femininity. These constructed understandings of gender appear even more significant when taking into account the value placed upon bodily presentation on the sports field where social activity is established upon principles such as competition, winning and overcoming opponents. The formulation of normative masculinity as superior to femininity and the practice of sport as a male social space create the (false) need for more obvious outward performances by those who wish to participate. This is particularly evident in the displays of the body which act as a central means through which an expected sporting masculine identity can be established and maintained.[4]

However, it is important to make it clear that this form of masculinity, located as it is in body practices, is not based solely upon physical build or biological sex. Expected sporting masculinity can be understood as a version of hegemonic masculinity in that it involves the subordination of competing forms of masculinity as well as femininities. However, what distinguishes it from versions of masculinity hegemonic in other constructs, for example the patriarch or the corporate leader, is the strong emphasis placed on bodily performance. Expected sporting masculinity is expressed through particular types of bodily performance which derive from traditional forms of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, especially where investment in the male physical body has been valued. This is particularly evident in sport, where the body becomes even more significant and specific displays are considered important. Greater value is placed upon displays of strength, skill and often aggression. In consequence, bodily performances which equate with weakness or inability are considered inferior. However, it is the performance of the body which is expected, not necessarily the social category, such as gender or age. Although these play a role, it is the bodily performance which provides the central focus. For example, in an elite sport such as professional tennis, players in the men's and women's events whether physically large or small tend to display exaggerated versions of aggressive masculinity through their on court manner (for instance, Rafael Nadal, Lleyton Hewitt, Serena Williams, Maria Sharapova). In this case, women are *performing* masculinities within the context of competitive sports, rather than in the way Halberstam (1998) talks of female masculinities. In the sporting context, men and women strut about the court, pump their clenched fists and act aggressively towards their opponents. In the same way, a wheelchair user, although disadvantaged in comparison to an able bodied athlete can still perform expected sporting masculinity in a similar manner and, consequently, reinforce the discriminatory practices found in organised sport, in particular those which constantly position hegemonic male bodily performances as exemplary. However, at the same time, evidence which supports the presence of expected sporting masculinity raises interesting questions about the extent to which traditional forms

of masculinity are threatened or subverted when it is performed by women, gay men, lesbians or the disabled. Thus, the context of professional, competitive sport may allow for women to display expected sporting masculinity, whereas the broader structures still operate to separate men's and women's sports. Outside of professional sport, displays of expected sporting masculinity become more problematic for women.

With this in mind, I have provided some examples in order to explore expected sporting masculinity and assess the relationship of the body to performances of this type of masculinity. Expected sporting masculinity is not necessarily just about excessive displays of physical aggression. It is sometimes expressed in more subtle forms and can be understood in terms of a form of masculine 'character' displayed through bodily performance. The following examples are taken from the field-notes written during my research at the straight tennis club. The first example is Toby, a younger and more recent member of the club. I had initially selected Toby as a potential interviewee mainly because of his age (eighteen) and because there were few others of his age at the club.[5]

The second example is based on observations of two older men (in their fifties) which specifically explores their physical performances at play. I chose these men to provide a contrast in age but also to demonstrate how expected sporting masculinity occurs, not only in men of contrasting ages but at differing social and competitive levels.

PERFORMANCES OF EXPECTED SPORTING MASCULINITY

I had arranged to play Toby and conduct an interview afterwards. He had joined the tennis club in the previous year with his father and older brother. They had moved to the area from another part of the country. Toby was currently taking a sports management course at a Further Education college and his brother was away at university for most of the year. Toby had taken a more active part in the club as he was still residing and studying in the area and had expressed an interest in becoming involved with one of the teams and playing competitive matches.

I had approached him initially to play a friendly game as a way of breaking the ice. As I had taken over running one of the teams, I knew he would be fairly keen to get in my 'good books' and was quite willing to take part in an interview when I suggested it. I was aware that I had acquired 'status' within the club, not only as an active member with a moderate amount of power in the sense that I could choose other team players, but also I was recognised as having tennis ability or sporting capital, which was seen as an 'asset' to the club. The relationship I developed with Toby also highlighted the nature of co-construction within the research process. I was more aware of this during my interactions with Toby which, I think, related more to my awareness of our age differences, along with the disparity in

other forms of cultural capital in contrast to the relationships developed with men at the other clubs. I was also aware, more than any of the other interviews, of the possibility that I could potentially exploit this position. Therefore, in terms of the research process, during my conversations with Toby, I felt a greater need to diffuse some of the more apparent differences. The status which I held at the club also extended to the initial relationship I had with Toby, in that there was also a pressure on him to impress me. In this social environment, I was considered an established 'player' and an accepted member of the club whereas Toby needed to acquire some status among the other members. At the same time there was a need for Toby to 'prove' himself to me as a 'sporting' male. His performance on the tennis court would not only provide evidence to me that he was a good player, but more importantly, his performance would also demonstrate his 'worth' in the club to others and at the same time affirm his masculinity to himself as well as me. This was also not to ignore the status I had to maintain within this particular social setting. I was aware that I had to prove myself to Toby in a number of ways as my understanding of my position within our relationship needed to be demonstrated in some way. The initial circumstance of our social relationship was built on common ground, based upon being male and taking part in sport. Diffusing or downplaying the other more contrasting areas of our lives created a greater emphasis upon sport and masculinity. To an extent, then, in my performances to Toby, I was aware of my own contribution to the reproduction of expected sporting masculinity as I was attempting to engage socially with him through existing understandings of 'appropriate' masculine behaviour within the arena of sport.

When I initially met Toby, he was extremely quiet. Often he would attend the club with his father and brother and they would play on their own. I thought it would be useful to have a few 'friendly' games with him before I attempted an interview. The first time we played, I asked if he would be willing to take part in my research. I explained the research in terms of an investigation into sport and participation. It appeared that Toby seemed to understand my research as more of an extended project similar to one that a secondary or high school student would conduct. Playing a game of tennis, as well as providing a useful method to observe at first hand bodily performance and expressions of masculinities, also helped diffuse some social barriers mentioned previously. However, two men meeting for the first time to engage in a competitive situation presented other potential social problems to negotiate. The very fact that the encounter would result in a winner or loser was problematic for each player and there were 'learnt' or expected ways to display winning or losing. At the same time there was also the possibility of risking some form of devaluation of personal masculine identity. Winning is constructed as an indication of being athletic, successful, and proficient in sport; which in turn signals, within hegemonic masculine discourses, the mark of a 'real' man. There is also greater social status associated with physical prowess in men, particularly in sport and it

has been my experience that these displays are demonstrated early, but in a range of ways.

In my initial games with Toby there were many times when he appeared quite concerned about displaying particular characteristics which would prove to me his 'worth' as a potential team member and, importantly, his ability to be one of the 'men'. During the initial 'knock-up' Toby would often apologise when he failed to return the ball to me at an appropriate length or if he hit the ball out. In this situation it was not only playing ability that was on the line, but also general 'masculine' performance on the court which would provide evidence of 'character'. In our game, although I was a stronger player, Toby was keen to run down every ball, to the extent that he fell over on several occasions. He would shout to himself and berate himself loudly if he did not get to a ball he felt he should have. For Toby, losing the match was not as important as providing evidence to me that he possessed the characteristics to be included in the realm of male sport. As I mentioned before, I was aware of being, to an extent, part of the established male sport arena and how Toby was keen to display the characteristics necessary to become a bona fide member of this club.

Tennis may be considered less aggressive than team sports such as football and rugby as it is a non contact sport, but at the same time, I have observed many displays of physical 'masculine posturing' on the tennis court and in the health club. For example, this posturing is often expressed by throwing the racquet or physical gestures such as a clenched fist after hitting a winning shot. It is also something which was in evidence among the men in both the straight and gay clubs, regardless of age. Even with the onset of age, it appeared that it was often difficult for the men to change habits developed through a lifetime of sporting practice. In the straight club the average age of membership was well into middle age.

Another example of age in relation to the performance of expected sporting masculinity can be seen in two older members, Clive and Roger, who were both in their fifties and had taken up tennis later in their lives. Football had been their main sport during their younger days and had continued at various levels until they were in their forties. The physical nature of the sport had taken its toll and as a result Clive had had to stop playing football after undergoing an operation on his damaged knee. Tennis was taken up as he considered it an active sport, but held less risk of incurring further injury to his knee through the continuous barrage of knocks received when tackled by opponents in a game of football. Clive was still extremely fit and was able to play tennis to a reasonable standard to the extent that he was, in a short period of time, playing for the B team. Roger did not take part in the club as much as Clive but for several years had played tennis (with Clive) on a regular basis. They had originally started playing tennis on Thursday nights throughout the year as this was generally football match practice night and both Clive and Roger previously attended this when they were playing for the football team. Playing tennis on Thursday meant that

they could have a drink afterwards in the main clubhouse bar and keep in touch with the other members of the football team.

If asked about their playing standard and their reasons for taking part, both would readily acknowledge their lack of skill in tennis and saw playing the game as a small, but important, social aspect of their lives. It was their time away from work, their wives and families and a time for pleasure as opposed to duty. Their enthusiasm was demonstrated by their willingness to play in all forms of weather throughout the year. At the straight club, Clive and Roger were not the exception, and from my experiences in other clubs around the country, groups of people would play regularly in all types of weather.

The irony was that when it came to actually playing the game, the outward signs that Clive and Roger exhibited suggest that they were not enjoying their experiences. To the observer there was evidence to suggest that the game was more of an ordeal as the men were constantly mumbling, gesturing, grimacing and often swearing. The general malaise was also often expressed physically though the body by the slapping of the thighs, hanging the head and even throwing racquets. Animosity was not usually directed towards the opponent, but appeared to be directed inward. During the game there was constant admonishing of their performance and often audible conversations with themselves in the form of reprimanding or goading, presumably in order to spur them back into action.

Apart from the physical act of playing a game of tennis, there was much more at stake, even in the context of a social game between friends, where on the surface there would appear to be little at stake. However, even a game at this level demonstrates the importance placed upon bodily performance as an indication of an individual's sense of masculine worth. At the same time it presents an external expression of social character to others. Performing well (at any level) is an important part in the construction and presentation of masculine identity. In this case, Clive and Roger provided clear indications that they enjoyed the physical experience of their bodies during sport. Clive told me how he got a 'buzz' from the physical sensation of running around on the tennis court in the same way that he did when he used to play football. This was a reason why he continued to take part in sports. However, the enjoyment of being able to experience the thrill of one's own physicality is displaced by the awareness of one's performance which provided a social signification of masculine worth. The discourses operating in sporting competitiveness and hegemonic masculinity locate the physical experience within a social context and produce a need to justify one's performance both during and after the game. During the game, as I have shown, such justifications take the form of an outwardly, physical display whilst, in the bar afterwards, there is a post-match analysis of the performance. Post-match analysis of sporting performances provides the opportunity to account for any poor showing in terms of an aberration. This was similar to Emmison's (1988) study of post-match accounts

of defeat by professional sportsmen where he found a major part of the social process for justifying a loss was to provide an explanation (or excuse) which would, in turn, create an understanding of the event as an one off occurrence—and thus justify not giving up completely.

I noticed a contrast to the on court performances of the men described previously when watching a match between two teenage girls at the same club a few days later. The two girls were playing an organised match as part of a knockout tournament run in conjunction with the county Lawn Tennis Association (LTA). The competitive element was enhanced by the fact that it was an organised match where the winner would progress to the next round. However, the relationship between the two players, who had never met before, was conducted in a spirit of mutual enjoyment and respect. There were no outwardly signs of trying to prove ones sexual identity and status. The girls laughed and joked before and after the game and spoke to each other between points and games. Although this is only a one off observation and detailed study of women who take part in sport was not part of this aspect of the research, I feel that it highlights the importance placed by men on performing masculinity in a specific social context. I am not suggesting the girls behaved in a typical manner. As I have mentioned before, performing expected sporting masculinity is not merely confined to men, although I would expect it to be a practice more prevalent for women in professional sport, rather than at an amateur level, where less emphasis is placed upon competitiveness and body performances. The important point is to recognise the role of the body and gender within these social spaces. The two teenage girls did not have to conform to the expectations of performing a version of masculinity in the way the men do when taking part in sport.

As the aforementioned examples demonstrate, 'expected sporting masculinity' can be understood as a particular assemblage of bodily performances which are located in a formation of hegemonic masculine practices. However, although this performance of masculinity operates within the specific context of sport, expected sporting masculinity is confined to performances *on* the playing field. There continue specific performances of sporting masculinity off the field, within the social and discursive spaces of sport, but these displays can be different within the context of heterosexual and gay spaces. These could be considered as performances of 'accepted sporting masculinity. As such, I have included observations from the research revealing more subtle ways in which masculinise within the context of sport are performed.

ACCEPTED SPORTING MASCULINE PERFORMANCES OFF COURT

Hegemonic masculinity prevails at the expense of femininity and other versions of masculinity, which are considered a 'failed masculinity'. Expected

sporting masculinity operates in the same way in that bodily performances, which do not uphold the characteristics expected, are also considered a form of failure and in the case of sporting participation, those who fail are literally confined to the sidelines.

Observations at the straight club revealed that, on court, failed masculinity was negotiated through performances of expected sporting masculinity. However, off court activities also provided many opportunities for the men to have to negotiate masculinity and this was particularly the case in conversations where there was the possibility for areas outside the remit of sporting practice to emerge.

Straight Men Talking Together

On court performances were revealing in terms of the emphasis placed upon bodily-based actions. However, a central aspect of the taking part in a tennis match was the social activity taking place before and after the game. Much of this revolved around conversations between team players and opponents on the way to a match or in the bar or clubhouse afterwards. The social context of the match situation and whether the game was single sex or mixed often determined the nature of conversations and the performances the men enacted. Appropriate masculinity, therefore, could also be constructed through talk about sport and the bodily performances required in it. On nearly all occasions, post-match conversations did not revolve around the game itself and although there may have been a sense of satisfaction in the result by the winning side there was a common courtesy (or sporting etiquette) which dictated that gloating was not acceptable. There was usually a summary of how the teams had been performing in their other matches which provided the opportunity to reassure the losing side that their defeat was not too detrimental to their overall performance in the league. For example:

> ***Competitive match***
>
> *Toby's first match in team. He was the youngest and had wanted to prove himself.*
>
> *Conversations in clubhouse afterwards were polite and respectful, although main conversation was football.*
>
> *There was sense of enjoyment in our team (as a result of winning) When opponents had left, our performances were reflected upon positively in terms of 'team' win.*
>
> (Diary entry. Home match against M . . .)

The main topic for conversation was sport in general. The common ground was usually football, although if there had been recent international sporting events, these would be included. On one occasion, there had been a high-profile boxing match the night before and the post-match conversation

immediately started with comments about the fight. For some reason, one of the players from the home club mentioned that the referee in the boxing match was wearing gloves. He thought that it was ridiculous that gloves were worn. Upon hearing this, another player suggested that they were worn as a precaution in case the referee had to remove the gum-shield from a boxer knocked unconscious. The player who made the original comment added that the gloves were hardly likely to protect the referee from a bit of saliva when it was more likely that he would be sprayed by blood and sweat during the course of the bout. The aspersion appeared to be that contemporary boxing had become 'softer'. One of the men agreed and then mentioned that it was a sign of the times, adding that in the clubhouse changing rooms the communal baths for football players had been removed because of the risk of HIV. (The inference was based on ill-informed views about potential sources of HIV transmission. One casualty of this paranoia was the suspension of the large communal baths used by footballers because of misplaced fears related to infected bodily fluids, such as blood and saliva, being transmitted in bath water.) There was a brief pause followed by what appeared to be a realisation among all the men that the conversation was moving from the safe area of sport towards the potentially awkward area of HIV and AIDS. The conversation quickly returned to a debate about whether Manchester United could continue winning in the next season.

The men appeared aware that issues relating to sexually transmitted diseases could be problematic for them. Their misinformed view that HIV was directly related to homosexuality and their reluctance to accommodate these issues within their conversations demonstrated how discourse created a shared knowledge which positioned heterosexual masculinity as normative. On another occasion, with a different team, the subject of homosexuality was explicitly raised when one of the men informed the group that his son was about to go to university in Brighton (England). Another then joked whether his son 'had turned gay' with the inference that Brighton was noted for its gay community and this must have prompted the choice of university. The father quickly responded by saying that his son was not gay although the conversation continued about Brighton and 'the gays' who lived there. The 'gays' were described almost in terms of another species and one of the group described to the others how 'they' occupied a certain area in the city and came out every year to march 'in leather with their arses hanging out'. Apart from this incident, the absence or subordination of women and subordinated forms masculinity within sport produced a subtle and less obvious form of heterosexual hegemony in comparison to explicit sexist and homophobic behaviour, such as the on court expressions described previously. What became apparent, however, was the requirement for a particular form of masculinity in order to take part in sport and this called upon both bodily and discursive performances.

Although there were different responses during the research process from the gay and straight men in relation to their willingness to freely disclose

information about their bodies, there were other times when the men from the straight club were able to discuss more personal aspects of their lives. The research process involved taking an active part in all aspects of club activities. As such, the interviews were not the only means of gaining valuable data during the fieldwork. Being an active participant and member of the tennis club granted me access to many areas where I could observe, take part in conversations or just listen. In the straight tennis club I was included as a named player in the men's first team (or A team) which meant playing in home and away fixtures in summer and winter leagues. As I was also able to play for the mixed team, this provided great opportunities to compare and contrast my experiences of men only matches as well as mixed gender matches. For example, in relation to the focus upon the extent to which bodily practices were central to the enactment of heterosexual masculinity, one particular example is instructive.

Taking part in away matches meant there were often long periods spent in a car travelling to the opponents ground. On one occasion, four of us drove together to an away match. Jez drove and Simon sat in the front with him while I sat in the back with Toby. A few weeks previously Jez and Simon had been discussing the idea of having a vasectomy. The topic had arisen when the conversation had moved to talking about children. Jez had three children by two partners and Simon had two from a previous marriage and his current partner already had two children. The topic had continued throughout subsequent journeys to away matches and the intimate setting of a car provided the opportunity for regular updates as both men had decided to have the operation. On this particular journey to an away match, Jez spoke about having had the operation the previous week. Simon was going to have his operation the next day. The drive lasted about three quarters of an hour, but nearly all the journey was spent discussing the procedure. Jez was able to inform Simon what had happened to him and, importantly, how long it would be before he could play the next match. The conversation was lighthearted in tone and each account was framed around or concluded with a joke, usually sexual in some form. There appeared to be good mileage in the sexual innuendo and both seemed quite keen to continue this as an aspect of the conversation. Seymour-Smith Wetherall and Phoenix (2002) notes in their study of men with testicular cancer that formulaic responses often have a canonical flavour in that they describe a sense of the true nature of 'men' and play with what is already established.

References were made regarding the actual operation procedure and about the embarrassment of having the doctor, whether male or female, (as well as other health workers) standing around the operating table while the patients were effectively powerless and at the mercy of the medical team. There was a sense of indignity about being made to lie prostrate on a table with, as Jez remarked, one's 'willy out' and being literally exposed to others. Jez spoke of his embarrassment at having to lie on the table exposed whilst the doctor and nurses carried on their conversations. At one stage the

nurse was having a conversation with him whilst he was having his groin manipulated. For both of them, there was a great amount of significance placed on being 'exposed' in a situation which they could not really control. The conversations appeared to suggest an anxiety about being powerless in this situation and a perception that this presented a potential threat to their masculine status.

Humour was employed as a means through which the conversation avoided taking on a more serious tone or a potentially uncomfortable direction. It provided a sense of mutual ironic understanding of the procedure. Their potential vulnerability and fear was diverted by the use of sexual innuendo and humour. Throughout all of this their bodies were a major source through which they recognised and demonstrated their masculinity, both to themselves and others.

The aforementioned example highlights the way in which the body is incorporated in the construction of masculine identity in that it provides a means of presenting signs of individual social status to others. The example also demonstrates the ways in which the body can present social definitions of normative masculinity. Lying helpless on a table was a direct contrast to the physical, heroic, exertions which could be presented on the tennis court. In both situations, however, it is the body which provides the focus for these definitions. Not only can the body provide the proof of masculinity through valorous performances, but it can betray it in situations where it is constructed as weak. The humorous tone during the conversations alleviated the problematic nature of potential powerlessness by placing emphasis on more light-hearted aspects of the procedure, which in turn presented the event as an aberration, in the same way that a defeat on court was accounted for.

The straight tennis club provided the chance to observe expected sporting masculine practices in action within the context of a traditional sporting site. However, I wanted to compare these observations with a site where bodily performances were still a central aspect for participation but the social codes found in traditional sport would not at first impression appear an obvious factor. The relatively recent emergence of health and leisure clubs highlight an area within contemporary society where importance is placed upon the physical body, but not purely in terms of sporting performances. Consequently, a health club was a site where some aspects of masculinity were potentially challenged and provided opportunities to explore, not only further evidence of expected sporting masculinity but also observe social situations where failed masculinity might emerge.

Body Performances in a Health Club

I purposefully included observation in a large health club in order to provide additional examples of the centrality of the body in constructing our understanding of individual and social identity. At the same time, a

different site provided an additional form of participant observation for methodological integrity and also meant that I could observe as a participant in a more covert way in comparison to my participation at the tennis clubs. The health club I selected was located in a large town about thirty minutes away from the straight tennis club. I knew that none of the members of the tennis club belonged to the health club and because it was a large health club, with over three thousand members, I felt that I could be relatively anonymous. The health club was also part of a large chain of similar ones located throughout the country and membership entitled free access to all of them. During the course of the fieldwork, I attempted to visit several other locations in order to consolidate the observations made at the main site. As the health club was large, in space and membership, I was able to observe without drawing attention to myself. For example, I was able to use a stepping machine or cycle for sometimes up to half an hour and at the same time view nearly all of the gym floor space. During the first year I attempted to attend at various times throughout the day because I wanted to assess how people behaved in both busy and relaxed times. In the second year, I attempted to attend on a regular basis at the same time so that I could observe the same people over a period of time. Throughout, I purposefully never spoke to anyone at length and although, after a period of time there were several people that I saw regularly, I only ventured as far as casual greetings. I did not make notes of the observation at the health club, but recorded them in the form of a research diary at home.

On first impression one would think that a health club would be an obvious site where contemplation of the body is foremost in the minds of the participant. But it is through the way the individual performs and presents the body that social understandings of gendered bodily performance become most apparent.

The principal aim of the health club I observed was to establish a facility for both sexes and all ages in an attempt to capitalize on a broad and lucrative leisure market. However, the historical legacy of gym culture and sports has remained that of a male preserve. Indeed, even recent research has tended to focus upon the male bodybuilder (for example Fussell 1992, Klein 1993). Even though all the clubs that I identified as part of the research site were open to both sexes, there was still evidence of gender divisions. As such, there continued to be territorial gendered spaces within the gym. For example, the free weights area was predominantly occupied by men in comparison to areas such as the aerobics studio or beauty salon which tended to be used by women.

One aspect of the health club which revealed the complexities of body presentation and the social requirements for appropriate gendered behaviour was found in the changing room. As Probyn suggests:

> The locker room is one of the only legitimate spaces in which same-sex naked bodies parade in intimate anonymity. Protected by a welter of

> codes about how and where to look, nonetheless strangers dress and undress, wash themselves, lathering breasts and bums in close proximity.
> (Probyn 2000: 20)

The changing room, as Probyn points out, is one of the few social spaces where it is considered acceptable for same sexes to be naked together. However, this does not mean that each individual experiences nakedness in a similar way. Even though it is socially acceptable, experience of one's own body and other bodies causes different forms of reflection and social display. Within the sporting context, a locker room represents a specific location which occupies an almost mythological status. For instance, a sports commentator builds up a description of the atmosphere in the locker room in order to convey an air of intimacy and connection with the team. It is the preparation room prior to an event and the place where one returns immediately after a match, win or lose. But above all the men's locker room is regarded as a male preserve.

At the health club, there were changing rooms clearly identified by gender. The main difference in the male changing room at the health club I observed was the lavishness of it in comparison to the general facilities often available to amateur sports players. There were carpets on the floors, shower gel was available in the modern showers and laundry bags were provided. The main problem for the men using the changing room at the health club, however, was that they had to undress and, to an extent, display their bodies for other men in a context which was not that of a sports team together before or after a match. It was not a musty, team changing room where a group of men could talk about the events of the match in an environment of exclusive maleness and team camaraderie. At the health club, the member, although attending under the auspices of keeping fit, was also taking part in an individual experience aimed primarily at the narcissistic pursuit of bodily enhancement. Consequently, there was something suspiciously 'feminine' about the health club that had to be countered and this was made all the more threatening by the need to expose the body to the gaze of other men.

In the changing rooms, one way of countering these tensions was the presence of televisions which provided a constant stream of cable sports programmes. Any uneasy silences were displaced by the sound of sports commentary or action in the background. The televisions also provided a focus for the eyes. I noticed that on several occasions there were live football matches or recordings of recent games on show. This appeared to create a 'locker room' atmosphere and also provided a constant background of sound. Most of the men congregated near to the televisions and changed whilst watching the match. Inhibitions were eased and there was often animated conversation about various aspects of the game.

There was no uniform ritual for presenting the body in the space of the health club changing room. The only apparent taboo appeared to be the

overt demonstration of (homo) sexuality. Although I did not observe or hear of any such instances, the presence of this taboo seemed to be indicated by the absence of such displays. Those who were more likely to parade naked in the changing room tended to display outward signs of confidence in their bodies and in general possessed muscular builds or were older. These were not strict patterns as it was also apparent that there were many men who did not feel comfortable being completely naked and would go to extreme measures to change without exposing themselves to others. It was noticeable that the younger men were often more self-conscious about public nudity. This contrasted to their more confident bodily presentation in the actual gym. Often pairs or groups of three men would work out together. They tended to be in their late teens or early twenties. They appeared aware of the capital that they possessed in displaying their muscular bodies and would demonstrate this through their confident banter whilst working out and by consciously flexing their muscles. Vests and tight fitting 'T'shirts were worn to accentuate their bodies, specifically, the shoulders, chest and biceps. In general, more time was spent working on these areas of the body, whereas, below the waist, baggy shorts or track-suit bottoms were worn as if not to draw attention to this area. This was in direct contrast to the women, where the tendency was to wear tight fitting pants, regardless of body type. However, the bravado displayed by the young men on the gym floor was not uniformly evident in the changing room. Whilst changing, often a towel would be draped around the waist in a similar manner to one changing on a public beach and the body would be contorted in order to manipulate the clothing under the safety of the towel. On occasions I saw groups of men working out together but after the session dressing in different areas of the changing room.

There are conflicting understandings of the appropriate bodily presentation that are to be expressed in public spaces. Body practices constructed within the discourse of hegemonic masculinity enable the individual to present a social performance necessary within this space. Experiences of, and reflections upon, one's own body, the body of others and one's sexuality determines the way in which the body can be displayed. The physical sensation of being naked has to be negotiated within the context of the social surrounding. The body can be at the same time a potential source of capital or a possible cause of shame. Capital could be achieved through the display of perceived masculine prowess and this could be effectively presented through bodily performance, whether it was through lifting heavy weights, demonstrating strength and endurance on particular machines or through the physical possession and display of muscles. For example, I overheard two men discussing their biceps after a session in the gym. One remarked, 'I'm twenty-three and a quarter inches, you must be twenty-six inches'.

The greater size of the biceps clearly carried with it a form of social capital which had been developed through an understanding of muscularity equated with masculine prowess. Here the body can be seen as being

disciplined and constructed as a way of producing physical capital which can then be converted into other forms of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1977). However, the body could also be potentially embarrassing. Nudity brought with it the risk of shame through the fear of presenting 'unmasculine' characteristics, such as evidence of homosexuality. An erection whilst changing could be perceived by others as a sign of homosexual arousal and was therefore to be avoided in this environment. Fear of being looked at in addition to having unwanted erections is a possible explanation why many of the men chose to dress using a towel to hide their genitals. This highlights the way the body can literally expose an individual to an unwanted social identity and at the same time provide evidence of the role of the body in constructing understandings of appropriate gender performance. Thus, if we read this in terms of Connell's (1995) concept of body-reflexive practice, the pleasurable experience of an erection is neutralized by a perceived social fear that it could be misconstrued by others as a sign of sexual arousal brought on by homosexual desires. However, this is not to say that an erection in the context of the changing room necessarily implies evidence to others of homosexuality. For example, one of the men (Fraser) I interviewed at the gay tennis club, described his experiences of school sport and how the body was considered as a source of humour, in a similar way to Jez and Simon's accounts of vasectomies:

> *It was always difficult, cos erm you know, I always remember the boys in the bath with an erection. It was a great thing to get them and they'd be great fun, but I didn't want to do that cos it was just a little too . . . too near the knuckle . . . I might have enjoyed it too much (laughs)*

Fraser's adult interpretation of his (gay) sexuality and his own body provided a different reading of the events in the changing room baths. For the other boys, having an erection was experienced as a physical thrill and a source of humour. It could also be seen as an indication of potency to the others. The physical experience of an erection required some form of social meaning to be called into play. In this case it was the outward sign of acquired adult masculinity. However, for the men in the health club changing room, there was not the 'safety' of a traditional teams sports locker room space, such as in football or rugby where there was a presumption of heterosexuality. The changing rooms were part of a health club located in a social discourse which accommodated the narcissistic, which could be considered at odds with more traditional sports. Within this context, inappropriate displays of the body could be seen by others as indicating homosexuality, which was understood in terms of an inferior sexuality or failed masculinity. At the same time, it could also be suggested that within the social context of male sport, sex was not meant to play a part. Bodily exertions were meant to be confined to the sports field. The social discourse of sexual activity located specific spaces for sexual displays or activity. As

such, forms of social regulation were brought into play in order to manage these potentially damaging social situations in the most appropriate way.

Interestingly, whereas the changing rooms which Fraser experienced as a child were not conspicuously encumbered by inequalities based on sexuality, there was, however, a different form of division based on the understandings of bodily performance. Fraser described how, during his time at school, there was a separate bath for the good players and another for the weaker players. Bodily performance was again the starting point for the formation of social identities and hierarchies.

Fraser's recollections of his experiences of sport at school also highlight the complex relationship between expected sporting masculinity as a preserve of proper (heterosexual) masculinity and gay (in terms of feminine performances) as always a 'failed' masculinity. In the preceding examples, bodily performances, within the context of sport, were considered most appropriate if they displayed evidence of strength, assertiveness and skill in comparison to 'failed' performances which displayed weakness, inability and, more obviously, femininity rather than homosexuality. Therefore, the inclusion of a gay tennis club in the research provided an opportunity to explore the extent to which sexuality influences the performance of expected sporting masculinity. I argue that, like hegemonic masculinity, expected sporting masculinity constructs masculinity as different from and superior to femininity, but places greater emphasis on the bodily performance. As such, for gay men who take part in sport, sexuality becomes less of an issue in comparison to displays of appropriate masculine performances.

GAY MEN PERFORMING EXPECTED MASCULINITY

I draw upon two examples of participant observation which support the claim that expected sporting masculinity is prevalent in sporting practices as well as broader settings where reference to sport is associated with cultural capital. The first example highlights displays of competitiveness as an integral part of expected sporting masculinity expressed in traditional sport. The second observation provides an example of the social status placed upon expected and accepted sporting masculinities within the context of subordinated sexuality.

I had arranged to play a ladder match with Tim and had asked if I could conduct an interview afterwards. Tim was thirty-one and taught science in a secondary school. I had encountered Tim previously only on very superficial terms, mostly during tennis club evenings. I had heard that he was extremely competitive and tended to socialize with a group of similarly competitive players (all red)[6] who often would contrive to play amongst themselves during the club evenings. Tim was extremely slight in his physical appearance, but quite aggressive in his on court play. He would grunt and shout and even during club sessions he would chase down every ball

and hate to lose. The club singles league was a means by which I could meet him in a one to one situation. He was quite keen to play me as I was positioned higher in the league and we had not played before. We arranged to play at my club and then use the clubhouse afterwards for the interview. On meeting, Tim was extremely talkative and friendly. We talked about tennis in general and some of the tournaments that we played previously. Tim was interested in discussing tactics and provided analysis of his performances against other men at the gay tennis club and how he would approach playing particular people at the club.

I had been thinking about the interview beforehand and had not really considered the game itself. I was a little more nervous about the interview as I did not know Tim as well as some of the other interviewees. I was aware that I was trying to please Tim during our initial conversations and let him choose which surface he wanted to play on. After three games (which I won) he said that he thought the courts were a little slippery and would rather play on the artificial grass, which although wet, drained well. Again, I remember thinking about the interview and wanting to keep him in a good mood so I agreed and we changed courts.

When the match started, Tim became really serious and I noticed that the initial friendly chat we maintained during the knock-up was dispelled once the game started. At the change-over between games, Tim kept his head down and remained in deep concentration. During the game, he would shout at himself and admonish himself if he lost a point. He would often, between points, turn his back to me so that he could calm himself down and compose himself for the next point. I was fascinated watching all this and found it hard to concentrate on the game. I lost the first set and was down in the second when I became aware that I was not really enjoying the situation, and the person on the other side of the net was so overtly competitive that it appeared he would do anything to win. However, I also began to feel that I didn't really want to lose to him. I felt that I had not been concentrating on the game but rather the research process and the interview. I was constantly trying to think how I could approach the subject of his competitiveness in the interview. I was also aware that we were playing as members of the gay tennis club, which meant that there was something else at stake. I knew I could play better and part of me did not want to lose to him, especially as it was the first occasion that we played a match. To an extent, I was being drawn into taking part in the competitive framework of mainstream sport even though I was still aware that the gay tennis club had been created in an attempt to establish more social and inclusive practices. However, the situation at the time resembled an extremely competitive encounter between two men playing mainstream sport. Sexuality was not at stake, but rather hegemonic masculine egos. I decided then to compete in the match. I did not want to lose without a fight. As I started to take control of the match, Tim also started to become aware that he was losing his grip on the game. He started to shout and swear and

throw his racquet around. By that stage, my focus was to win and I wanted to get the game over with as quickly as possible.

It was obvious that Tim was really annoyed about losing and found it hard to say anything when we had finished. I could not tell him that I had not really been concentrating initially, but also did not want to be patronizing and say that he had played well. At the same time I thought that it would be difficult to conduct an interview and suggested that we did it some other time. I was disappointed with myself, for letting the situation become so competitive and losing perspective of the social situation. However, the example highlights a number of factors. In this particular situation I was involved in the social process of performing expected sporting masculinity and, at that moment, complying with broader hegemonic masculine practices. Although we were gay men and aware of the social discrimination which takes place at the expense of alternative sexuality, within the arena of sport we succumbed to the prevailing expected sporting masculine sensibilities which diverted our attention from the original social setting both of us had entered. In this particular case, the practices prevalent in mainstream sport overshadowed the more egalitarian sensibilities which might have been expected to be displayed within the context of the gay and lesbian movement. To that extent, Tim and I conformed more to the mainstream version of sport rather than confronted it. As indicated earlier, body performances are based upon ideals of traditional heterosexual masculinity and are available and practiced by gay and straight men alike. However, the position of gay men who take part in sport creates a number of ambivalences. The cultural significance of sport brings with it the knowledge that there is capital to be gained from taking part or being able to display evidence of this. Often, the awareness of being gay and occupying subordinate sexuality is displaced by the need to present expected sporting masculinity. This is further exaggerated by the perception that gay men should attempt to be as good as 'real' men. Consequently, these performances reinforce discriminatory gender practices rather than confront them.

During the research at the gay tennis club, I had the opportunity to help out with a stall for the gay tennis club as part of the London Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. The club had not been involved before, but had been contacted by the organisers to take part with a number of other groups in order to provide information to those attending. The event was held in a large park immediately after the traditional Gay Pride march through central London. It was expected to attract about 80,000 people and I thought it would be a good opportunity for me to be able to watch, to an extent, from inside and specifically focus on displays of the body. From the stall I could observe the event happening around me. I was also curious about the reaction a sports presence at the Mardi Gras would create and how both the other members of the tennis club and the visitors presented themselves. The Mardi Gras had developed in recent years as an offspring of the more political Gay Pride march but had become more commercial. It had grown

to such an extent that it was able to attract celebrity pop performers eager to perform to large audiences rather than support a political event.

The stall was situated in a circle along with a variety of other clubs, associations and causes. The scene was reminiscent of a 'freshers' fair during the first week of university. My role was to hand out leaflets which provided information about the club and to respond to any enquiries. The whole event was geared towards having fun, which meant that the majority of visitors to the event were more concerned with finding a good spot in front of the main stage and maintaining a steady supply of alcohol. As such, any interest in finding out about a tennis club was limited. However, this meant that I had more time to observe people and events. The tennis club was sandwiched between the London Kings Cross Stealers (an all-male gay rugby club) and the Gay Bears Group (a social group for hairy or chubby men, or men who were attracted to them). I have included these observations as I was struck by the way the body was used as a primary signification of masculine identity. In this case, the body presented a means of displaying to others masculinity, hegemonic in nearly all senses, even though the social context was in the setting of an organised celebration of subordinated sexuality.

The members of the rugby club congregated in groups at the front of the stall, rather than occupying a position behind the tables. They were all in high spirits and there was a continuous display of physicality in the form of jovial pushing and back slapping. All of the members had cans or bottles of beer in their hands at all times and several wore only shorts. The stall itself displayed photos of the club members in action playing rugby as well as several large posed photos which made up a calendar depicting the main team in various states of undress. On one occasion, a player who had been photographed for the calendar stood next to his picture whilst the others laughed and joked.

The men attracted a lot of attention from the passing crowds and, at the same time, appeared to thrive on it and play up to it. They seemed keen to present an outwardly 'macho' aggressive, heavy-drinking, tough image. The irony was the context of the performances of the men in the setting of the Mardi Gras and its relationship to the ideals of gay pride. However, the men were obviously achieving a great deal of capital through their performances and it appeared that these performances were often exaggerated and contrived. As such the men's performances were both theatrical in their display to others, but also performative in their enactment of masculinity located within heterosexual hegemonic discourse. Their performances were also presented in the form of expected sporting masculinity because even though they were outside of the sports arena, the cultural understanding of masculinity expressed through active sports performance dove-tails with broader interpretations of hegemonic masculinity. In this case, hegemonic masculinity presented itself as more attractive or compelling in comparison with a subordinated sexual identity, particularly if it was associated with a feminised, weaker version of masculinity.

The gay bears group was similar to the rugby players, in that although less physically attractive, in the conventional sense, they were still keen to display their bodies. Their bodies were celebrated in terms of their manliness or their distance from feminised understandings of bodily performance by presenting an exaggerated version of orthodox masculinity. Most of the men wore leather or denim and proudly displayed their bare hairy chests. In a similar manner to the men from the rugby club, they were putting on a performance of 'hard' or 'butch'.

Rogoff and Van Leer (1993) suggested there are similarities between the drag artist and the butch leather-clad man in their extreme presentations of masculinity. This view may be considered in relation to the ways in which many gay men who participate within in the 'gay scene' have embraced body building (Alvarez 2008) and where the body is at the same time a means of displaying heteronormative masculinity whilst also eroticised. Segal (1997) describes how gay identity has sought to accommodate a 'super-macho style of masculinity'.

> This 'butch shift'—gay muscle men clad exclusively in leather and denim, or gay 'clones' with short hair, moustache, check shirt, blue jeans and bovver boots—would appear to be a celebration of conventional masculinity, just as the reality of much of the sexuality of gay men seems to be an exaggeration of the more promiscuous, emotionally detached, entirely phallocentric encounters characteristic of male heterosexuality.
>
> (Segal 1997: 149)

The rugby players and the gay bears provide support for the claim that significant value is placed upon the presentation of the body. They appeared to be keen to present to others an expression of their identity based upon traditional understandings of heterosexual masculinity without apparent awareness of their part in the reinforcement of gender and sexual boundaries.

The relationship between sexuality and masculinity found in expected and accepted sporting masculinity mirrors the complex issues found in hegemonic masculinity where performances of masculinity simultaneously speak heterosexuality whilst femininity and 'weak' masculinities are unspoken or considered inferior. Within expected sporting masculinity, however, it is clear that some gay men (as well as women) are also able to perform this identity successfully. An interesting aspect which emerges from this ambivalent relationship can be seen in my own position within the straight club. Throughout the research I did not make any open declarations about my sexuality but at the same time never made any attempts to mask it in terms of, for example, talking about girlfriends. My identity within the club appeared to be based upon my playing skills and my ability to perform expected sporting masculinity, acquired through many years of experience within mainstream sport. To an extent, my tennis skills, if considered in terms of generalised understandings of mainstream sport, could have been

read by the other members of the straight club as connoting heterosexuality. As a consequence, I did not have to negotiate 'failed' masculinity during the period of the research.

In summary, I found that the tennis clubs and the health club I observed were saturated with gendered-body performances and in particular they were sites in which specific versions of masculinity were made and remade. This making and remaking occurred across a range of locations, for instance, on and off court and in relation to a range of practices and organisational arrangements, both formal and informal.

All the examples can be seen as contemporary constructions of masculinity through the body practices associated with sport, in this case, specifically the sites of tennis and a health club. It became apparent that particular forms of body practice merited greater cultural capital and were in the majority supported and upheld by those who were less likely to achieve such status. The body and bodily practices were a significant aspect within this formulation of masculinity and contributed to the presence of a specific form of masculinity, which I termed expected sporting masculinity. Presenting this form of masculinity to others constituted recognisable signs of eligibility for participation within sport. At the same time, a more complex relationship between masculinity and sexuality emerged where, through expected sporting masculine performances, it was possible for gay men to participate in a similar manner to heterosexual men. Consequently, if this version of masculinity can be performed by people other than able-bodied heterosexual men, it raises interesting questions about whether such performances subvert it or not. I explore this issue further in Chapter 7.

The preceding observations indicate that an expected version of sporting masculinity is prevalent within contemporary sport and this reflects broader social definitions of normative gender. However, as the example of Fraser's school experiences demonstrated, it is important to recognise whether these enactments have been constant and the extent to which entering sport requires the learning of specific body practices. As such, it is necessary to investigate further how body practices associated with masculinity, especially expected sporting masculinity, have been central throughout the life course and whether factors such as bodily performance and sexuality create obstacles to participation.

5 Young Bodies, Schools and Sport

School settings are considered a prime site for constructing understandings of the individual body in terms of not only gendered identity but also its 'ability' to take part and continue into adult sport. This chapter incorporates research with young children and adults about perceptions of sport, as well as discussion of the role that school physical education plays in reinforcing particular gendered stereotypes. It is suggested that the experiences of physical education in schools play a significant part in the overall construction of young peoples' sporting identities by continuing to expect and celebrate specific performances of masculinity (expressed through the body) at the expense of other formulations.

In the previous chapter I explored what could be considered an 'adult' world of sport, constructed in terms of its distinction from, or progression from, childhood play. Although there appear to be many overlaps, much of adult understandings of sport conflict with the ways that young people can, or are able to, make sense of it—within their 'not yet adult' worlds. The experiences presented in the previous chapter were those of adults engaging in adult oriented sports clubs and where children (those under the age of sixteen) were generally accommodated as a separate category and often provided with their own spaces and times away from adults. Although there have been recent insightful critiques of the knowledge generated about what children should be doing with their bodies (Evans Davies and Wright 2004, Gard and Wright 2005, Kirk 2006) and how they should be benefitting from taking part in physical activity, there continues to be a slippage at policy level and in many branches of academic sport and health related discourse between what is considered sport for children and sport for adults. There are similarities to what happens in adult formulations of children's gendered identities. As Renold (2007) points out,

> 'there is a lack of research that scrutinizes the specificities of age and generational dynamics in the formation of young masculinities or that fully problematizes the appropriateness of adopting adult—defined notions of hegemonic masculinity to make sense of young boys' constructions of 'boyness'.
>
> (Renold 2007: 276)

In sport, in particular, there is a more general view that children go through a rite of passage to adult sport, where adult sport is considered a 'natural' progression, particularly for young boys. This formulation can be seen in the description provided by Simon in Chapter 4, where he considered it inevitable that *most* boys and some girls will make the transition. These sentiments were similarly described by the men interviewed by Pringle in New Zealand.

> In the transition from boyhood, where few injuries occurred in rugby and all males were encouraged to participate, to teenage years where participation was no longer mandatory and rugby was played with greater physicality, rugby was discursively transformed from a 'sport for all males' to a 'man's sport'.
>
> (Markula and Pringle 2006: 113)

Much of this understanding of children making a transition to adult sport is reinforced not only through social interpretations of the biological body (Synnott 1993) but also through the structures put into place to manage the physical maturation of young people within the school place. Thus, there is general acceptance that there will be a move from junior or primary schooling to secondary education which coincides with the onset of puberty. This transition marks out a shift to an adult-focussed, more 'serious' approach to the development of young minds. This is particularly evident in school-based sport and PE where there is a marked shift from play-oriented physical activity at junior level to more structured, competitive sports at secondary level. In a study exploring the attitudes and feelings of children towards physical education during the transition from primary to secondary schools in the UK, Dismore (2007) found that the general enjoyment of PE did not automatically stop in the first year of secondary school. Rather, the practices and focus of provision for PE and school sports shifted the emphasis to more adult-centred, competitive sports, taught by more skilled, specialised PE staff. The focus became more 'ability-' and performance-based and ultimately made the children reflect upon their bodies in terms of whether they felt 'able' to take part or not (Wellard 2006a). In addition, the hidden curriculum of PE (Fernandez-Balboa 1993) along with the ideologies of the body dominant within the school system (Evans 2004) makes it difficult for many young people to continue enjoying physical activity or feeling that they are able to. The result is that the general enthusiasm for and enjoyment of physical activity and organised sporting activities held by the majority of younger children is lost by a significant number in secondary schooling. It is not surprising that those who tend to 'drop out' are those that do not want to adopt the expected masculine performances considered necessary for continued participation.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL SPORT

> *It was very exciting in those days, in the barefoot days, at primary schoo l . . . The games were exciting and rugby suited me: I was big for my age and when I got my lanky legs pumping I was hard to stop.*
>
> (Matthew, quoted in Markula and Pringle 2006: 205)

> *My shivering, bespectacled and disinterested frame did not endear me to my team members or the PE teacher as I repeatedly failed to rehearse narratives of hegemonic masculinity within these public performances and rituals of the body.*
>
> (Vicars 2006: 352)

For many young people, school sports and physical education provide the main opportunity for physical activity (Sallis and Owen, 1999). Physical education lessons present an important arena for the construction and consolidation of dominant and subordinate masculinities and femininities (Paechter 2003). The sites where physical education is located, such as the gym, sports hall or playing field, function as the context for displays of hegemonic forms of heterosexual masculinities and the subordination of others or alternatives. Moreover, the ideal types of bodily usage expected within physical education can be regarded as generally located in traditional understandings of male and female sports. Therefore, the different bodily usages encouraged by secondary school physical education both permit and support the development of particular masculinities and femininities. In Paechter's words, 'In secondary schools in particular, physical education lessons are an important arena for the displaying and acting out of masculinity and femininity, particularly those forms which could be described as hypermasculine and hyperfeminine' (Paechter 2003: 47). According to this argument, much of physical education remains gender-segregated and a place where specific gendered performances are expected and encouraged. This is particularly the case for young men and women when there is more uncertainty about what constitutes correct or appropriate performances. For some theorists (Connell 1995; Theberge 2003), sport (school sports in particular) operates as a means of presenting broader social constructions of gender and identity. According to Paechter, physical education, therefore, provides an important arena for boys to act out 'hypermasculinity' (Paechter 2003). However, for her, a consequence is that the relationship of girls and femininity to physical education is more complex, partly because the agenda is set by the boys and interest in sports is excluded for girls by their male peer group. Whilst I agree that the relationship of girls to PE is complex, this is not to suggest that it is an ultimately easier relationship for boys. There is the danger of falling into the trap of regarding 'all boys' as having a propensity towards sport. Although expressions of femininity are

often demonstrated by resistance to physical education and sports in a similar way that expressions of masculinity are demonstrated through sporting prowess and resistance to 'passive' academic work in the classroom (Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman 2002), this is not always the case (Bailey et all 2004). School sports do, however, continue to reinforce gender binaries which position the activities of girls as subordinate to boys (Scraton 1992; Paechter 2003) and rely on a particular manifestation of sport through competition and fitness-based regimes.

> The dominance of competitive sport in popular culture, though less than heretofore in the official PE curriculum . . . and monadic, surface focused fitness practices discourage the development and use of open, communicative bodily practices and forms.
>
> (Paechter 2003: 57)

Theoretical debates surrounding the gendered practices evident within physical education and school sports are informative as they offer support to claims that studies within this area need to include consideration of the body and broader academic approaches. However, many theoretically focused studies do not always provide any concrete solutions or ways forward and, ultimately, maintain a theory/practice binary (MacDonald 2003).

Although, theoretically, we can speak of the variety of 'identities' available to individuals, within the context of school physical education it could be argued that the claims made by post-structuralists of 'fluidity' of gendered identities is markedly restricted (at ground level) and even the very young have to quickly learn the importance of presenting appropriate (less fluid) gendered bodily performances.

It could also be claimed that there are still ways in which many young people are 'excluded' from taking part in traditional sports—and ultimately enjoying their bodies to their full potential. There does, however, remain a risk that simply 'including' an individual suggests that what they are being included in is unproblematic. In merely attempting to 'fit' young people into the existing framework there is little challenge to the notion that the location of 'that which is included' is more superior to 'that which is excluded.' It is generally assumed that the practices which operate in sport are less problematic than the individuals who would like to participate. However, rather than looking at 'problem' children and attempting to make them fit in, it is also worth taking into consideration the practices which may 'exclude' an individual in the first place, as well as the 'restrictions' which are placed upon those who are already included.

The process of selection or distinguishing those who are included and those who are excluded is rife in sport as well as in PE. As Evans (2004) pointed out, talent selection in the UK already separates the 'able' from the less able in order to identify winners and losers. The consequence is that many young people will be excluded not only from the 'pool' of talent, but

from taking part in sports in general. There is also an additional irony with this form of filter process, in that even for the 'winners' there is often a pursuit of what could be considered unobtainable goals which are potentially both physically and psychologically damaging (Heikkala 1993). Similarly, Connell (1995) describes how the idealized version of masculinity which is represented by the elite, traditional sports competitor is often the most insular and the least social. Nevertheless, this remains the form which is expected by the adults within the school community. Their 'adult readings' of what it is to take part in sport ignores, or fails to take into consideration, what it is to be 'a child'.

One way of looking at the restrictions placed upon young people as they attempt to fully experience their bodies is by applying the concept of what is limited within a system. For instance, Pronger's (2002), interpretation of the 'philosophy of limit' (which itself is a version of desconstructionism aimed at acknowledging materialialist critiques), describes the potential, or 'puissance' (Pronger 2002: 66), to be found in bodily pleasures that exist 'outside' the boundaries of conventional thinking—potential which, it could be claimed, is kept restrained by the barriers, often self-imposed, created through attempts to conform to perceived social expectations of normative gendered identity. For Pronger, questioning limits has been central to the work of activist movements, although, in comparison to other social institutions, sport and PE remains relatively unscathed by activist challenge.

In the UK, traditional sports still provide the model for PE provision within schools (Kirk 2002) and through this (and broader definitions provided through the media and professional sport) it could be claimed that particular 'gendered' patterns are reinforced. Green (2007), however, suggests that although there have been changes in the provision of PE in more recent years, there have been continuity in many traditional approaches alongside changes, rather than replacement[1].

However, there are instances when established gender patterns may be contested. The location of dance within physical education could be seen as one such area where there is the potential to challenge existing gender binaries. The differing gendered histories of traditional sports and dance provide the opportunity to explore the tensions which emerge and the strategies adopted by those who choose to take part in dance. In this case, the focus is upon men with previous experience of traditional sports who take up dance as part of a teacher-training course. The questions which emerge relate to whether these men have to renegotiate their masculine identities in light of their previous sporting histories. It also highlights broader issues about abilities (Evans 2004) and the role that physical education may play in the shaping of young people's physical identities.

Much of the research into school-based masculinities has been conducted within state schools, with attempts to explain boys' lack of academic success in comparison to girls (Skelton 2001, Jackson 2006). The legacy of

Willis' (1977) research into working-class boys' anti-school culture continues to be influential and has informed much later thinking. Although, the focus on class is important, there are dangers that many specifically class-based approaches have reinforced the notion of 'authentic' masculinity generated through distorted socialist views of the working man in comparison to the 'effete' freeloading upper-class gentleman. This binary can be seen to ignore the complexities of masculine performances and at the same time consolidate existing gender binaries.

As Swain's (2006) study of boys who attend a fee paying independent junior school shows, although the boys were at an advantage by attending the school, the prevailing ideals of masculinity were still played out. Even though academic success is not as problematic for the boys in comparison to the boys in Willis' study, it is an expected, presentation of a particular bodily performance, through sporting prowess, which carries with it the greatest social capital among the boys. Swain's research supports Connell's interpretation of hegemonic masculinity in that, although there are multiple patterns of masculinities, this does not diminish the authority of the hegemonic form.

Consequently, it may be asserted that among the privileged, educated classes there are possibilities for expressing multiple masculinities, for younger people within the school setting, alternative versions have to be negotiated with far greater sensitivity than dominant forms. Thus, it is easier, if one is able, to go along with the expected versions or keep a low profile. This is an aspect I explore further in Chapter 7 when I look at gay sporting bodies and identities.

In the school, regardless of class, it is the body that becomes the main marker of ones gendered identity. Although it is important to take class into account at a broader level, invariably classes are generally separated from other classes, but it is through the body that young people are primarily able to distinguish and categorise themselves and others. In simple terms, the body is the initial marker of gender; boy or girl. Through the body individuals learn what is expected from them. In other words they learn how to be either a 'real' boy or girl. In Swain's study, although the boys had significant economic and cultural capital by the very fact of their attending a fee-paying school, the leading masculinity was linked to physical capital of the body,

> And was a kind of 'muscular athleticism': those who were the fastest, fittest, strongest and skilful at sport were the boys who were the most popular, and who had the highest status amongst their peers.
>
> (Swain 2006: 324)

The boys at the bottom of the hierarchy in terms of popularity and non conformance to the expected performance of masculinity were seen as different not in terms of alternative (homo)sexuality, but rather because they did not act in the expected way in sports, and they did not 'try hard enough' (Swain 2006: 329).

LOCATING ONESELF WITHIN THE SPORT HIERARCHY

If we can talk of a hierarchy that operates to distinguish between different types of sporting bodies, and sets precedence on particular bodily performances, then we need to recognise the process through which these ideas are learnt. In interviews I conducted with men who were training to become PE teachers there was a constant sense of 'naturalness' as an explanation for their own ability and an inevitability that they would be involved in sports of some kind[2]. The men provided interpretations of their childhood activities which led to their current involvement in sport. For example,

> *During primary school my dad took me to the rugby club and I started to play mini-rugby, my dad wanted me to do some sort of sport I guess, and he can't stand football and he knows that he's big, my mums quite big for a female, obviously that's why I turned out quite big myself and rugby's pretty much suited to my body shape really, so he cut down football and got me down the rugby club to get me active I guess.*
>
> (Max)

> *I think it was through my dad that I played football, because my dad had always been quite passionate about football and he always used to enjoy playing it, I think from a young age I've always kicked a football around with my dad.*
>
> (Lee)

> *PE in our school was ability set and so I think because I was in all the sports teams I obviously had a higher level of ability, I was always in the top sets for PE, which always meant that, even though it wasn't favouritism, teachers preferred that because they are able to do more work.*
>
> (Nathan)

Similar themes were repeated in all the interviews where early experiences of sport were influenced by parents (in most cases the father) and their recognition of their own bodily presence. Being 'big' or 'fast' in comparison to others was remembered and described to me. However, this was primarily interpreted through an essentialist understanding of the body in that they had been 'born' with these physical qualities. There was little, if any, recognition of the varying ways in which young people physically mature and the contrasting ranges of body types within a specific year group. The literature also suggests that those who are able to display particular 'masculine' qualities during their school years are positioned at the top of the hierarchy. Much of these displays require evidence of sporting prowess (Frosh et al. 2002, Jackson 2006, Renolds 2007). Just like the boys in Swain's (2007) study where there was a hierarchy based upon physical and sporting prowess, the men recounted similar descriptions of physical capital. When

I interviewed Matt, I asked him if he considered himself to be part of the 'in crowd' at school.

> **Matt:** Yeah, I think I was in. The PE teacher was a rugby player and our main sport was rugby, and then the next sport was football. I think that because of my sporty self it allowed me to get in the teams.
> **IW:** What did you play? Were you physically big?
> **Matt:** Yeah I was, I was pushing six foot by the time I was in year ten. From year seven to year eleven, I was one of the tallest, top speed.
> **IW:** Were you sort of aware of that?
> **Matt:** I could tell I had a bigger physical side then a lot of my mates and stuff, sometimes it got me into trouble. Just simply because of my height.
> **IW:** In what way?
> **Matt:** You know the bigger lads were seen as though they were picking on the little kids, looked like bullying, which obviously wasn't a good thing but in rugby, that was obviously how I got into rugby as I had that bigger size. When we played other teams a lot of them were the same size as my friends. And because I was bigger I could just plough through them.[3]

Being 'good at' a sport was equated with corporeal performances where physical power could assert most impact. Matt's account demonstrates how a selection process operates, described where he was selected by the male PE teacher who had seen in him evidence, through the body, of the appropriate (expected) requirements for participation. Through their induction into school sports, sport obviously provided a significant way of achieving cultural capital for all of the men. Their ability to be physically active and successfully participate in school-based sports competitions were recurring themes throughout the interviews. Sport had been and remained a central aspect of their lives and contributed to a large part of their formulation of masculine identity and their perception of how other men saw it.

> *I think every lad thinks 'I'd love to be a professional player.'*
>
> (Rob)

And like many of the men I interviewed in the adult the sports clubs, they had all been successful, to varying degrees, in sport during their childhood. This success was not necessarily related to specific' documented, sporting success, but more in that they were able to take part throughout their youth without any significant barriers. As such, they were all able to recollect how sport had been an essential part of their youth. Their understandings of sport were clearly based within traditional formulations of heterosexual male-based sport (Messner 1992, Connell 1995) and they all presented themselves to me with this framework as a guide and distinguished between those who 'could' and those who 'couldn't'. Those that couldn't were, according to them, generally 'girls and gays'.

Even though the context of the interview was set within the parameters of physical education, it became apparent that the men were able to use sport as a means of presenting 'legitimate' masculine and sporting identities to me in various ways. For instance, evidence of sporting prowess and accounts of specific sports related achievements marked out their legitimacy to me and within the field. At the same time, their understandings of traditional sport as a main aspect of physical education enabled them to bracket dance as something 'outside' of their definition of sport. Consequently, their lack of experience and inability to dance became a reinforcement of their legitimate masculinity. This may have been a factor in what appeared to me a general lack of real enthusiasm or commitment to dance in comparison to their enthusiastic accounts of their involvement in traditional sports.

SPORT FOR MEN, DANCE FOR GIRLS

Having to take part in dance highlighted the way that the men incorporated a restricted understanding of their bodies in relation to movement as well as their masculine identities. For them, dance conflicted with the way they had developed a specific-gendered body reflexive practice. As Gard (2001) suggests, Dance continues to be seen as strongly associated with feminine and non-heterosexual ways of moving. For these men, dance was not just seen as an activity specifically for girls, but as completely removed from their own construction of sport. Through their bodies, as Connell suggests, they had incorporated an understanding of their own gendered identity which was not only influenced by discourse, but also through a learned physical experience of how their body should move.

Dance was considered to be an activity 'outside' of their definition of sport and an activity primarily for girls and with no real benefit for them.

> *Mainly a girly way, as far as I'm concerned if you said dance, it's a girls activity, its something, it wouldn't be taught at my school.*
>
> (Darren)

> *I've had quite a sexist view, just for the girls really and girls and gays because that's what the opinion I had.*
>
> (Jim)

The men were not completely ignorant of gender issues and were sufficiently aware of educational requirements in relation to inclusion. In fact, knowledge of, and being seen to be proactive in providing inclusive practices within the classroom was considered an essential part of being a PE teacher. Within the context of PE and the degree course they were taking, they were sufficiently aware of educational professional policies which promoted inclusive practices.

> *I can go into schools and talk quite a bit now about dance and see the positive effect that it can have, like a lot of kids, we taught a lot of boys and you can actually see their opinions change just in an hour. Which is good, because it shouldn't just be a stigma of just being for girls and like for gays or whatever the stereotypes are. It shouldn't be like that because it gives a lot of opportunities for people that aren't necessarily games players, to do something, to be physically active like that.*
>
> (Jim)

Although there is some semblance of an inclusive approach in Jim's description of the benefits of dance, there remained a clear distinction between those who were either 'games players' or not. At the same time, in this context, dance was still equated with an activity on the 'outside' which may act as an enticement for those non-sporting types to take part in sport. In terms of the men actually taking part in dance, however, this was still problematic. In this situation, however, it was made easier by the fact that they could share the experience with other 'sports' men facing a similar ordeal.

> *I was thinking well if my friends back home saw me doing this they'd be a bit like 'what's going on' but I mean everyone was in the same position. So gradually as the weeks progressed everyone sort of like for example you have to do your dance performance evening and all the lads are there, like lads who play rugby and they've got no interest in dance and everyone's in the same boat and you just get on with it and everyone claps everyone and says well done.*
>
> (Rob)

Dance was considered an activity which would look good in curriculum vitae and would, subsequently, provide evidence that they were adopting inclusive educational practices. They were aware that physical sporting capital by itself was not necessarily enough to gain a job. For the men, taking part was considered advantageous in that successful completion of the course would enhance future job prospects. In particular, the men were aware that within the context of physical education, dance was considered an activity which could be incorporated in order to encourage girls to take part in physical activity. However, much of this rationale was understood through broader discourses of health and obesity.

Several of the men did note, however, that there were additional benefits of taking part and approached participation in a positive way :

> *I couldn't dance and dance was going to be my weakest subject so I thought that it would be a really good opportunity to develop that side.*
>
> (Anthony)

Taking part in the dance module also provided the men additional social capital among other students, especially the opposite sex. They told me

how they were able to use it, particularly in social encounters with women to promote a more 'softer' character as a counter to the 'harder' image of the stereotypical male sports student.

LIMITS ON BODIES

If Pronger's (2002) interpretation of the 'philosophy of limit' is applied to formalised physical activities, it could be claimed that a range of alternative forms of bodily expression are restricted or, in some cases, not even allowed. Highlighting the 'limits' of conventional thinking about physical activity helps us explore not only who is excluded, but also the range of experiences that are available (or not) within the context of many forms of schools sports and physical education.

Additional research into the experiences of girls in physical activities (Bailey, Wellard and Dismore 2005) highlights, unsurprisingly, that girls do enjoy engaging in physical activities but it is the practices inherent in sport that deter them rather than their willingness to take part. By exploring the embodied, pleasurable experiences of this activity it is also possible to explore the 'limits' of many formalised activities, such as mainstream sports, which continue to exclude 'alternative' practices or 'inappropriate' bodies. As such, dance could be considered a form of physical activity which incorporates different aspects to mainstream (male-based) sports, whilst demanding highly advanced physical techniques and practices by the dancer.

Analysing the experiences and everyday practices of a group of men who engage in physical education and sports pedagogy was intended to explore further the questions which had arisen in the research with men in traditional sports. These related to the extent to which gendered bodily performances contribute to successful participation in sport, the significance of demonstrating sporting ability within the context of sport and the capacity of dance education in assisting with creating a more inclusive experience in PE.

The sporting life histories revealed a restricted view of the role of school PE which were reinforced through their constructions of expected sporting masculinity. It appeared that the men were making value judgments about the role of physical education based more upon their current expectations of sport and physical activity. These values were constructed through an adult lens and influenced particularly by dominant conceptions of elite sporting performance and heterosexual masculinity. Many found it difficult to remember aspects of their PE lessons other than those relating to traditional, competitive sports, particularly in primary school.

> *I don't remember any specific sports other than football, that was the only recognised sport I can remember.*
>
> (Nathan)

> *(Primary PE was) very basic. We had one male teacher that we would have all the time. Obviously the girls it would be single sex. The boys that I used to go to school with were all very into their football and rugby. It would be very competitive.*
>
> (Sam)

A narrow view of gendered participation was also reflected in their accounts of school practice. To an extent, the men were reflecting the discourses apparent within the classroom. However, as mentioned, the men were aware of the inclusive approaches to be found in the PE curriculum, but found it easier not to challenge. For instance, Rob describes the reaction of some boys when dance was included in PE:

> *I heard one of the boys say 'oh my dad says this is gay and boys shouldn't be doing this'. So if his dad is saying that what chance, ok the PE teacher is meant to be inspirational, but if they're getting told that at home, I mean what sort of chance does he have?*
>
> (Rob)

The responses from the men in this research support the claims made by David Brown (2005) in his study of gendered practices within current physical education teacher education. According to him, much of teacher training practices within physical education continue to refine and reinforce the gendered habitus. In a similar fashion, the men in the dance group were able to articulate an intellectual openness about the contribution of dance in a pedagogical sense. However, similar to the men Brown researched, they had available to them physical capital which covers 'a number of the 'core' masculine associated games that are highly valued capital and exclude Dance almost entirely' (Brown 2005: 13).

Likewise, accommodating or transforming dance into sport was also problematic. As Brown states:

> What was an alternative medium of body expression becomes reappropriated as conventional athletic activity in which symbolically masculine principles of athleticism are foregrounded and those more symbolically associated with femininity, including a concern with corporeal aesthetics, and emotional expressiveness are subordinated.
>
> (Brown 2005: 14)

Connell (1995) suggests that heterosexual men have less to gain from the breaking down of gendered hierarchies and are maybe, therefore, reluctant to embrace fully, if at all, the demands of those on the margins. For the men I interviewed, the threat of 'subordinate masculinities' remained constant and there appeared to be a policing of their own and others masculine identities, much in the way that Redman (1996) describes. However, what

became apparent during this research was that the men failed to grasp the possibilities of taking part in dance as a means of extending themselves, both in terms of the mind and the body. Dance had to be contextualised for the men in relation to their potential participation in education, rather than as an opportunity to extend their physical and aesthetic capabilities.

The men had developed an understanding of dance that was based upon social and historical formulations of sport as both gender- and class-based. Within this discourse, dance was presented as 'other' and not considered as a part of traditional sport. Within the context of a group of trainee physical education teachers taking part in a dance group, this was more disappointing. Maybe naively, I had entered this research expecting to find evidence of challenges to the prevailing gender discourses which operate at the expense of many. The way the men constructed and performed dance was through a version which did not compromise their definition of normative masculinity and at the same time demonstrated their sporting prowess.

One of the problems identified by Brown is that dance, if it is incorporated within the school context, is presented in a more 'sportified' form. The dance group which the men took part in presented a specifically gendered performance which highlighted the men's traditional sporting prowess, rather than a purely aesthetic form. Consequently, as a form of symbolic destruction, it became redundant. As Brown states:

> how much symbolic and practical disruption to the gender order does such a practice really promote if the internalized habitus of such forms of instruction in Dance are shifted to appropriate a masculine sporting body habitus? Indeed, might not this approach reinforce the *libido dominandi*?
>
> (Brown 2005: 14)

A DIFFERENT PATHWAY

For the men described previously, sport provided a 'natural' pathway in their development of adult, masculine identities. The body played a significant part in the way that their gendered identity was constructed as 'normal'. However, it is still important to recognise other external factors that influence directly or indirectly the construction of gendered identity. Whereas, the trainee PE teachers considered dance to be an alien form of bodily movement and outside the parameters of their own learned corporeal comfort zones—the experiences of those who took part in dance from an early age demonstrate contrasting as well as shared understandings of the physical body.

As I have previously mentioned, Connell's (1995) concept of a 'circuit of body reflexive practices' which describes how new constructions of self-identity are formed through bodily experiences has been instructive

throughout all aspects of my research. For instance, a key theme, which emerged during my research with straight and gay men who take part in sport, was that they all expressed their enjoyment of participating in physical activity, although within the context of sports there was contrasting access to and levels of pleasure. What became clear was that specific socially prescribed performances dictated the nature of subsequent participation and contributed to the men's construction of sporting identities in terms of their own understanding of whether they 'fitted in' or not. The 'body-reflexive practice of sport' created an understanding of normative identity for some men, whereas for others, it established an identity based upon difference. Many of these formulations are generated at an early age and then, as Butler (1993) describes, reiterated through constant repeated performances. However, early enjoyable experiences of the body can provide a buffer for later gendered expectations.

For example, in research conducted with young ballet dancers, early experiences of dance shaped their understandings of 'alternative' forms of movement and particularly for the boys, (possibly) provided a means of extending the boundaries of conventional thinking about the male body. However, this is not to imply that this pathway was plain sailing. The experiences of one boy named Dylan, who was sixteen years old and had been dancing for thirteen years highlights how dealing with social definitions of the gendered body is only one aspect of maintaining participation in a physical activity at a high level. Although, in comparison to the other men described in this chapter, it was an additional 'problem' which they did not have to contemplate as directly as Dylan.

For Dylan, the benefits of his dance training were clear:

> *By the time I was about ten, so it does take a long time but it worked you and worked you, I had bigger muscles than the other lads in sports and they were all wondering 'oh why's he running faster than us'.*
>
> *Plus it keeps you really healthy. If you eat right and do ballet then it keeps you really healthy.*

Not only did the ballet training create a muscular body which had significant sporting capital, as demonstrated to other boys in school-based events such as running, but it also was considered as a healthy activity. Dylan described how he developed an understanding of his body at an early age and could recognise the positive outcomes of rigorous exercise.

> *I think the feeling after you've done something you know you've worn yourself out and you know you keep getting stronger after each lesson, I mean I like to jump higher and I like to stretch myself out, I like to look good basically and ballet makes you good you know you need to pull yourself up and everything.*

However, it became apparent that the justifications for continuing to take part were decreasing and he was at the stage where he would have to decide whether to continue or not.

> *The thing is I've been doing ballet for so long that I've got a little bit tired of it, don't get me wrong I would be nowhere without ballet, ballet is the foundation, if you what to do dance and you don't do ballet then your going to have, you've got a lot to catch up on, I mean even footballers do ballet and it strengthens you so much that you get the technique right and you can do any type of dance, so you'd be nowhere without ballet but I'd like to do more hip hop type break-dance which I'm set up for because I've had ballet which I'm glad that I've had it but I've been doing it for how long now I think its 13 years, so it's a long time.*

It would be rash to suggest that Dylan's eventual 'tiredness' with ballet was solely the result of him having to deal with conflicting gendered identities. However, it was clear that they played a significant part. The fact that Dylan had to equate ballet training with football demonstrated that he was aware of a hierarchy of some sort and that greater social value was placed upon specific sporting activities. This distinction had also to be negotiated with the effects that his training was having on his own social life, much in the same way that many adolescents who take part in sport have to deal with. When I asked if it had become more difficult maintaining dance during later stages of secondary school, Dylan responded:

> *Yes it was actually, because I started to get more social, I started to go out with my friends more and you know they were all drinking on Friday, getting pissed and I wanted to as well because I wasn't having as much fun as them but you know I'm more healthy than them because I haven't been drinking every Friday, I've been going and getting up the next day early and getting on with my exercise and they've just been lazing around on Saturday, but yeah it was quite hard and it got me down sometimes because I wasn't able to go out and sleep over.*

Wainwright and Turner (2004), in their study of former ballet dancers and staff, comment upon the 'sheer physical hard work of the professional ballet dancers' (Wainwright and Turner 2004: 314), which is comparable with the physical training undertaken by professional athletes. Heikkala (1993), drawing upon Foucault (1984, 1986) applies the idea that athletes are subjects, not only of external authority, such as those exerted by sporting governing bodies, but also through 'their own understanding and reflection relative to the ways they fulfil the plans' (Heikkala 1993: 401). These techniques of the self allow individuals to perform operations

on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being in order to transform their identities within these practices and in turn achieve happiness and/or perfection. This relates to dance as well as sport in that although it is evident there is external control and power enforced by governing authorities, there are other factors within the process. Dance, like sport is not always compulsory, particularly outside of school there is a voluntary element. In the case of the Dylan and the other ballet dancers, although they had been selected for their dance classes, they were still attending on a voluntary basis. As Heikkala explains, in relation to the sports performer:

> Sport is not forced labour; it must and does include a strong voluntary flavour. Significantly, the will to do better must also carry a strong internalised feeling of a 'need' of discipline and conformity to the practices necessary for achieving the desired goal
>
> (Heikkala 1993: 401).

What is important to consider in the case of Dylan is that there were fewer opportunities to enjoy being an adolescent in comparison to other boys taking part in traditional sports. A main reason for taking part in team sports (as well as the prime appeal for adult men who continue to play sport in their leisure time) is the social element. It is generally taken for granted that some form of social activity will follow a team sport such as football or rugby, usually in the form of a drink with other team mates in the club house. Dylan did not have the opportunity to develop a real sense of camaraderie with his fellow dancers in the way that was clearly evident in the accounts of the men who took part in traditional sports. In Dylan's case, ballet had remained a solitary pursuit and his gender had been a key part in this.

IW: What's your earliest memory of ballet?
Dylan: Just sitting down in a big circle with all the other girls, sister next to me, doing the bad toe, good toe thing (pointing then flexing) that's the earliest memory I've got.
IW: Were you the only boy in that?
Dylan: Yes, I've always been the only boy in my group.
IW: How did you cope with that then, did you have a strategy?
Dylan: No, girls used to pick on me a lot or just try and ignore me.

Thus, for Dylan, taking part was immediately something that exposed his difference or his gendered otherness and, consequently, had to be negotiated. In this case, through tolerating teasing from the other girls and attempting to focus upon the dance. During the earlier stages, the enjoyment of the physical activities and the experience of his body enabled him

to position the positive aspects as outweighing the negative ones. However, as he got older, his strategy was to keep his dancing a secret. As the dance classes took place outside of school, he attempted to keep his this aspect of his life private. In contrast to the men who took part in activities such as football or rugby where these pursuits could be celebrated and discussed on and off the field, Dylan's experience of dance was much more isolated. When his friends did find out, Dylan had to suffer the consequences.

Dylan: Yeah, well they found out eventually because my mum would let it slip or something like that and they use to bully me, take the piss all the time.
IW: So how did you cope with that?
Dylan: I'd smile and grin.

Keeping participation in dance quiet was a strategy adopted by nearly all of the older boys interviewed in this research. Even though they were achieving at a significant level and attending a prestigious dance institution, they felt that the activity of dance was problematic and that keeping their involvement secret was the best strategy. Often this was not the case, as success brought greater awareness from their schools and different interpretations of this achievement. One boy named Russell who was fifteen years old told me how, even though he had been attending an elite ballet school as an associate for some time, when he was selected to take part in large dance production and needed to be away from school for a few days, his headteacher promptly made an announcement about it at the next school assembly. Russell explained to me that he understood that the headteacher had done this in order to celebrate his success with the whole school, but at the same time he had felt embarrassed and subsequently had to deal with teasing and bullying from other boys.

Although the accounts of Dylan and Russell about their experiences of ballet do not necessarily tell us something that we did not already know—what they do, if taken into consideration with the more conventional pathways of the men who took part in traditional sport, is reveal the limitations of gendered expectations in relation to physical activities and the almost rigid boundaries which restrict the movement of alternative ways of being. The unquestioned social construction of a 'natural' transition to 'adult' sport effectively limits the experiences of those who make the transition as well as those that are considered unsuitable.

In interviews with the young dancers, there was a clear sense that the moving body was something to be enjoyed and valued, much in the way that the men described their recollections of participation in traditional sports. However, the young dancers (between the ages of eight and eleven) articulated a sense of the body that extended the boundaries of traditional thinking.

Ballet makes me feel free.

(Sophie)

It's just the way that you move—the movement of it. It's elegant.

(Russell)

It is a beautiful experience.

(Jessica)

Often, these descriptions were framed in terms of how they felt whilst dancing. Words, such as 'soft', 'flowing', gentle' and 'dreamy' were used. Given that the classes were held outside of school hours and in a non-compulsory setting, the importance placed upon these embodied experiences demonstrates the significance of 'pleasure', in a much broader sense, as a factor in the dancers' participation. James, one of the dancers in the study, described how 'a flame is ignited' when he danced.

The association of dance with other artistic forms of expression provides the opportunity to contest taken for granted assumptions about sport and physical education. The young dancers were able to explore their own bodies, both physically and artistically in ways that go beyond the forms of experience found in conventional sports. This is not to imply that dance is free from the constraints of social compliance. The transgressive impact of the dancers is still embedded in other forms of restraint, particularly those related to the gendered aspects of dance culture. For instance, Jessica described how the other children at school considered dance:

They thought I was sissy some of them, you know, doing ballet.

The experience of dance, though, for Jessica (and the other dancers) was enough for her to continue participating regardless of the comments from her peers. It is from this perspective that we suggest that looking at forms of physical activity 'outside' of conventional forms of sport may provide more examples of different ways to engage young people in physical activities—which ultimately encourage embodied pleasurable experiences, such as those which James describes:

I find it a way of expressing myself through music by moves like strength and grace, a way of expressing your feelings, without saying a word by using actions and movements to express myself.

As I have suggested elsewhere (Wellard et al. 2007), there is an irony in the fact that many of the practices which form the basis of dance incorporate many of the distinguishing factors used so often to describe performers or performances in elite male sports. The combination of strength and grace has often been a factor in the descriptions of many male sporting

'heroes' (for example, John McEnroe in tennis, George Best and Pelé in football). The possession of sporting skills combined with strength and grace, or 'artistic flair' reportedly separated them from the ordinary player. However, these qualities are core aspects in the development of the young dancers. Exploring their bodies, not only in terms of physical accomplishment, but also in terms of artistic and creative expression, suggests that there is much to be learnt from the practices inherent in dance. Although, I should be clear that I am speaking of the physical practices of dance as opposed to the (heteronormative) gendered narratives so often characterised in traditional dance and evidenced in the recent popularity of ballroom and Latin American dancing.

Garrett suggests that we should challenge 'narrow and limiting conceptions of gender and the body' (Garrett 2004: 236) and to do this we need to recognise the centrality of the body in these debates. As Paechter rightly points out:

> If we are to understand how children learn and construct masculinities and femininities in school and other contexts, we need to have a radical reconception of the gendered body in which the body takes a full share of our attention.
>
> (Paechter 2006: 132)

6 A Lifetime of Sporting Bodily Practices

In Chapters 4 and 5 I described how expected sporting masculinity is made and remade in the context of sport and constructed as normal within the school setting. The material was gathered relatively recently (during the twenty-first century) and any claims made as a result of it is constituted as enactments of the present. However, the incorporation of life history interviews allowed investigation of continuities and changes in the performance of expected sporting masculinity through the life course. In this chapter I draw upon further analyses which enable consideration of social process in the formation of sporting masculinities and gendered identities.

As indicated in previous chapters, I have identified Connell's (1995) approach to body practices as a concept through which the body can be understood as occupying a significant role in the construction of gendered identity. In this chapter, I provide examples which incorporate a form of life-history technique within the interview process. A significant factor in this approach is that it facilitates evidence to be gathered first hand and helps to avoid many of the problems faced by more subjective readings found in second-hand textual analyses. Also, as the ethnographic material was collected within the context of sport, I adapted the interviews with the sample group of men to take the form of sporting-life histories. The accounts from the men enabled me to assess whether the enactments identified in the previous chapters have always been performed. Thus, recollections of childhood activities and experiences of school and adult sport could be evaluated in the light of the observations made in the present and in relation to the initial research questions.

The argument that the material body through its experiences and capacities is implicated in the process of producing meaning about particular interactions and exchanges can clearly be supported within the sporting context. For it is within the sporting arena that emphasis is placed upon specific socially-constructed performances of the body. At the same time, the application of the life-history approach draws from the respondent more generalised experiences of social practices. Consequently, for the men who took part in the interviews, sport was an initial means through which they were able to disclose many other aspects of their lives. For example:

> *I can remember doing, you know, being really embarrassed having to do drama and things like that . . . always seemed a bit girly to me.*
> (Shaun 32)

Shaun's statement demonstrates how the focus upon sport during the interviews presented opportunities for the men to talk about other aspects of their lives. In this case, I was able to question further his responses which had offered particular themes, such as what he understood by 'girly' and what aspects of drama he found embarrassing. Consequently, Shaun was able to describe to me his experiences of primary-school sport and how, at an early age, he had developed a sense of his body as significant in the presentation and construction of gender. Additional descriptions, such as his embarrassment at doing drama and finding it 'girly' reveal an early formulation of gendered identity. These findings support more detailed research which has focused more specifically upon the construction of masculinities within the school setting (Skelton 2001, Jackson 2006, Renold 2007).

By providing a general analysis of experiences of the body within the sports context, I attempt to explore further men's relationship to expected sporting masculinity and how it cannot be read off from prior positions such as class, sexuality or age. As I described in the Chapter 4, not all gay men are excluded from performing expected sporting masculinity despite the fact that it connotes heterosexuality in our sex/gender formation. Similarly, not all heterosexual men are willing or able to perform expected sporting masculinity. One of the key factors mediating men's relationship to this version of masculinity is their ability to demonstrate the level of physical prowess demanded by it.

CONSTRUCTING A SENSE OF THE MASCULINE BODY

The importance of bodily performance is learnt at an early age, particularly as a means of presenting a social identity, and is formed through comparison with other bodies. Early experiences of childhood are important in the development of normative forms of gender and bodily behaviour (Walkerdine 1990, Thorne 1993). Versions of bodily performance, predominantly expressed as masculinity or femininity, are learnt, rehearsed and then repeatedly acted out. Physical performances are often associated with gendered experiences so that an understanding of gender is specifically related to the corporeal.

In the interviews it was clear that a central childhood concern of the men was establishing themselves as 'normal' in terms of their perceived understanding of masculine behaviour. For Connell, body reflexive practices 'constitute a world which has a bodily dimension, but is not biologically determined.' (Connell 1995: 65) The body could, therefore, be said to provide a means through which the men, as children, were able to demonstrate

(or not) their understanding of normal masculine behaviour. At the same time, during adolescence, there was awareness that behaviour which was considered socially unorthodox could be potentially problematic and this in turn required some form of management. It was apparent that bodies were perceived in gendered terms and at the same time distinctions were made between the levels of status to be gained from different forms of bodily performance. Without the additional forms of capital available to adults, such as economic capital, the body emerged as even more central to the establishment of a social identity. The ability to demonstrate to others signs of accepted masculinity, in contrast to signs of femininity, is required from an early age. Among the gay and the straight men interviewed, this was achieved with varying levels of success. Their understanding of homosexuality was vague during primary-school years although there was awareness that the presentation of appropriate masculinity was important as there was a negative association with outward performances of weak or 'gay' masculinity. Many of the gay men in the sample demonstrated how bodily performance could be used to mask their alternative sexuality and avoid the risk of becoming a target for bullies. The men who were able to demonstrate appropriate masculinity through bodily performance and particularly through sporting performance were able to navigate childhood, school and youth relatively easily. This was in contrast to the gay men who presented more 'feminine' characteristics. In their accounts, the men (gay and straight) who were less able to 'pass' as 'masculine' reported being the victims of bullying and non-acceptance.

According to Frosh et al. (2002), boys learn at an early age the need to demonstrate their difference from girls and at the same time need to confirm their understanding of popular masculinity amongst their peers. The key way to do this is through demonstrating toughness and, in particular, physical or sporting prowess. Frosh et al. incorporate Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity in their study of adolescent boys and a central theme throughout the study was the boys' attempts to present orthodox masculinity, especially through physical and discursive performances of football.

Simon and Gary: Two Sporting Life Histories

In order to explore these themes further, I start with the accounts of two men from the straight club. I decided that it would be interesting to compare and contrast the experiences of two men from the straight tennis club. I selected Simon and Gary as I felt they would provide a useful starting point to explore some of the main themes. Although the main contrast between the two men was in terms of their sexuality, (Simon was heterosexual, whereas Gary was gay) I was aware that one of the most noticeable differences between them was their ability to participate in sport as much as they wanted. Even though they both enjoyed taking part in physical

activities, Simon appeared to have greater access to sport and was clearly more confident about his body in comparison to Gary. I wanted to explore whether sexuality was the main factor in their ability to take part in sport or whether their understanding of their own masculinity as expressed through their bodies was a greater influence. At the same time, their similar social backgrounds enabled me to explore whether other social factors, such as age and class contributed to their experience of sport in any way.

Gary and Simon were roughly the same age (Gary, thirty-nine, and Simon, thirty-eight) and had similar economic and social backgrounds. Their fathers were from the same area and had strong ties with the large mill which provided the core employment for the local town. Gary's father worked nearly all his life at the mill whilst Simon's father, although not employed at the mill, nevertheless, had a long standing involvement with the sports and social club. Simon continued to work on the factory floor at the mill after leaving school and at one point in time Gary worked there for three years. However, despite these similarities, their early childhood experiences and subsequent paths through school are marked by their differing constructions of masculine identity related to their bodily presentation. Simon and Gary were interviewed early on in the research and their accounts set the tone for subsequent interviews. An additional reason for selecting Simon and Gary at that stage was not only their familiarity to me, but also in the way I felt I could 'relate' to them. I wanted to establish whether these men had developed similar understandings of their bodies. This would enable me to compare and contrast them with other men of differing ages, sexuality and social backgrounds. I had known both men prior to the research through my association with the tennis club and our shared knowledge of the local area. They were a similar age group and during the period that I became more involved in the tennis club and the team I developed a close friendship with both men. I think that my relationship with Simon was formed through a mutual respect built upon our shared interest in sport and the way we had benefited from it in the past. At the same time there was a sense that he admired other aspects of my attitude to sport and life in general. He told me on one occasion that he admired the way I appeared to enjoy playing tennis and said he wished he too could be more expressive. I had known Gary prior to the research. We had not been in the same social circles during our schooldays, but I became friendly with him when he developed an interest in tennis and at one stage I helped him by giving him some coaching. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) discuss the importance of recognising the two-way process during the interviews where 'the resulting narratives are always a product of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000: 45). For example, in one of the interviews conducted by Hollway, she described how she felt the relationship was like mother and daughter (Hollway and Jefferson 2000: 47) and the understanding of this relationship needed to be considered during the analysis of the data. In the case of Simon and Gary, our similar ages

and familiarity, created the sense that our relationships were understood in terms of a friendship, however, this was not the case in all the subsequent interviews as demonstrated in my aborted attempt at interviewing Tim, described in Chapter 4. It is also difficult to gauge exactly the extent to which the men understood the research I was conducting. I had explained to them that I was investigating sport, the body and participation, but there was no further enquiry from either of the men. I found this a general occurrence throughout the research. There was often an anxiety on my behalf about maintaining research integrity, but for all the men in the sample there appeared little need for detailed explanations. At the same time, I generally did not offer detailed information about my work. Often, I have found that attempts to explain sociological concepts outside of an academic environment can appear patronising. For my interview with Gary, I had arranged to go to his house and for Simon, at that time as I was living near the tennis club, I suggested that he come round to my place one afternoon on his way back from work. Because of my prior knowledge of both men and the setting in familiar surroundings, the interviews were relaxed and conducted as conversations, which I had initially hoped for.

An important aspect which emerged was the way that all the men who took part in the research described the enjoyment experienced through their bodies when they engaged in some form of physical activity. Gary and Simon provided similar descriptions of the physical thrill of taking part in active pursuits.

> *Running and swimming, like socially, like running with friends and all that type of thing, I enjoyed that, but I didn't particularly like organised sport. I used to go cycling with friends and stuff like that and then we used to go to . . . erm just play around really. Not sporty, just play.*
>
> (Gary)

> *I was very keen on going up to the playing fields, just kicking a ball around.*
>
> (Simon)

The enjoyment of taking part in physical activity experienced by all the men is an important point and central to the argument that the body is implicated in the construction of masculinity. However, specific socially prescribed performances dictated the nature of subsequent participation. Connell's (1995) concept of a 'circuit of body reflexive practices' allows us to understand how new constructions of self-identity are formed through bodily experiences. In this particular case, the 'body-reflexive practice of sport' (Connell 1995: 63) created an understanding of normative identity for Simon, whereas for Gary it established an identity based upon difference.

Gary described how he was aware at an early age of his physical presence by drawing upon comparisons of his own bodily presentation with the other children.

> *I was probably a little bit camp when I was at school. Cos I wasn't aggressive and stuff like that and I was in the lower tier at school, so I was in the 'B' stream and it was more of an aggressive culture and kids didn't wanna learn and so it was very difficult . . . Sport was pretty atrocious . . . because it was all cricket, which I loathed, football which I was useless at and hockey which I was crap at.*

Gary's use of the term 'camp' suggests that his recollections are shaped by an adult reading of his childhood experiences even if camp was not a concept he would have used at the time. However, it is safe to assume that Gary is describing a sense of being different from other boys that he felt at the time. But what is important is that this sense of difference appears to have derived, to a significant degree, from his experience of his body. Through the physical experience of his body he developed an understanding of it as being weak or inadequate, especially in comparison to other boys when having to take part in organised sport. His descriptive awareness of himself as 'camp', or different in terms of the other boy's bodily presentations, also demonstrates that he had developed an understanding of appropriate masculine performance which, in turn, did not relate sufficiently to the experience of his own body. This is similar to Connell's (1995) example of Adam Singer who was criticised by his father because of his apparent lack of skill at sports. Connell argues that Singer developed an understanding of his body as different from normative masculinity through his inability to throw a ball like a 'real man'.

> The public gender meanings are instantaneously infused with the bodily activity and the emotions of the relationship. Even so, there is a split perception. Adam has learned how to be both in his body (throwing) and outside his body watching its gendered performance.
>
> (Connell 1995: 62)

Gary's understanding of his body as weak had been developed through a similar relationship with his own body and its gendered performance. He was aware that he did not present the expected version of masculinity and in the early years of school he was made aware of his difference from the other boys specifically through his physical bodily presentation, rather than as a result of any awareness of his sexuality. Indeed, it is difficult to make claims that children are fully aware of their sexuality at an early age or understand the social implications attached to it. For Gary, however, it seems possible that the realisation of his difficulty presenting orthodox masculinity in comparison to the other boys was further accentuated by his placement in the lower stream in the secondary school where the emphasis, within the pupils' culture, was on the presentation of aggressive, physical masculinity rather than the academic. This, again, is similar to Connell's description of Adam Singer, in the attitudes expressed by his father, like the other boys at Gary's school, were located in hegemonic masculinity. In this

environment the performance of bodily strength attracted the most cultural capital and in the school curriculum sport was considered a prime area to encourage the boys to let off steam. For Gary, though, his body was a major source of humiliation as he felt he was unable to compete physically with the other (in his words) 'thugs'. Consequently, his experiences of sport as a child were negative.

> *I just hated it all. I wasn't very good and so I hated it al l . . . I don't know I just always feel conscious when there's a massive group of people in sport. I feel kind of conscious about my ability.*

Gary 'wasn't very good' at sport, but more tellingly the consequence of this was that he could not perform hegemonic masculinity. His loathing of organised sport continued throughout school and during the latter years of secondary school, when he became increasingly aware of his sexuality, he came to regard sport as something that other (heterosexual) men do. Gary's construction of sport bears similarities with Pronger's (2002) description of his experiences of sport as a child.

The physical experience of sport created a social understanding of how he should present his body within this context to others and, combined with his interpretation of homosexuality, formed a circuit of bodily reflexive practices which ultimately shaped his ability to interact with the other boys. Because of his feeling that he was unable to 'pass' successfully within this environment, he continued to avoid it.

> *I mean I didn't have any problems coming to terms with my sexuality. But saying that, I thought being gay I wasn't particularly good at sport so I thought well that's part of it.*

Gary's account reveals the way that appropriate bodily performance is part of acquiring successful masculine status. Failure in this area signals failure as a 'real' man. Consequently, Gary constructed the notion that being gay was, in some sense, a failed masculinity. Gary's early experiences of his body, particularly in relation to school sport, created awareness as he grew older of the need to present orthodox masculinity. Gary placed great importance on the need to 'blend in', particularly in the work setting, and it was his bodily presentation which provided a main way to achieve this. He told me that he was unhappy in the way that he had presented his body as a youth. Not only was he aware of his difference in terms of sexuality, but he was aware of his physical shape.

> *No I didn't particularly like it, when I was skinny. I always thought I could put on a bit of weight.*

Weight was also an important indicator of masculinity for him. When he was at school, most of the other boys were physically bigger and he related

being skinny to being weak. However, as he moved towards middle age and increased his waistline, he had resorted to dieting and taking diet tablets, rather than adopting a physical exercise regime to combat this. In terms of his constructed understanding of normative masculinity, physical exercise, for Gary, was associated with organised male sport which he felt uncomfortable taking part in or gyms which he felt no desire to attend. The social significance his body continued in that the way Gary experienced it continued to be influenced by his understanding of sport which he considered a site where there remained a continued threat that his physical performance would let him down.

As an adult, Gary was introduced to tennis through friends. He enjoyed playing tennis but his past experiences of sport had diminished its appeal and prevented him from wanting to remain an active member of a club. Although he had managed to achieve a reasonable standard, there remained a constant sense of doubt about his own abilities which created a feeling for him that he did not really belong in this social arena. His attempts in the past to take part in tennis clubs were only for short periods.

> *I find a little bit, kind of to a certain extent intimidating because of some of the people who are there . . . cos some people are very good and it can be if you're not up to standard, you know it's very difficult. I think it's different when you're young because you can learn. I think when you're kind of like in your late thirties and stuff like that it's very difficult to kind of progress . . . and I feel that erm it can be quite intimidating by people what, you know they're much better than you and I'd hate to be in a situation, probably, it probably stems from school where you think that they don't really want me in the team and you think am I really playing with people who don't want to play tennis against me but think, oh I've got to . . . in a club environment.*

For Gary, there was a marked distinction between sport and play. There was pleasure to be gained from his body in terms of physical activity but, for him, sport was associated with negative social expectations and in particular, a pressure to perform hegemonic masculinity. Pleasure through play was found in other areas, particularly in sexual activity which was seen as fun and where the social expectations could be managed. Dunne (1988) describes how young girls are able to take part and enjoy sports as girls, but the onset of puberty creates problems in terms of the social understanding of their bodies, which effectively precludes them from taking part in the same manner. Dunne developed her theory by analysing the representations of girls and women in sport. However, similar arguments to Dunne's can be developed in relation to boys and ethnographic studies, like Connell's, support these claims. The onset of puberty, if read in terms of bodily practices, directs the individual to experience his or her body in a particular manner. Consequently, adolescent women begin to understand and experience their bodies as weak in relation to men. Gary learnt to

experience his body during childhood and adolescence as weak, or feminine. This understanding of masculine identity was also influenced by his perceptions of normative femininity and homosexuality. Gary, therefore, constructed a social identity through an acute awareness of his own body. His bodily performances informed his perception of masculinity in relation to other men and also provide support for the claim that the body is central in the presentation of gendered identity to others. Thus, for Gary, social situations which held the possibility of presenting an inappropriate identity were avoided.

Like the working-class women described in Skegg's (1997) study, Gary's identity was shaped by class and gender, but there were also ambiguities in relation to his sexuality and body. His understanding of gender was constructed through an early socialisation process located in traditional working-class masculinity and gender binaries. For example, the following descriptions of his father provide evidence to support this view:

> *Well kind of like er everything's black and white. Didn't particularly like the company of women, apart from my mother.*

I asked Gary why his father thought this way.

> *I don't know, I just think he was kind of like more comfortable in men's company. He worked in an all male environment and was quite happy in that environment.*

Gary's experiences of home life and school had clearly informed his own understanding of what masculinity should entail. I continued the theme of the conversation by asking Gary what he thought authentic masculinity was.

> *I'd say masculinity to myself was a very, very ordinary . . . ordinary kind of run-of-the-mill person.*

Men who displayed feminine characteristics through their bodies were more problematic. As indicated earlier, Gary felt that it was his body that betrayed him, particularly in a social situation such as sport, rather than his sexuality. Consequently, Gary identified with normative versions of masculinity but felt excluded from them because of his physical presence. However, his understanding of gay masculinity was built upon a stereotype of camp effeminacy.

> *Yeah I have very good relationships with women because they are women. I don't feel comfortable in the environment of camp people. I wouldn't want to walk down the town with people screaming and squawking, it's not my scene, it's not what I want, I just want to blend in.*

Simon, in contrast to Gary, experienced his body and his abilities in sport as natural. Physical sensations and pleasurable experiences gained from physical activity were seen as positive and normal. Simon's experience of his body enabled him to construct an identity based upon normative masculinity. For example, when he was at primary school, his recollections demonstrate that he was already aware of the performances required. Being active was considered an essential part of his world and was often hampered at school.

Simon: It was mostly games, I mean they did sort of the human movement studies . . . A lot of music in the playground, pretending to be a statue.
IW: How did you find that?
Simon: Well for someone who used to like running around in the countryside I suppose it was a little bit pedestrian . . . erm, I played for the school football team.

Football was a space where he could be active and this figured heavily in his childhood memories. Playing football was considered a natural activity for boys to take part in and he never had any reason to find participation problematic in the way that Gary did. However, when I asked if he ever used a gym, the response was an emphatic no. This could be explained by his participation many sports, but there was the sense that, for him, using the gym betrayed the 'naturalness' of his ability in sport which in turn carried with it greater cultural capital.

I suppose with the football being on a regular basis it kept me ticking over and I never felt that I had to go down the gym.

For Simon, taking part in sport was deemed more satisfying than the more 'artificial' practice of going to a gym. Simon had learnt that the presentation of effortless, 'natural' ability in sports achieved greater respect from others and related his abilities to an inherited metabolism.

Erm . . . I suppose from an early age, I think most of it just comes down to stamina . . . I did used to get tired sometimes but that was mostly due to a poor diet . . . obviously with my mum out working and me being on my own at home, left to my own devices. I might have eaten the wrong food. From that point of view I might have suffered but . . . I've always been fairly naturally fit.

In the past the only threat to his 'natural' fitness as a child had been from a poor diet, which interestingly was blamed on his mother. In adult life the physical nature of work played an increasing role in how he was able to use his body. Simon's daily work routine consisted of long periods spent

alone working on large machines. The work was physically demanding and also unsociable which may also explain the lack of enthusiasm for additional solitary, physical activity found in the gym. During the research I was able to get to know Simon better and I found that my general impression of him, and to an extent Gary, was one of a conservative man, keen to conform. Obviously, these comments are based on a more subjective reading on behalf of the writer, but they were made by taking into account the lifestyles and opinions of the other men in the sample and also experiences formulated outside of the research. Working out at the gym was, for Simon, considered unnatural and maybe to an extent narcissistic. From his accounts it appeared that he understood his body in terms of 'other' where there was the sense that it was a machine or mechanism which enabled him to perform tasks in the way that Synnott (1993) describes. This is also similar to the accounts from the older men in the sample and may be explained by the men's relationship to class- based traditions and understandings of 'hard work' and manual work. This offers an interesting comparison to Skeggs' (1997) investigation of working-class women. In her study she found that the women she interviewed were constantly aware of their class position, but were more concerned with how they could differentiate themselves from it. The men in the straight club tended to favour the values associated in particular with traditional working-class masculine performance whereas, the women in Skeggs' study found class was 'experienced by the women as exclusion' (Skeggs 1997: 74).

In contrast to Gary, Simon's 'natural' abilities in sport enabled him to make the transition from primary play to adult sport, although he was also aware that not everyone would be able to make it.

> *Because there was such a difference between primary school . . . was sort of very friendly and 'oh, never mind you can do it', quite encouraging, whereas er secondary school was, I mean not just the teachers, it's the pupils as well . . . those that were quite tough and there was a few shrinking violets as well.*

Earning respect from others because of his sporting ability enabled Simon to develop an understanding of sport as a male preserve where certain qualities were required. His accounts of his experiences as a young man entering into the world of adult male sport almost suggest a 'rite of passage' to hegemonic masculinity.

Simon: You sort of see everything there is to see about football. The good side and the bad side. It was . . . er men against boys and er you know they're licensed to do whatever they want to, but you know it sort of conditioned you to er either fall at the wayside or battle through it.

IW: Is that good or bad?

Simon: Depends what character you are erm . . . it did affect a couple of friends of mine . . . but they did see some very nasty injuries . . . erm it was particularly scary on a few occasions . . . when you've got the other team and the supporters you know sort of baying for blood, sort of thing. But all in all it was erm it was just good for me, I just erm . . . if I got fouled or whatever, I just got up and got on with it and erm and that seemed to wind the opposition up even more and it actually helped us get the result we wanted . . . because they totally lost it.

IW: Yeah, whereas they wanted you to.

Simon: Yes, so it was erm, from that point if view it set the team up for later on in life. And we had a lot of success later on. That was quite good grounding from that point of view.

Simon was able to make the transition to adult sport successfully and because of this was able to justify the process. Those who 'fell by the wayside' were, for Simon, considered unsuitable for participation and the selection process merely sorted them out. Simon learnt that successful participation in adult sport required a performance of expected sporting masculinity as a means of demonstrating to others his ability to take part.

During the latter years of primary school and the early years of secondary school, organised sports start to take precedence over play and with it not only more rules-based physical activity but a requirement for particular forms of masculine performance. Although bodily prowess can be seen as a factor in primary school play, the introduction of 'adult' sport brings with it a greater emphasis on the way certain bodily performances are required in order to enable participation. For Simon, and the other men in the sample, there appeared to be a learning process or transition period, where those who were able to take the knocks and present the appropriate performances would be more successful. As such, violence, competitiveness and aggressiveness were learnt as part of this process and were to be expected. For Simon, as he had managed to negotiate the transition relatively successfully, these experiences were remembered in a positive light and a period where his character was shaped beneficially. For a brief period he had spent some time at a local comprehensive with a poor academic reputation, but after he had shown proficiency in sport, he gained additional status in the school.

> *I mean everything, sport, the academic side, social side seemed to escalate and become a lot better than what it was. The confidence you get from sport, in my particular case carried over to the classroom and beyond.*

Keeping active remained a priority for Simon, not only as a means to continue playing sport but also as an indication of his masculine status which placed emphasis on the importance of activity and hard work. The nature

of Simon's heavy daily work routine also provided the basis for his understanding of his body. Playing sport was enough to maintain his body and sustain sufficient cultural capital. At the same time Simon recognised the need to maintain a certain level of physical fitness in order to keep up a particular standard, not only at work, but in all aspects of his social identity. Realising the importance that Simon placed upon his active involvement in sport, I thought it would be useful to ask him how he would cope with not being able to take part as much

IW: So how do you see yourself coping with old age if you can't play so much football. Will you consciously try to remain active?

Simon: I will try to remain active. Erm I suppose now with the football virtually trailing off to the occasional game, sort of every couple of months, tennis is going to come to the fore. Possibility that I might think about doing something else to, just to keep up a decent level.

'Something else' meant another form of organised sport, not exercise for the sake of exercise. Keeping active remained a priority, not only as a means to continue playing sports but as part of social expectations based on the importance placed upon activity and the influence of traditional class-based work ethic. The importance that Simon placed upon his body was evident in all aspects of his life. He described the physical demands of his job, whilst at the same time he reinforced the notion that physical effort was a sign of character:

> *I'm on my feet all the time, so literally twelve hours. By the end of my shift my feet are burning and my legs are aching.*

Even though Simon's work was physically demanding, leisure time was spent either playing sport or with his family. Simon distinguished between the physical toil at work and physical enjoyment gained through sport. In contrast to Gary, participation in organised sport had remained an open door to Simon and one where entrance did not need to be negotiated. His ability to present hegemonic masculinity combined with his sporting ability had provided benefits throughout his life and helped during his school years. Simon and Gary had contrasting experiences at school which could at face value be explained in terms of their sexualities. But for Gary, the 'problem' at school was not his sexuality, it was his bodily performance. His lack of competence in presenting hegemonic masculinity, particularly in an environment where sporting prowess carried with it greater levels of capital and his outward presentation of 'campness' made his experiences at school more difficult. In fact, he was able to manage his sexuality more effectively than his physical presentation of accepted masculinity within the school. For instance, during the later years of secondary school Gary was able to conduct a sexual relationship with another boy who was one of

the school 'hard nuts'. Significantly, this explicitly gay relationship did not cause him problems because he was able to keep it hidden. Interestingly, in adult life, Gary rejected the gay community. His ideal partner, in his words, was someone who was 'straight acting' and, over the years, Gary had deliberately attempted to present himself in social settings as 'straight' which entailed working on his bodily performance to others. This meant initially putting on weight and wearing clothing which he thought reflected local men and carrying his body appropriately, for example, walking with a slight swagger. It also meant adopting at appropriate times exaggerated banter or swearing. In essence, learning to 'pass' as a heterosexual male.

Although coming from similar social backgrounds, Simon and Gary had developed differing understandings of their own bodies. However, at the same time, there were similarities between the two men in that their constructions of appropriate masculine performance were located in an understanding of hegemonic masculinity. Simon demonstrated a taken for granted understanding of his body as normal, in the way that Bourdieu (1990) describes as hexus, and had less cause to reflect upon the notion of difference from other men. His experience of his body, particularly in physical activity was related to pleasurable feelings. Taking 'knocks' and enduring physical pain was considered part of the whole 'package' of sport and in turn reflected a constructed understanding of normal masculine behaviour. These characteristics were displayed in his approach to his work, even though they were not considered in the same pleasurable way. Consequently, his understanding of masculinity was based upon the importance of physical, corporeal performances both at work and in play. This view of masculinity can be contrasted to his understanding of femininity which was based upon inactivity and physical weakness. Bodily performance was central in this relationship as a means of demonstrating to others his masculinity. For Gary, his body was experienced and understood in terms of being unnatural and different from other men. His reluctance to move to a city to be a part of a gay scene meant that he had not been exposed to the body-consciousness expressed, for example, through body building which has become an established part of contemporary gay male lifestyle (Simpson 1994). He compared his body with femininity and developed an understanding of his own identity as being weak or inferior to other men.

What transpires from the accounts of Gary and Simon is the way that specific gendered bodily performances are significant throughout the life course. The emphasis upon the body as a means of presenting 'natural' or 'unnatural' masculinity reinforces the hierarchical structure of gender relations and simultaneously contributes to the dominance of a hegemonic masculinity. At the same time it is also important to acknowledge the way in which both men experienced their bodies and the way this played an integral part in the construction of their own masculine identities as well as wider social understandings of other men and women. Gary's attempts to conform to hegemonic masculinity through his efforts to avoid problematic

social situations, such as sport, and in adult life his dislike of 'camp' acting men reveals the complex nature of those who are both disadvantaged by hegemonic masculinity but are also at the same inextricably bound to it.

The interviews provided the opportunity to compare the responses of the gay and straight men when relating to their own understandings of their bodies. The accounts of Gary and Simon reveal how the two men contemplated their bodies in contrasting ways because of their perceived understanding of how to perform masculinity. Thus, Gary demonstrated a greater awareness of his body as a means of performing masculinity as he was forced to confront issues of gender performance and sexuality. For Simon, as he was able to conform to an accepted version of masculinity there was a lesser need to reflect upon his body in the way Gary had to. Nevertheless, Simon demonstrated awareness of his body in other ways and constantly reflected upon his bodily performance in relation to other men, women and the ageing process.

These patterns were repeated throughout the interviews. I had conducted the interviews for the gay and straight men in a similar fashion, focusing specifically on sporting life-histories. For the gay men, disclosure of their sexuality was something which emerged unprompted within the interview and was often a means by which they were able to make sense of their own masculine performance. For the straight men, their bodies were constructed more from 'within' an arena of masculinity where bodily performance was a means of maintaining status. The reaffirmation of binary distinctions relating to understandings of feminine and non-masculine performances was an accepted consequence of their perception of a 'natural' gender order. Active, hard working, physical masculinity based upon traditional understandings of heteronormative masculine and feminine behaviour was considered the authentic version. Because of this, during this research, I felt that I needed to 'tread more carefully' in my interviews with the men from the straight tennis club (apart from the one with Gary) when talking about masculinity. I mentioned, in Chapter 4, about my awareness of performing expected sporting masculinity to Toby, but this was also a constant factor throughout my experiences in the straight club. My ability to perform expected sporting masculinity had meant that during my time at the straight club, I had never had cause to divulge my sexuality. At the same time, I did not want to jeopardize any potential relationships with the men I wanted to interview. I felt that, in this situation, knowledge of my sexuality would transfer the focus more towards me and construct the interviews within a different framework. At the same time, there was also the possibility that some of the men may not have wanted to do the interviews in the first place. I also wanted them to talk about their lives and found that lack of acknowledgment of any problems in their readings of normative masculine actions equally revealing.

Needless to say, the interviews were revealing and in the case of Simon, I was able to draw upon his relationship with sport as a means of directing

the conversation to the nature of competitiveness and then towards masculinity. In many of the conversations with the other men in the straight club there was less opportunity to bring direct questions of masculinity into the frame. However, Simon's responses indicate how masculinity within sporting practice is constructed in relation to broader social understandings. I initially asked Simon about the nature of competitiveness within sport and where he thought he had acquired it.

Simon: Yeah, I mean I've always been fairly competitive anyway in all sports.
IW: Where does that come from?
Simon: I think it does stem from my dad.

Sporting competitiveness, according to Simon, had been learnt and acquired from his father and fitted into a constructed understanding of sporting practice as a masculine arena. In this way Simon had to construct an understanding of what masculinity meant to him. As I have indicated, the question of masculinity is not a topic which is openly discussed. There is the sense that masculinity is 'unquestioned' and this in turn establishes a greater sense that it is a natural and static phenomenon rather than more fluid. This is important as it highlights the problems in attempting to accommodate analysis which incorporates the theoretical *possibilities* of fluid gendered identities along with the *entrenched* everyday reality of social expectations. For the men in the straight club, there was little need to question their understanding of masculinity. Within the arena of sport, where hegemonic masculinity is performed within even more restricted limits, (expected masculine) bodily actions appear to be performed louder than words. Competitiveness, for Simon, was associated with action and in turn applied to a reading of 'natural' male behaviour.

I used Simon's explanation of his competitiveness resulting from the influence of his father to ask whether there was some relationship between traditional understandings of sport and masculinity.

IW: Is this traditional? I've been reading about this idea of sport as a masculine arena. Where you have these traditional assumptions about sport and it tends to be related to the men . . . I have tried to get my head around what is masculine. What do you understand by it? When I say that it is a masculine arena?
Simon: I just think of strength and toughness and that sort of thing.
IW: And in a way they are sort of qualities you should strive towards?
Simon: But, you know, if you look at ladies tennis. You look at someone like Venus Williams, I mean, is she not aggressive and tough . . . But then you think she's doing so well because she's adopted masculine traits . . . I don't know . . . I mean, you think, years and years and years ago, some one like the Chris Everts and the Evonne

> Goolagongs, that they were natural players, but they were erm sort of finesse or gracefulness. Gentle, if you like, but effective, whereas now it's all grunt and groan.

It was evident from the response that the construction of masculinity was produced from broader social understanding of the 'nature' of normative gender performance. Simon drew upon a heteronormative description of male and female performance and provided examples of idealized feminine characteristics, such as 'gracefulness' and 'gentle' in comparison to the more masculine traits of aggressiveness and strength. Simon used the example of women tennis players to suggest an apparent transformation in gender performance. At the same time hinting that this transformation in the women's game was at the expense of a clearer distinction between the sexes. To an extent, it could be suggested that the on-court performances of the Williams sisters present a disruptive moment within the heteronomative discourse of gender definitions, but the radical potential of this disruptive moment is diffused by the reinforcement of expected sporting masculinity and the simultaneous performance of normative gender in other ways (such as wearing short dresses, ribbons and jewellery).

Simon's regret for the loss of the 'feminine' characteristics performed by the women tennis players of a previous generation can be read in terms of a broader understanding of gender and gendered behaviour. Normative male sporting performances are understood in terms of more general social understandings of hegemonic masculinity and within sport of expected sporting masculinity, whereas female sporting performance is seen as a reflection of a wider understanding of a gender-based binary distinction between male and female and a subsequent belief that sport remains an 'unnatural' arena for women.

Simon reinforced his understanding of normative gender behaviour later in the conversation when we spoke about how he managed to maintain time for sport after leaving school, staring work and then getting married.

> **Simon:** I got married when I was 25 and was keen to carry on the football and the tennis and luckily my, she's my ex-wife now, she understood.
>
> **IW:** Did she play sport?
>
> **Simon:** No she er, she's a bit like my mum in the sense that she did some dancing. But she was never a sporty person. Chalk and cheese I guess. Opposites attract I guess. But you know, she was happy for me to do the football and the tennis and erm on occasions . . . weekends and stuff like that we'd set aside time to go out together, but erm primarily you know there was a free reign at the weekends.

Simon provided an account of how a taken for granted world of normative masculinity is formed and within this world an understanding of normative

masculine and feminine bodily performances is established. However, there appears little room to consider alternatives with the implication that, for Simon, sport was the territory for 'real' men and an essential component in the doxic world of authentic masculinity. In this light, expected sporting masculinity is a bodily-based expression of masculinity which is encountered in the social context of normative masculinity.

At this point, I think that it is important to account for other social factors. As I have suggested with the example of Simon and Gary, specific bodily performances were more important as a factor in the construction of masculinity than sexuality. However, I want to explore this further by drawing upon the accounts of other men from the sample. At the straight club there was a wider range of age groups in comparison to the gay club and I wanted to incorporate an element of age into the research in order to assess whether the onset of age affected the relationship to hegemonic masculinity and the performance of expected sporting masculinity. At the same time there was a broader range of class backgrounds among the men at the gay tennis club, so I needed to take into account these aspects within my arguments. I start with an example taken from interviews with some of the elderly men at the straight club and then continue with examples which take into account relations of class before investigating, more specifically, sexuality.

The Ageing Male Body

The older men I interviewed at the straight club demonstrated more ambivalent attitudes to hegemonic masculinity than the younger men in the club. Recollections of their youth provided similar readings, in relation to the other men, of the performance of traditional heterosexual masculinity, but the aging process had diminished the emphasis upon performing expected sporting masculinity. The ageing process also made the men more aware of their bodies in terms of the investment needed for maintaining health. Although I had known the men prior to the research through my involvement with the tennis club, in conducting the interviews and, subsequently, in analysing them, I attempted to take into account our relationships and especially how they viewed me, whether this was as a member of the club, a younger man, the son of an acquaintance or a researcher. Their familiarity with me possibly made my task easier in that they were willing to take part and assist me in whatever way they could. What was difficult for me to ascertain was their perception of me and the way that this influenced the research process. Our prior relationship created a more relaxed atmosphere than one conducted between strangers, but at the same time I was aware of the position that I occupied in the club and the possibility that there may have been some pressure on the men to impress me. However, this can be seen as a positive aspect of the life history approach in that interpretations of what is considered important now may be assessed in terms of other

revelations in the interview process and observations in the field. As Peter Berger suggests,

> as we remember the past, we reconstruct it in accordance with our present ideas of what is important and what is not . . . we notice only those things that are important for our immediate purposes.
>
> (Berger 1970: 70)

In this case, there may have been attempts by all the men in the sample to recall aspects of their biographies which would present past sporting experiences in a manner which they believed would satisfy me and at the same time promote their own image of sporting and masculine prowess. However, attempts by the men to present versions of the past in order to impress me could be considered as revealing performances of masculinity. The interviews were also revealing in that the men were quite willing to talk openly about their relationships with their bodies. For instance, Edward, age seventy-four, provided an example of bodily practice which conflicted with broader hegemonic masculinity. Edward described to me how he had been experiencing back pains during his early forties. His wife had during that time been attending yoga classes and had enthused about how it had eased her stiff back. As a working-class man living in the 1970s, it could be argued that Edward faced a substantial social expectation to perform a normative version of heterosexual masculinity. However, for Edward, the possibility of alleviating his painful back provided a greater incentive. Although he was the only male in the class, he found that the exercises did relieve his back and he subsequently continued to practice yoga regularly.

> *It was very noticeable that when coming away from the yoga class I would walk fifteen years younger.*

The specific movements performed in yoga, based upon slow, sensuous and often balletic contortions would have been a stark contrast to his experiences of active and aggressive mainstream sport. However, it could be argued that the sensations experienced through his body would have been significant for him to re-think his understanding of normative masculine sporting practice. Thus, for Edward, there was an individual experience of his body, but at the same time the recognition of the social performance of his body which until then had been constructed in a different way. Yoga was initially considered by Edward to be the domain of women. I asked him how he came to go to the class and whether he had thought of going himself

> *My wife did in the first instance. She suggested that we should go and er. . having started it I realised how good it was and it really did lead to an increased fitness.*

Prior to going to the yoga class, Edward had not considered it as an option and although he did not specifically say to me that he would have been embarrassed to go when he was younger, it was my understanding that he was able to justify going because initially there were health considerations and he was well into middle age.

Edward, along with Albert and Jim, tended to view their bodies more in terms of other in comparison to the younger men in both groups. The younger men (under forty) related more to their bodies and performance in terms of their identity. The older men placed greater significance upon their class background in terms of their identities rather than relating in a more direct way to their bodies. For the older men, their bodies were given, in that there appeared little apparent consciousness of it being a malleable entity or something which could be transformed to suit different social locations. Bodies were seen as mechanisms which enabled physical activity rather than as a means of constituting identity. Bodies were also understood as being 'working-class bodies' by the fact that they were more likely to be involved in some form of manual labour. Although there were many similarities between the men at the straight club in terms of their identification with working-class issues, it was difficult to envisage Simon being able to justify taking part in yoga in the same manner as Edward. Simon still located himself within normative masculinity, but in the case of Edward, his age positioned him on the borders of normative masculinity because of his inability to physically perform in the same way as other younger men, like Simon. Therefore generational differences were apparent in some cases although it could be claimed that age did play a part in the construction of normative masculinity, but only to the extent that it affected bodily performances. Edward, however, was still able to demonstrate normative masculinity in other ways, whether this was through on-court displays or in the interview situation where he could provide accounts of past performances of hegemonic masculinity. For example:

> *I find that for instance when I look at my hands now . . . how soft they are. Though in my younger days I would have great calluses all across there (points to palm of hands) really thick ones there and the one on my thumb was the biggest I'd ever seen . . . it would be at least an inch long and three quarters of an inch wide and sometimes, if I didn't tape my hands up heavily I really paid for that . . . I'd rip my racquet hand to shreds within fifteen, twenty minutes . . . they'd be bleeding and I'd have a blood stained racquet . . . and they'd be very painful.*

Not only does the above quote demonstrate how Edward was able to use past sporting memories to convey to me a particular version of 'tough' or 'hard' masculinity where he was also able to suffer the 'knocks' described by Simon earlier, but it highlights the way in which the body was used, and invested, in displays of masculinity. For Edward, the graphic description of the extent

to which he would subject his body, for what was merely a social game of tennis, demonstrated the importance that he placed upon performing in a particular manner within the sporting situation. It was also a means of providing evidence of his enthusiasm for sport and, in turn, his masculine status. This could also be read in light of the interview process which was a social encounter between two men and how masculine social conventions may have influenced Edward to attempt to impress me. I know that my position in the tennis club as a member of the men's first team clearly carried status among other members, along with the physical style of tennis which I played. I knew that Edward admired this, as he had once remarked upon it and would often come to watch when the first team played in home matches. However, the fact that Edward did feel the need to provide evidence of his own sporting prowess suggests that there is importance placed upon presenting evidence of normative indicators of masculine identity.

The Straight Working-Class Body

For Simon and Gary, their understanding and experience of their bodies proved to be most influential in the construction of masculine identity. This was clearly established in their accounts of their experiences of sport. However, at the same time, other social factors cannot be ignored. Edward, Simon and Gary clearly placed importance upon traditional working-class values and this may also provide an explanation for Gary's dislike of feminine characteristics in other men in that they were considered less 'authentic' than masculinity expressed through evidence of hard work and physical labour. Edward was also aware of his position within the masculine hierarchy in relation to his age, but he was able to recount past experiences where he would have occupied a different position to the present. I want, therefore, to draw upon some further examples from the research in order to qualify some of the claims made previously.

The men from the straight club, because of their greater investment in hegemonic masculinity, I found, were less willing initially to disclose information which could cast aspersions on their masculine identity. However, on several occasions, during the course of the interviews, the men opened up to reveal awareness of the importance of their bodies as a means of performing masculinity.

David, age forty-three, for example, began our interviews with a routine description of his childhood experiences of sport. The conversation had started with recollections of the sports that were provided for in school. He mentioned rugby as one of the sports that was not played at his school and how he had liked the idea of playing it but not had the opportunity. I had said that I would have liked to play also but added that I considered myself too skinny to play anyhow.

David: *Whereas I was always more on the large side. Not fat . . . bigger, stockier than most of the other kids.*

IW: *Were you aware of that?*

David: *Oh yeah. You know after a while you sort of get the bullying lot and think sod this I'm not going to put up with this, I'll sort them out.*

David revealed that his bodily presentation was a key factor in the construction of his own sense of masculine identity and those of others. Although he did not consider himself fat, his description of himself being heavy or 'stockier than most of the other kids' reveals an understanding of his own body developed through constant comparison to others. The social understanding of how to perform masculinity shapes the experience of his body. For him, his body was experienced as large or heavy, which implies at a social level it being ungainly or restrictive. This resulted in David being bullied by some of the other school children which he felt he had to deal with in the appropriate manner. Although David did not go into detail, it was implied that he had to 'sort out' the bullies by using aggression.

Shaun provided another example of the way in which awareness of the body was revealed indirectly. Shaun was thirty-two years old and had only recently taken up tennis.

Shaun was a hairdresser by trade, more specifically a barber, in that he had a small men's salon which tended to be frequented by older men wanting traditional haircuts. Shaun had followed in the footsteps of his father, who had also run his own barbershop. In the same manner as the other interviews, I started by asking him about his experiences of sport as child. All of the men from the straight club, with the exception of Gary, cited football as the main focus for their sporting activities. Shaun had played football at school and still maintained a keen interest as an adult, although this was as a spectator as participation had stopped after leaving school.

In the course of our conversation he mentioned that he had recently started going to a local gym and, when I asked why, he explained his reasons.

Shaun: Erm . . . probably about two or three years ago, started going to the gym . . . I'd never been in one before in my life. Always perceived them as being, well I spend the day in front of the mirror anyway (laughs) and I just imagined them full of men standing around, you know flexing their muscles and saying how good they looked, you know and I thought I don't need that . . . And when I finally got talked into going by a friend, we were going on holiday in a months time and just wanted to get in shape a bit. And I went in and could not believe that there was all ages, all shapes and sizes and thought this is great. There was no one kind of . . . (pause)

IW: Where did you get that initial idea from?

Simon: I don't know really . . . don't know, just imagined it to be full of beef-cakes . . . you know . . . I suppose because of places like Ted's gym, used to be a bit 'chavvy' and geezers down . . . but when I actually went to the council run one.

Shaun's construction of normative masculinity was inextricably linked to his own understanding of bodily performance. Men who attended gyms, according to Shaun, were more likely to be anti-social or 'chavvy' which was a local term for a dim-witted, violent type. Attending a gym was, for him, fraught with a range of disruptive messages relating to accepted understandings of masculinity. Even during the interview, after having spent several years attending the gym, Shaun still felt the need to shift responsibility for making the decision to go in the first place upon his friend. For Shaun, gyms were considered places of narcissistic bodily pursuits which did not rest easily with his own understanding of masculinity based upon traditional working-class values.

However, applying only working-class sensibilities as a factor in accounting for the way Shaun and David constructed their identities is insufficient. I have suggested that the body is more central in explanations of the way these men formulate an understanding of their social identity and, at the same time, I believe that Bourdieu's concept of the doxa, the taken for granted aspects of the social world, is relevant here. Everyday social practice is based on a relationship where the body is experienced and contemplated as central to the recognised normative practices at large in the social world. Shaun and David were typical of the sample taken from the straight club in that their bodies were pivotal in their ability to perform expected sporting masculinity but, at the same time, their social world was also informed by the taken for granted codes expressed in hegemonic masculinity. This was particularly evident within the sporting context. The examples given demonstrate how, within this hegemonic male environment, the accreditation of cultural capital was based upon bodily performances. In a scale of cultural capital based upon performances of expected sporting masculinity, Gary would be positioned at the bottom. This position would be attributed directly to his inability to perform, through his body, hegemonic masculinity.

An original intention was to take into consideration the significance of class as an influence in the construction of masculine identity. However, it is apparent that class is less important as a factor in the performance of expected sporting masculinity. Although many aspects of expected sporting masculinity can be traced to traditional hegemonic understandings of working-class masculinity, class background itself appears less of an obstacle in terms of the actual performance. However, in the example of Gary, sexuality appeared more significant because of its direct relatedness to gender binaries within heterosexual hegemonic discourse. The association of homosexuality with effeminacy and 'failed' masculinity was more problematic within mainstream sporting practices as it was considered a barrier to participation, in comparison to class which could be overcome by expected sporting masculine performances.

7 Non-Heterosexual Sporting Bodies

While Connell (1995) has identified the need to address the issue of conflicting masculinities, it is important to recognise that there has also emerged an understanding of a variety of gay masculinities. In the last chapter, I described the accounts of Simon and Gary and how experiences of their bodies directly shaped social relations in later life. Even though their experiences were different, both men displayed similar readings of masculine identity and it is relevant that although Simon was able to perform hegemonic masculinity, Gary did not consider himself part of either a heterosexual or gay community. The term gay 'community' is also problematic, but one that is often used, particularly within the media, to express a shared social identity amongst gay men and women. The term implies some form of homogeneous social institution which in reality does not exist. Several points emerge from this.

When attempting to account for gay sexuality and masculinity theoretically it is apparent that the social structures which created meaning for Gary and Simon shaped their understanding of what masculinity entailed. However, theory which focuses specifically on discourse, does not always offer sufficient explanation for the way Gary experienced his body as weak, or less able in terms of sport, in relation to other men. Sexuality may be considered a relevant factor in explaining how Gary constructed an identity in his adult life, but in childhood it does not fully account for the understanding or 'feeling' of his body in relation to the other boys.

There is often the suggestion that the experience of being gay is intrinsically linked to an identity based upon a stereotypical image of the urban-based, young, affluent gay male who frequents a gay club scene. This gay (male) identity is repeatedly positioned as sharing greater affinity with narcissistic, consumer-fixated characteristics often associated with typologies of women in heterosexual hegemonic discourse. Gay men are positioned in a gender-based binary alongside women and in opposition to (heterosexual) men. More recent focus upon the range of masculinities presented within heterosexual masculinity has acknowledged the conflicting versions but has mostly ignored the range of contrasting gay masculinities with the result that the experience of being a gay male is, more often than not,

characterised by a homogenous gay lifestyle. At the same time, this misconception may also arise from the discourse of 'homosexuality' which is based upon the notion that gay men are a species defined by their sexuality.

There are many assumptions made about gay 'lifestyles' which are often based upon research with those who are accessible as 'openly' gay. Being open about one's sexuality is still socially problematic. It is more likely that those who are able to live as 'out' gay men or women in relative safety often do so within larger metropolitan environments. The experiences of those who do not participate in the gay 'community' for whatever reasons, whether it is related to the social, economic or geographical, are not as widely acknowledged. Gary told me about many men in situations similar to his that he had met in the past (usually for brief sexual encounters) and who were unwilling to come out as gay and lived as 'straight' men, sometimes with wives and children, or they were gay, but found it difficult to meet other men and were not comfortable with the gay scene. At the same time, it cannot be implied that all men and women who participate in gay sports are open about their sexuality in all aspects of their lives, or are gay in the sense that they feel they are part of a gay 'community'.

Focusing solely upon sexuality does not fully explain the many contrasting lifestyles and practices experienced in contemporary masculinities, rather it needs to be read through social understandings of the gendered body. A general aspect of what is relevant in the lives of individuals is a shared understanding of what is considered to be appropriate bodily performance. Status is continually ascribed to the active, able-bodied, athletic male body which in turn subordinates other bodies, particularly those which are associated with physical weakness. Heterosexual masculinity is culturally signalled by specific bodily practices with, for example, lack of prowess providing an indication of 'failed' gender to the extent that, regardless of sexual orientation, this is articulated as homosexual behaviour or feminine behaviour. For example, Redman (2000) in his study of teenage schoolboys notes how 'unmasculine' physical performances were cited as a key indication of 'queerness' by the boys rather than explicit knowledge of sexuality and Frosh et al. (2002) in their interviews with teenage boys also found that accusations of homosexuality (and often subsequent bullying) were initially based upon outward physical signs which expressed a deviation from the limited margins of hegemonic masculine performances.

School experiences of sport and physical education, as described in Chapter 5, play a significant part in developing a sense of masculine identity as well as laying the foundations for future participation in adult sports. Paul, age thirty-four, for example, was one of many men in the gay tennis club who had experienced taunts during his schooldays and, occasionally, hostility because of his inability to present a particular version of masculinity based upon the body.

I remember the first, when I joined junior school and er they wanted me to play football. I cried and cried and cried and tried to get my mother to write me a letter so I didn't have to play . . . Erm, cos I knew I was going to get picked on. It was going to put me in the spotlight, I couldn't kick a ball, therefore I was going to be called a poof and, you know, I'd get all the aggression from the other boys . . .

I kind of . . . I suppose was fed up with it . . . fed up with all the bullshit you get from the sports teachers, you know they were quite bolshy and they gave boys nicknames, er and you just wanted to get away from characters like that, you know, they, a friend of mine, they called 'Doris', one kid they called 'stickweed'. It was kind of like subtle, or just humiliating the kids . . .

Paul told me that he was not aware of his sexuality at that stage, but aware of his body presentation as different in comparison to the other boys. In this way, his understanding of his bodily performance shaped the perception of his identity in the form of 'failed' masculinity. It is also interesting the way nicknames are located in descriptions of the feminine, such as 'Doris', or a body type 'stickweed'. These nicknames establish meaning in terms of their opposition to orthodox understandings of normative masculinity. Many of the men in the sample, especially those who experienced school sport unfavourably, mentioned their teachers and in particular the male PE teachers who would often instigate bullying through name calling and encourage specific behaviour which was associated with male sporting performance, for example, 'get stuck in', or 'stop acting like a girl'.

Paul developed an understanding of his subordinated masculinity through the reactions of other boys and men and it was in sporting contexts that his inability to perform expected sporting masculinity was highlighted. This compares with the accounts of Gary and several others in the sample. Sport, therefore, can be seen as a prime site for illustrating the way conventional masculinity is reproduced through heteronormative understandings of bodily performance. At the same time, however, it is important to recognise that some gay men are more able to invest in socially accepted heteronormative versions of masculine body practices, depending upon their ability to perform hegemonic masculinity.

Further examples highlight the contrasting experiences of gay men in orthodox sport and I draw upon the accounts of Peter, age thirty-three, and Jamie, age twenty-seven, as they provide contrasting examples of how corporeal practices shaped their social relations rather than as a result of their alternative sexuality.

Peter and Jamie were regular members of the gay tennis club at the time of the research and both men had been attending for roughly the same time. As I did not know them in any other capacity than being members of the gay tennis club, I initially noticed their physical performances on court

and the contrasting reactions they received from other members. Peter and Jamie were both extremely competitive on court, although in terms of their outward appearances, Peter presented a conventional 'sporting' performance in terms of his body build and his sporting techniques. He gave the impression that he had taken part in many sporting activities during his life. Jamie, however, at first impression appeared to be more unorthodox in his techniques. He was also quite noticeably effeminate in his outward physical demeanour.

Peter told me that during his childhood he was aware of his sexuality at an early age and especially during his adolescence. There are problems in being precise about awareness of one's sexuality in the past. Peter was obviously describing his childhood from the perspective of an adult and it is difficult to make specific claims about his exact understanding of a complex social identity. However, what is significant and more reliable is that Peter was able to recollect how he could manage any potential areas of conflict, particularly within the environment of school sports, through his bodily presentation.

> *I think I was more concerned about being caught out. That was the fear. I didn't really think oh no I'm gay, I just better not get caught.*

The main concern for Peter was being able to present a normative version of masculinity. The fear he held was based on being seen by others as presenting 'gay' rather than the broader understanding of his sexuality. Probyn (2000) talks of the importance of 'shame' in constructing self-identity, particularly in sport. It is based on an understanding of the body as incompetent, which for many needs to be concealed at all times. The sense of shame in relation to bodily performance was a central theme among all the respondents. Shame related to the presentation of 'unmanly' behaviour and a subsequent threat of ridicule. The notion that Peter needed to avoid being caught suggests that 'gayness' presents itself in some physical form which is manifested through the social presentation of the masculine body. For Peter, this meant learning about ways to present his body in a 'non-gay' manner and become more aware of what being a 'normal' young male involved. Peter was able to adopt strategies for this.

> *Well you just don't look (at other men) longer than you should look . . . I didn't actually physically do anything . . . quite secretive . . . and because I was quite sporty anyway and quite good academically, I wasn't gonna get picked on. I'm a fairly big . . . you know I was OK. I was quite keen to fit in.*

Learning how to act within an environment heavily laden with conventions of hegemonic masculinity was important. Peter's accounts of how

he maintained a furtive approach to containing his sexuality corresponds with the observations I made in the health club. 'Rules' of masculine bodily conduct are constructed without reference to explicit texts. They are learnt within the context of a 'natural men's world'. In this case, Bourdieu's (1990) concept of the taken for granted social world (doxa) is more relevant within the context of the boy's lives. The concept of hegemony implies an awareness of alternatives, but these are overlooked because of continued acceptance of prevailing social practices. From all the men's accounts, it would appear that awareness of alternative sexuality was limited in comparison to the awareness of a need to demonstrate appropriate masculine bodily performances. Peter's physical presentation was, therefore, a primary means through which he could maintain an outward appearance of normative masculinity. He was physically strong and 'sporty' so his outward physical performance did not conform to stereotypes of the feminised gay body. This is not to say that the problems Peter had to negotiate in order to keep his sexuality hidden are confined only to gay men. Homophobia is often used to police a range of subordinated masculinities (Redman 1996). Boys learn from an early age how to present their bodies to others, particularly in more intimate settings which arise in sport. Peter's example highlights the way forms of masculinity are learnt and then acted upon. In Peter's case his physicality and ability in sport enabled him to 'pass' as a 'normal' young male without conflict. Probyn (2000) uses the example of the Australian rugby player, Ian Roberts, who came out in public as gay and notes how his body was

> used to hide the possible shame of being gay. (Probyn 2000: 17)

Peter was able to use sport and his body as a similar 'beard' to mask his gayness. At the same time, Peter also recognised the cultural capital to be achieved from his bodily displays. Even within the context of an interview with another gay man, where sexuality was not problematic in the way that it may be within a heterosexual sporting environment, Peter was still keen to demonstrate to me how sport had been a large part of his life and importantly that he had been good at the ones he took part in. Sport was not just fun and games, but was an activity to be taken seriously. This often meant a more disciplined approach which invariably made the sport less enjoyable.

> *I also used to do swim training. So, er, that was like twice a week, serious stuff till I just grew sick of it in the end.*

Consequently, in the context of the interview, Peter was concerned with presenting himself as a 'legitimate' gay male, but much of this entailed identifying with heterosexual masculinity and presenting himself as 'manly' in an orthodox fashion. There were numerous ways in which he was able to

do this, but his body and sporting deeds provided the main sources. At the same time, it appeared that Peter recognised the significance of sporting capital and was keen to provide evidence of this in his conversations with me. Thus, the reference to swimming training and the serious nature of the participation was included more as an indication of Peter's legitimate place within sport and, to an extent, his ability to be a 'real man'. Peter's general confidence in his own body, his ability to participate in mainstream sport and his enjoyable experiences of school read more like those of Simon, described in the previous chapter.

In contrast, Jamie recognised the problematic nature of his physical presentation at an early age, even though sexuality was not an issue at the time.

> *I was a very effeminate child, very effeminate and they were quite, it was quite a rough area . . . I was kind of, you know well spoken. . So I was a prime target for ridicule and I remember when I was young they started to call me 'posho' 'posho' and 'posho' and I hated it.*

Being softly spoken and 'posh' was interpreted by the other boys as an additional factor to being effeminate. It did not coincide with their version of masculine performance which had been constructed through a reading of working-class masculinity based on displays of strength. Jamie became aware of himself as physically different from other boys at an early age. Constant comparison with other boys produced a focus upon his body as a central means through which he gained an understanding of his position within orthodox masculinity. In contrast to Peter, who was able to present a 'masculine' image and did not have to negotiate 'difference' in terms of his sexuality until a much later stage, Jamie was aware that he presented bodily performances which in comparison to the other boys did not represent normative understandings of masculinity. He was aware of more subtle forms of performance, such as the way he was softly spoken, but was mainly aware of how his physical stature drew attention.

> *I was a very small child, I mean it's unbelievable now cos I'm six foot two (laughs) . . . I grew like a foot in a year, but I mean I was five foot up until the age of sixteen. I didn't develop until I was very late . . . So, you know, a tiny little creature who was really camp.*

Jamie's adult reading of his childhood focused on his physical attributes and this provided a main way to interpret the difficulties he experienced during that period of his life. Although the initial problems in his ability to adjust to life in the school could be read in terms of class differences, most of the problems faced by Jamie throughout this period were the result of his physical inability to present hegemonic masculinity to the other boys and girls. Like Paul, mentioned earlier in this chapter, Jamie also became the

focus of bullying and taunting from the other children. Awareness of his distance from the orthodox understanding of masculinity meant that Jamie attempted to avoid most sports and did not participate in activities which could cause potential conflict. For example, it was not until university that he took up any form of fitness related activity and this was in the more individualistic and female dominated pursuit of aerobics. There was a sense of regret when he described his lack of achievement in other sports

> *It was the first time in any sport I had been good at something, apart from tap dancing which I associated, I ditched because it was slightly associated with being gay and I wanted to break all associations with that . . . So I ditched tap dancing which is my biggest regret in my life cos it was something in which I was very talented.*

Competence in terms of being able to present the body in an appropriate fashion was an important aspect for all the men, not only during school sports, but in their later adult involvement in sports clubs. Bourdieu's (1977) concept of bodily hexis is particularly relevant here. He describes how within the habitus, the body is a central means through which actors conduct themselves in terms of, for example, bodily stance or gait. For Bourdieu, in bodily hexis the personal combines with the social where

> the body is a mnemonic device upon and in which the very basics of culture, the practical taxonomies of the habitus, are imprinted and encoded in a socialising process which commences during early childhood. This differentiation between learning and socialisation is important: the habitus is inculcated as much, if not more, by experience as by explicit teaching.
>
> (Jenkins 1992: 76)

Although Bourdieu acknowledges that experience of the body is central in any theoretical debate, Connell's (1995) concept of the circuit of bodily reflexive practices is particularly useful in this case as it accounts more explicitly for the individual experiences of the body as a factor in the construction of masculine identity. For instance, Connell's example of Adam Singer who developed an understanding of his masculinity through his inability to play sport like other men, and his father's taunts that he 'threw like a girl' (Connell 1995: 62) can be applied as an explanation for the way Jamie developed a sense of his own masculine identity. Awareness of his own presentation of masculinity at an early age caused Jamie to consider his body practices and how these actions would be interpreted by others. For Jamie it was even more important as the outcome of his actions could lead to further incidents of ridicule or bullying. The initial awareness of his own body as 'unmanly' caused Jamie, in a similar manner to Gary, to reject sport in general and formulate 'gayness' in terms of weakness in

relation to the normative versions of masculinity presented. School sport was associated with team activities which meant being with other boys and potentially more ridicule. Any interest in sport or physical activity as a child was confined to the sidelines.

> *I remember watching Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova. It was my mother that got me into it. She would sit me down and watch the final and I loved watching it.*

It is significant that although Jamie's experiences of participation in sport were restricted by the negative attitudes of his peers (and teachers) he still maintained an interest in sport, but it was constructed through a reading of his own identity situated within the heteronormative location of feminine body practices. As such, he had to make do with being a spectator rather than participating. However, it is also important to recognise that being 'camp' or effeminate are not bodily performances which necessarily confine the perpetrators to subordinated experiences of sport. As I have suggested, expected sporting masculinity is not necessarily restricted to a specific gender or sexuality. For instance, other men, such as Fraser, age fifty-two, and Gareth age twenty-nine, acknowledged in their interviews with me that they were considered camp or effeminate by other boys during their schooldays to the extent that, in Fraser's case, the other boys gave him the nickname 'Effi'. They also had contrasting social backgrounds, Fraser experiencing an affluent private school education whereas Gareth grew up in a working-class council estate and attended a local comprehensive. However, they were sufficiently able to demonstrate sporting ability and expected sporting masculine body performances. Consequently they recalled more positive experiences of school sport and schooldays in general. As such, they could be considered camp but tough, where tough equated with aggressive, competitive and proficient performances on the sports field.

In summary, the recollections of Simon, Gary, David, Edward and Shaun (from the straight tennis club) and Peter, Jamie, Paul, Fraser and Gareth (from the gay tennis club) highlight the contrasting processes through which masculine identities are formed in both broader social settings and within the context of sport. They are examples which provide evidence to support the claim for recognising the importance of the body in creating an individual sense of social and masculine identity. In addition, what emerges as a significant factor is that even though all the men were united in their enthusiasm for sport, their bodily performances dictated the way in which they could participate within it. At the same time, the centrality of bodily experience in the shaping of their identities also reveals wider held social understandings of normative masculinity. Within this formulation, both Simon and Peter could be considered to have been successful within the straight and gay tennis clubs respectively, especially taking into account the

fact that Gary and Jamie subsequently left the clubs. Because of this, I feel that it is important to remain alert to the nature of bodily performances within the sporting context in order to ascertain whether terms such as hegemonic heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity are relevant when applied to gender and broader understandings of the body. The examples of the men who shared similar interests in physical sporting pursuits but contrasting experiences of participation, highlights the need to incorporate the body in the theorisation of social and gendered identity.

Consequently, Connell's (1995) descriptions of body practices are considered relevant and remain applicable when taking into consideration the importance placed upon the physical experience of the body as well as its relationship to social constructions of gender, sexuality and sporting performance. Empirical research also supports the argument that sexuality is more problematic for the men if it accompanied an unorthodox presentation of masculinity. However, I did find that, for the gay men, the increased awareness of sexuality created a greater sense of the body in everyday lived practices. This was in contrast to the straight men, who were less outwardly concerned about their bodies unless it related to their sporting performance or gave them cause to reflect upon failed masculinity. Most of the time, the impression given by the straight men was that their masculinity was not in doubt. Although, within the context of sport, the men appeared aware of the need to constantly perform expected sporting masculinity, not only for themselves, but for other men and women.

For the men in the straight tennis club, bodies were seen more as tools for action where activity was a central part of their lives (work, play, sex and sport) in comparison to the expectation that women experienced more sedentary lives. This supports the claim made by Butler (1990) that binary distinctions construct misplaced social understandings of gender. For example, on the sports field women were not expected to be active (or as active as men in the case of mixed doubles in tennis). The notion of reiterative performances is an important theme which introduces the relationship of power within these social bodily acts rather than merely descriptive theatrical acts. However, Connell's suggestion that there is interplay between existing social discourses and bodily practices resonates within the arguments made here. Consequently, although social factors such as class and sexuality play a contributory role in the construction of masculine identities, these identities cannot be 'read off' from them. What is important to recognise is that an individual's ability to perform an identity is, in part, shaped by the ability to achieve an appropriate level of competence in the necessary body practices and modes of comportment. The result of this is that when entering the arena of sport gay men are just as likely to perform expected sporting masculinity.[1]

At this stage, I feel that it is important to explore further the role of sexuality in the construction of masculine identity and specifically, masculine performances within the context of sport. If it is the case that some gay men

are able to perform expected sporting masculinity there is the possibility that these men could subvert some aspects of established gendered practice. As such, I include research conducted within a tennis club which was (like many other gay sports) established as an alternative space for gay men and women to participate in sporting activities. The focus on this aspect provides the opportunity to compare the relationship of bodily performance to sexuality and the extent to which gay sports clubs created within the context of alternative sexuality challenge existing discriminatory bodily practices.

There is a tendency for mainstream sport to present excepted sporting masculinity as a model. For example, within the media, heterosexual male professional sport is considered superior to other forms and given the most coverage. However, outside of elite sport, there are many men and women who, although initially willing to take part, are considered less able, or are unwilling, to adopt the performances considered appropriate and, consequently, are forced to the sidelines. This occurs in the context of wider social power relations where heterosexual masculinity is advantageously positioned in comparison to women and gays.

Feminist theory has rightly challenged the privileged status of men in contemporary society, but in many cases has unwittingly reinforced a gender binary by positioning women as 'different' from men. More recent work by, for example, Segal (1997) has recognised the problematic nature of focusing upon gender distinctions and the need to acknowledge broader categories of male and female which incorporate subordinated sexualities as well as bodily performances. Butler (1990, 1993) has also attempted to re-direct thinking about gender away from the limitations of binary distinctions. Her work has been influential in broader discussions of queer and also in relation to sport (Jagose 1996, Kirsch 2000, Caudwell 2006). Although the precise definition of queer has been contested, I am applying the term 'queer' in the earlier description of it as a means to disassemble common beliefs about gender and sexuality. Although the activity of queer is seen as a 'queering' of culture through the reinterpretation of characters in novels and films, if applied to bodily practices located in sport, Butler's concept of performativity provides an opportunity to assess the radical potential of disruptive 'queer acts' which could challenge orthodox thinking about the gendered body. Indeed, the notion of gays taking part in sport suggests one such example of a queer act. Gay men and women participating in an activity considered an essential part of heterosexual masculine identity, on first impression, would appear to challenge orthodox thinking. However, as demonstrated in previous chapters, the contrasting experience of the gay men suggests that they can just as easily be complicit in reinforcing the gender order.

It is difficult to establish an 'alternative' sports club as very often the practices adopted are based upon those found in traditional sports (Pronger 2000, Wellard 2006b). Mainstream sporting practice reflects an accepted social understanding of sport as a site for heterosexual male participation

and competitiveness. At the same time, body-based excepted sporting masculinity has become so entrenched in contemporary sports thinking that any alternative versions tend to reproduce the same principles because they seek to emulate and comply with established mainstream sports practices. A significant factor in this is the unquestioned acceptance of competitiveness and the celebration of the 'winner'. Although this is not necessarily negative in all cases, it is often the context within the competition where conflicts arise. Consequently, because of the failure to recognise the variety of situations where competition takes place, there has been continued 'slippage' between what is required from sport and by whom. Much evidence on sport has been gathered within the context of those taking part in elite or professional sport. There is obviously a huge difference in the orientation of an individual towards an activity that is a potential or actual career with lucrative rewards in comparison to the casual, recreational player. This conflict of interest is similar to the continuing debates between primary physical educationalists and sport coaches about the role of school sports and physical activity in a child's development (Bailey 2005, Whitehead 2006).

Thus, the example of the gay tennis club highlights the ways in which similar processes are repeated without initial consideration of individual motivation and the potential consequences of adopting particular practices. Consequently, the research revealed that the levels of competitiveness found in the gay tennis club were also similar to those found in other mainstream tennis clubs. The structure of social play in clubs where the tennis was based around competitive matches placed greater emphasis upon playing ability. In these situations, social identity was based mainly on playing performance and capital was gained from demonstrating this to others. For example, as I described in Chapter 4, in the straight clubs where I participated there was a 'pecking order' in terms of the priority given to those who were deemed good players even though, with the exception of juniors, membership rates were equal. In the straight clubs greater prestige or rank was awarded to the men who played in the first or 'A' team and similar prestige was granted to those who held a red card in the gay tennis club.

The failure of the gay tennis club to acknowledge the problems of traditional competitive sporting practices, particularly in terms of the focus on ability, meant that forms of discrimination based on bodily performance were often repeated. Probyn (2000) describes how the organisers of the Gay Games faced similar problems when they attempted to ignore the social aspects of competitiveness by focusing on the notion of 'personal best'. The liberating aspects of performing to ones own level within a particular sport and, consequently, only competing with oneself were overshadowed by the structure of competitions which in many cases pitted one individual against another. Medals, in the manner of the Olympic Games, were awarded for winning performances, with little recognition for losing performances. Similar problems were experienced at the gay tennis club where competitive games ultimately produced a focus upon winning performances. This

focus may also provide a reason for the lack of women taking part and the prevalence of more able players than novices.

Any attempts to emphasise personal best were further undermined by the club's introduction of a competitive singles ladder and the affiliation with the American-based Gay and Lesbian Tennis Association (GLTA) so that it could stage an annual tournament. The various tournaments provided for singles and doubles competitions and were divided into playing categories ranging from the highest level of Open, then A, B, C, D and novice divisions. Points were awarded to participants within their category for a win and these were compiled by the GLTA and displayed on its own website. Players could compete in any number of tournaments held throughout the year, with the idea that more wins would mean more points and if a threshold was reached, the player would move up into the next division. Most of the members of the club took part in these tournaments (in the UK and abroad) which meant that they all had rankings which in turn provided a means of displaying capital. I made the following entry in my diary after taking part in the Sydney Gay Games in 2002.

> *It is just after the tennis tournament. It has been a hectic past couple of months—not in terms of the research but more so in the amount of competitive play that I have experienced. I have used competitive tennis as a means to gain access to the clubs and also become part of the different (but not so different) communities of men. Added to the exposure I'm getting within the clubs and becoming accepted by the other members, I have experienced more competitive play than at any other time (maybe more than when I played rankings tournaments in my youth). It seems that I have had to 'put myself on the line' in that I have had to contemplate my body in the physical sense and also take into account the emotional factors involved when playing competitive matches. On occasions, the primary motive for taking part (having fun and in my case, the research) has been forgotten in the pursuit of winning and beating the other person. I did not enjoy the tournament on a personal level and have to try to assess why I did not. For some reason, the competition seemed fierce, not just in playing standard, but in the general approach to the games. Winning did appear to be everything. Maybe this is related to the majority entry of males in higher categories in comparison to other lower categories, although in my observations of these divisions I found them to be equally competitive. Maybe it was also related to the competitive nature of contemporary urban living, but I'm not so sure. It does appear that within a charged atmosphere like this, the original social perspective is often lost.*
>
> (Diary entry, December 2002)

Interestingly, the tennis was staged on two sites. The Open and A players competed at the Olympic Park, while the other grades played on another

site on the other side of the city. In its concern to emulate sporting achievement and be 'just like' mainstream sport, the organisers had unconsciously reinforced a form of elitism based upon playing ability (favouring those already in possession of sporting capital) rather than contest broader forms of social discrimination which was part of its mission statement.

The cultural understanding of sport as expressed through hegemonic heterosexual male practices provided the mainstay of sporting practice within the gay tennis club. The members who were able display evidence of the established sporting practices were also able to wield the most power. To the extent that their previous experiences of mainstream sport were merely replicated within the environment of the gay tennis club. Consequently, issues relating to gay politics, broader discriminatory gender practices and inclusive participation were overlooked in favour of established mainstream sports practices.

As previously stated, one of the main reasons for establishing the gay tennis club was to escape the prejudices found in many straight clubs where expected sporting masculinity is taken for granted and alternative versions which do not conform to this are ridiculed or excluded. Many men and women, gay or straight, who were unable to perform expected sporting masculinity have experienced sport negatively, particularly at school and, subsequently, have had less opportunity to develop the playing skills considered appropriate. As adults this lack of ability is made more apparent when attempting to take part in a mainstream sporting club. In many mainstream tennis clubs there are playing in sessions for new members intended to identify playing ability, which, in turn, can deter many from joining. The gay tennis club established similar methods to distinguish its members and those in the red category were accorded greater prestige within the club. Individual performance on the court became the main focus with greater status gained from success on court. Consequently, this process led to the principle aims of an 'alternative' form of sports club being overshadowed. In terms of sporting participation, the gay tennis club has become, more or less, a version of mainstream heterosexual clubs.

A gay sports club involves acknowledging a set of conflicting values which not only brings into question sexuality and gender, but also issues relating to understandings of traditional sport, competition and etiquette which in turn relate to a wider social climate. The social processes apparent in sporting practice eventually altered the original aims or intentions desired during the formation of the club regardless of whether these were formally expressed or unwritten ideals. During my interviews with the men from the gay tennis club I asked for their reasons for joining a gay club in the first place. I was also able to bring this topic into general conversations on various occasions with other members of the club. Approaching this subject often resulted in discussions about the nature of gay sport, but it significantly revealed similarities as to the initial reason for joining a gay club which often contrasted to the actual experience once one became a member.

The following are examples of the experiences of four men from the gay tennis club: Keith (age forty-seven), Matthew (age thirty-eight), Peter (age thirty-three) and Jamie (age twenty-seven). Peter and Jamie were introduced earlier in this chapter where contrasting childhood experiences of their bodies and sport were described. Keith and Matthew have been included as they provide further contrasting experiences of their bodies and participation in sport. I also chose the two men for their initial outward appearances. Keith and Matthew contrasted in the way they presented their bodies. Keith did not present a conventional sporting body in that he was slightly overweight and had what could be considered, in heterosexual discourse, effeminate mannerisms. Matthew, in contrast, was extremely confident in his sporting abilities and gave the impression that he had taken part in mainstream sport on a regular basis.

Keith had been a member of the club from the time it opened in the mid-1990s. He explained to me how he had initially decided to join a gay tennis club.

> *Well I didn't want to join a straight club, I wanted more socialising with, because I was gay and I wanted to socialise with other gay people . . . So that's when I rang up. I can't remember where I found it, maybe I rang the (gay) switchboard up . . . So that was as soon as I got back . . . I was living in London as well . . . I wanted to continue er socialising, you know with other people. So I thought well tennis is a game I like.*

His decision to seek out a tennis club specifically for gay people was influenced mainly by his desire to socialise with other gay people. However, he also wanted to experience an environment where the constant need to hides one's sexuality was not necessary.

> *Well unless there was a predominantly straight club that was very open about accepting gay people you feel as though you should constantly hide things, constantly worry about what you are going to say or will I be accepted. Or they seem to be accepting me for what I am, but would they be the same if they knew er all the things they don't know I am. Er there wasn't the support about coming out at work or (straight) clubs, so you felt as though if you had a gay club you didn't have to worry about what you said. It didn't mean that everybody was as nice as pie just because they were all gay and friendly and happy-clappy. It wasn't like that at all, but er, you felt as though you didn't need to worry about being gay. You didn't need to worry about being gay. It was such a relief, such a relief and also you can also sort of talk about gay issues, even if it's just your life, which pubs and clubs that you go to and talk about it with a gay perspective . . . you couldn't do that, I was worried about I couldn't say that in that club . . . so I think it's absolutely vital.*

Keith was realistic about the likelihood that a member of the gay tennis club would not necessarily hold the same views and that there would be differences of personality, but at the same time he believed that the club would provide a space where being gay would not be used to judge him in a negative way. Keith had had the previous experience of playing at a mainstream tennis club and found it to be unwelcoming and also repressively organised, so he was in a position to make comparisons. An important aspect of the gay tennis group for Keith when he joined was the social element. Here he felt that he could fit in without being constantly aware of his sexuality, or as his sexuality was something to feel ashamed of and feeling obliged to conceal it in some way.

Peter, although having a greater and more successful involvement in mainstream sports during his life, described how it was also the social element which prompted him to join the evening gay tennis group.

> *I think what I started to do is that I'd been 'out' for a while. I'd had one long-term relationship and that had ended quite badly and then I think I wanted to go out, but felt that it wasn't really me. I found it quite difficult to pick men up because I didn't really want casual sex and then I found it quite difficult in a (night)club environment cos either I'd get drunk and then not know what I was doing, so I would, I was probably quite, I wasn't very confident about doing it. And then, so I thought, oh well what I'll do, I'll join one of the social groups that I saw at the back of 'Gay Times . . . at least then I'll start playing tennis and you'll start doing it like that . . . So I did primarily come to tennis to get a boyfriend. (laughs) It's a sad thing, so I did do it, I tell people that's what I did come to it for.*

For Peter, the gay tennis club provided the opportunity to meet other gay men and the possibility of forming a relationship. Not only did the club provide a venue where there would be other gay men, but it was also an environment where he could be more relaxed. Peter explained that he felt he would be able to instigate conversations in an atmosphere less predatory than that of pubs and nightclubs. Peter had been quite open in declaring that his main reason for joining the gay tennis club was to find a partner, which he had succeeded in doing. One of the main reasons for gay sport is the social factor. Peter acknowledged the importance of the social aspect in the gay tennis club in comparison to a straight club he belonged to ;

> *Well, the gay one is more of a social do and I, you are, you talk about things more to do with your life than you would at the straight club. I mean, the point I'm . . . the odd thing about a gay sporting club is you're there because you're gay not because you're sporting. Otherwise if I wanted to be the best tennis player, I'd go to the best tennis place, which is just to go to a straight tennis club. You play straight*

> *competitions. This hasn't got that, it's the social element which makes it different erm . . .*

As indicated in Chapter 6, sport had played a major part in Peter's childhood and most of his social activities had been centred round physical or sporting activities with his family, friends or at school. In early adulthood he was able to continue with his sporting activities at a high level although he chose to keep his sexuality concealed. Peter stated that the main reason for joining the gay tennis club was to find a boyfriend but in sporting terms it was also an environment where he felt he could be relaxed about his sexuality and not have to approach participating as seriously as he did in mainstream heterosexual sport.

Matthew had also experienced mainstream sport to a fairly high level and throughout had concealed his sexuality. One of the attractions of the gay tennis club was the potential to meet a partner.

> *But the thing about going to the (gay tennis) club was that erm, there was that element of wouldn't it be nice to meet someone who played tennis that I could have a relationship with.*

At the same time, a gay tennis club also provided another form of security when seeking potential partners. As Matthew points out, one of the advantages of the tennis club was the chance to meet other men with similar interests but at the same time provide a safety net.

> *I wondered whether also with me, cos I know the difficulty I have building a relationship with someone. Tennis is a nice easy way to actually keep a distance between the two . . . So you're there to play tennis and not really get intimate with someone, but that might be a, er knock on result . . . It was much easier, and also I felt again I had like a role. It gives you more confidence doing something you know you can do as opposed to putting myself in a situation like in a (night) club, where I don't feel comfortable, cos I don't feel confident in a club environment. I feel most confident when I'm on a tennis court, playing, doing activity and playing sport.*

Not only did a gay tennis club provide the opportunity to meet other men, but for Matthew the tennis court provided a literal and metaphorical net which provided a form of barrier where he could either remain on one side or cross over if he wanted to. His experiences in gay pubs and nightclubs had made him cautious about the intentions of other men where the focus was on casual sexual encounters, whereas in the tennis club he felt more in control in that tennis could remain the focus unless he chose to bring potential relations into the equation.

The focus on the social and the potential for a gay tennis group to provide a 'safe' haven or alternative space for gay men and women was

a response given by all the gay respondents in the interviews and was a common theme in the many informal conversations I had throughout the research with other gay men and women. All of the men in the sample had formed their understandings of traditional sport through their wider social experiences gained at school and, to varying degrees, through organised sports clubs. Their experiences were not uniform in that there were some who had participated successfully, whereas others had either found difficulty fitting in or had little opportunity in the first place because of their inability to perform heterosexual masculinity. What is important, though, is the realisation by each of these men that their sexuality was considered a 'problem' in that it was something which either precluded participation or needed to be masked or managed. The initial attraction of a gay tennis club was, therefore, the prospect of attending a social sporting activity where acceptance was not based on one's sexuality and, in turn, determined by performing a particular version of masculinity. However, these original motivations for going along to a gay tennis club did not always match up to the experiences once there.

Much of the emphasis in mainstream heterosexual sport is on playing skills and the ability to perform in a particular manner. This has led to many men and women (gay and straight) to feel anxious about their own abilities and also be aware of the constant scrutiny of others. Part of the initial appeal of a gay tennis club was to escape this form of discrimination but the structure of the club and the focus on bodily performance made it difficult to achieve this.

I suggested to Keith that a major part of sport in general was the way performance provided a means of judging an individual among others and that the role of a gay tennis club might be to provide an alternative space where those values are rejected. He responded:

> **Keith:** *But they don't, no, this is why I say that it's much more like a straight club than a gay club you know if you could call a gay club more rejecting those values . . . not . . . because it became to me more and more straight . . . because also they want to be more and more sort of, I think the other thing is they want to become more and more masculine in their play . . . even though some of them sort of have these affectations of playing like some women tennis players erm . . . seem to become much more masculine and they felt some way that they would be more attractive that way, the more attractive they become the more socially acceptable, the more partners they might meet, I don't know, it seems as though they're going along that line.*
>
> **IW:** *Is this a gay thing?*
>
> **Kevin:** *No, in the straight clubs it's men with women . . . it's just replicating the straight er . . . ethos.*

For Keith, the gay tennis club reflected the heterosexual sensibilities found in mainstream sport. In the gay tennis club, the focus on bodily

performance promoted similar forms found in mainstream sport which were directed more at women and those who manifested feminine characteristics. Peter echoed Keith's comments when I asked him whether being a good player helped.

> *Oh yeah definitely, Yeah . . . I mean that remains a big difference. It shouldn't do, but you know it's the same in any sort of sporting club. The better you are, the more respect, in a way, you get. You know, as long as you're not an idiot.*

Playing ability and bodily performances were the indicators of successful participation. The criteria for determining appropriate behaviour were based upon hegemonic heterosexual distinctions between masculine and feminine bodily performances in which masculine was equated with strength and power, and feminine was equated with weakness and passivity. The discursive binary distinctions between men and women evident within heterosexual hegemony appeared to be reproduced in the gay club between men through bodily performance. As such, Peter was more able to deal with these levels of judgment because he had gained the confidence to compete within mainstream sport and was considered a good player. For Peter the gay tennis club was more social because it was not to be taken as seriously as mainstream sport. The fact that Peter considered the gay club was less serious than mainstream sport suggests that he made a distinction between gay sport and mainstream (heterosexual) sports practice. He clearly positioned mainstream sport as more valid in comparison with gay sport and considered himself a legitimate sportsman.

Matthew was in a similar position as Peter in that he continued to take part in mainstream sport. One of the main reasons for attending the gay tennis club was that it provided the opportunity to display his tennis abilities without the fear of being exposed as gay that he experienced in straight sport.

> *I think now I would say there is a need and I think it's great and I've thoroughly enjoyed that purely gay competitive environment where . . . cos I'm not, even though I would say I fit in as well as anyone else, one of the main things that stops me being completely myself (in a straight club). I'm thinking about match dinners, after the match. Is that I can act completely safe. If someone said to me, where were you last night, I wouldn't say where I was last night necessarily.*

However, Matthew did not appear to grasp fully the conflicting ideals found in mainstream heterosexual sport and a gay tennis club, but related participation to his own needs. The gay club offered, for him, the chance to experience the sport that he was accustomed to without the need to hide his sexuality. He did not appear to consider that having to act in an appropriate

way within the environment of a mainstream sports club was problematic. Homosexuality was, therefore, clearly considered an embarrassment within the confines of mainstream sport and something which needed to be hidden. As he was able to operate successfully in both settings, he had failed to take into account the importance of an alternative space for those excluded from mainstream sport and the reasons for the discrimination.

For Jamie, the discovery of gay sport and in particular a gay tennis club did not provide the smooth path to participation which he may have expected. Peter and Matthew were able to negotiate sport during their childhood successfully which had created an association of sporting activity as enjoyable. In contrast, Jamie's experiences of sport as a child were similar to Keith's and he had thus created a more cautious approach to it. Sport, for Jamie, had involved a constant struggle based on his own sense of inappropriate masculine performance and although the gay tennis club was initially regarded as a means to escape these fears, there was a sense that he was constantly trying to prove himself.

> *You go to (the evening gay tennis club) and you're feeling paranoid, I think, you know heterosexual interpretation of gay people is that we're all happy together, having a great time and it's not true. I mean we're not one big happy family living in a gay ghetto. We are vile to each other. We are all each other's enemies.*

When questioned why he had such an opinion, Jamie related it to the negative experiences gay people have in their childhood and the development of defence mechanisms developed to deal with these.

> *Well I think it's because we have such an awkward upbringing and we have such difficulties coming to terms with ourselves that we see most people to be enemies, even other gay people and we can't always open up to them and we're instantly on the defensive, and I know I was.*

For Jamie, it was not only sexuality which was an issue but other factors which related more to outward bodily performance.

> *How they look, how they play, what they're wearing, what they're saying, who's shagging who.*

Jamie's previous experiences of sport where he had been constantly judged on his own physical performance had made him acutely sensitive to how others saw him. His initial expectation of the gay tennis club was that it would focus less upon sporting performance as an indication of worth. However, the contrasting experiences of the other gay members and the focus on traditional competitive forms of sporting practice meant that those with greater sporting capital were generally more able to participate effectively. Although

the social aspect was a general reason for joining a gay tennis club, the expectations of how this was to be achieved varied depending upon the previous experiences of sport. The research revealed that those who were previously able to take part successfully in mainstream heterosexual sport unconsciously (or consciously) continued the same bodily practices. Competition and sporting performance remained the central factors for participation and there was often little realisation by those who took part that the forms of discrimination resulting from these performances were more likely to be experienced by those without the appropriate sporting capital. Therefore the members of the gay tennis club who were less able to perform expected sporting masculinity shared similar experiences to women, elderly and the disabled in mainstream heterosexual sport.

GAY SPORT OR SPORT PERFORMED BY GAYS?

The complex range of differing experiences in relation to sexuality, masculinity and sport means that it is difficult to identify clearly unifying factors in gay sport practice. In terms of a collective identity, the gay sports club has conflicting ideals. On the one hand, it has been set up to provide an environment away from the often oppressive heterosexuality found in mainstream sports clubs, whilst, on the other hand, the club is based around competitive sport and adopts traditional sporting procedures. My observations at the gay tennis club and comments from the men in the sample group tend to support the claims made by Pronger (2000) when he suggests that the emancipatory power that appeared initially within the Gay and Lesbian community, particularly in its approach to sport, has been quelled in recent years through the attempts to 'normalise' and become part of mainstream sport. This is not to say that the gay tennis club has 'failed' as it has been successful in providing the opportunity for some gay men to play tennis in a relatively safe environment and that similar to the wider achievements of the Lesbian and Gay movement, it has contributed to making gay sport more visible. However, those who have greater opportunities to participate in gay sport are more likely to have had less traumatic experiences of mainstream sport as children. The evidence in this research suggests that amateur sporting practices in gay sport continue to reinforce discriminatory practices based on bodily performance and heterosexual understandings of gender.

In the research I conducted, I found that consciousness of gayness as a political issue was more often than not displaced by a combination of orthodox understandings of how sport 'should' be played and attempts to achieve playing time solely for oneself. Gay sport in general has adopted a liberal approach which seeks to provide access for lesbians and gays to the mainstream rather than confront or challenge the core ideals. Pronger (2000) cites the Gay Games as a prime example of an 'inclusion' approach.

Consequently, it is a very popular form of mainstream gay culture and expresses dominant gay liberal philosophy that lesbians and gays are just like anybody else. Gay sports, which follows a similar line of reasoning, proves normality in the same way that being a successful business person or doctor proves gay normality. Because of this many gay sports organizations seek legitimisation from traditional sports authorities.

On several occasions during the course of the fieldwork, there were comments from members of the gay tennis club about how similar the club was to other 'straight' clubs. This was not, however, a criticism, but meant as praise and an affirmation that the club was successful in terms of its ability to be the same as other straight clubs. There was often a sense of pride displayed when there was evidence to suggest that the club was just like any other (straight) tennis club. On one occasion, I was with a group of other members waiting for the next available court and watching the players on court finish their game. One of the men commented, 'you'd never know it was a gay tennis club.' The remark was meant to be complimentary and demonstrated how the gay club, and gay sports, was considered inferior to mainstream (heterosexual) sport. Therefore, a mark of success was the ability to appear like mainstream sport rather than oppose it.

The liberal approach apparent within the gay tennis club overshadowed any potential destabilising effects found in more radical gay politics to an extent that I detected the impression among many of the club members that they did not want sexuality, or gayness, to rear its ugly head in the context of a sporting environment. Affiliation to the Gay and Lesbian Tennis Alliance could also be seen as another factor in negating the opportunity to be alternative. The focus on competition deflected many of the original concerns for establishing a gay sport group in the first place and placed gay consciousness on the sidelines. The focus on winning, ranking points and tournaments also prioritised a more individual-based mentality rather than that of the group as a collective.

In the interviews, I asked the men how they would tackle the problem of addressing discriminatory practices. Keith was the most vocal in the sample:

> *Well it's very difficult not to be, not to replicate some of the straight . . . ways of organising things, you know like having different levels of players and er, I think it's good that they actually mix different levels of players together, but you've got to stick to that because it causes an awful lot of upset and embarrassment and bad feeling if you don't, because you realise that people just drift into their cliques and don't want to play with you because you're not good enough. This is another social rejection as well. If you had two good players and maybe structured it so you could have . . . but it has to be highly structured, highly organised. And also you've got to have somebody to tell people not to do things . . . but it's difficult to organise, I think the only way is through mixing people up, but that's got to be very well controlled*

> *and it's difficult to control. It's much better if the person doing that is not playing. But that's a burden and you've got to have more than one person doing that . . . erm . . . I think also you've got to have opportunities for er training er . . . coaching . . . but there again that puts another burden on the structure of the club.*

Keith's response was to apply more rigid monitoring of the play, but he found it difficult to escape the restraints of competitive sport. This reflected the conflicting themes of discriminatory practices, gay consciousness and how sport should be played which occurred throughout the research. Many of the gay men in the sample found it difficult to align their understandings of sport with those of gay discriminatory practices, choosing either to ignore or separate the two. This may also reflect more generalised understandings of sport where politics are often considered external to, and not part of, sporting practice.

Pronger (1990) suggested that gay sport irony is a step towards challenging heterosexual sensibilities. There was evidence of this within the gay tennis club, but it was not acted upon or emphasised to any noticeable extent. In its first few years the club attempted to stage a mock Federation Cup, based upon the women's professional tennis circuit. The intention was to create a light-hearted tournament where players could compete as female players on national teams. Although there were a few teams which made an effort to emulate their chosen sides, it had gradually toned down its alternativeness. There was a general following among many of the members of the gay tennis club for women's tennis, although this aspect was more confined to off court activities.

Off court aspects of the gay tennis club appeared to provide more opportunities for gay sport irony or queer acts. The identification with women's tennis presented further evidence to suggest that issues of sexuality were not completely forgotten. However, the practice of sport and the on court performances of the men where greater capital was conferred upon hegemonic masculine displays appeared to negate the any apparent 'queer' potential during the off court activities.

Rather than being a gay sports club, the gay tennis club could more realistically be considered a tennis club which had members who were gay. This highlights the dominance of mainstream sporting values and how the hegemonic aspects of sporting practice are more compelling than the experiences of subordination which created the original reason for establishing a gay tennis club in the first place. Consequently, attempting to establish gay sport is problematic in that those who are more likely to take part enter with pre-established understandings of how sport should played. Regardless of their experiences, the men who attended the gay tennis club tended to base their understanding of sporting practice upon the values which gay politics attempts to resist. Therefore, the initial political aims of the gay and lesbian movement relating to countering discriminatory practices in mainstream sport and wider social acceptance of alternative sexualities

are in conflict with established formulations of what sport should be and how it should be played. It could be suggested that the gay tennis club derives from a quintessentially gay liberation cultural intervention which has been overtaken by liberal politics, inherent not only in gay sports but mainstream sport in general.

Although Pronger (2000) believes that gay sports has provided lesbian and gay people the opportunity to enjoy sports in an inclusive and safe environment, ultimately it has made these people conform to the established norms, particularly those based on oppressive male heterosexual codes. As he suggests, 'from a radical perspective, gay sports, is part of the gentrification of homosexuality; it straightens out homosexuality, making it more palatable to, indeed more like, conservative taste' (Pronger 2000: 241).

In terms of theorising gay sport, applying a concept such as 'queer' is also problematic as there needs to be recognition of the social and cultural processes which have shaped the sport as it is played today as well as the issue of sexuality. As Kirsch (2000) points out, a problem with queer theory is the lack of recognition of the social and historical factors which have influenced the realities of everyday life.

Mainstream sport, as I have suggested, is riddled with expected forms of sporting masculinity based upon bodily performance. Factors which have excluded gay men and women in mainstream sport tend not to be emphasised in the attempt to be 'real' sport. In the case of the gay tennis club, it was revealed that sexuality was not the sole reason for the men's exclusion from mainstream sport, rather the bodily performances which signified failed masculinity. As some of the members of the gay tennis club were able to successfully take part in mainstream (heterosexual) sports clubs the implication is that certain bodily performances, considered as expressions of being gay, such as weakness, acting 'camp' or being 'girly', are more relevant in terms of how all individuals they are accommodated in mainstream sport. Exposing acts which are considered queer within the context of mainstream sport could provide the opportunity to challenge assumptions about gender and sexuality, as well as other social factors relating to age, race, class and disability.

Applying 'queer' to gay sport could be useful if the positive potential to be found in oppressed groups such as gays and the women's movement in general is harnessed to highlight subversive practices which disrupt existing practices. Consequently activities which are not be regulated by expected sporting masculine bodily performances could be encouraged. By challenging existing practices there is a greater possibility for introducing alternative ideas which are based on acceptance and accommodating difference. At the same time, it is important to promote the idea that sport does not necessarily have to be based entirely on winning and losing, or dominating an opponent. The continued focus on competing detracts from many other more positive aspects to be found in physical bodily pursuits. This is an area which gay liberal politics fails to address. Heikkala (1993), drawing upon Foucault's use of disciplinary practices, goes further in suggesting

that the blind pursuit of competition without careful reflection can lead to a fascism based on a love of power.

Reflection upon contemporary sporting practices is the key and it is among those who have the opportunity to initiate reflection that the potential is to be found. Creative ways to enjoy the physical thrill of sport need not be solely based on orthodox practices. There are clear possibilities to extend the limits of conventional thinking about adult sport and physical activity to include aspects of 'adult' play. In the same way that play needs to be incorporated in childhood physical activity. Indeed, it needs to be established whether there are forms of competition which can escape the problems discussed previously or whether the direction ahead lies in developing new sporting practices which incorporate an inclusive, non-competitive framework. Groups which have been established as an alternative to orthodox sporting practices should, therefore, be aiming to seek out inclusive forms of play.

The potential to be found within subordinated groups is endorsed by Bourdieu when he calls for a much needed challenge to accepted heterosexual masculine dominance.

> The objective of every movement committed to symbolic subversion is to perform a labour of symbolic destruction and construction aimed at imposing new categories of perception and appreciation, so as to construct a group or, more radically, to destroy the very principle of division through which the stigmatizing group and the stigmatized group are produced.
>
> (Bourdieu, 2001: 123)

These forms of symbolic destruction could be expressed through queer bodily acts which highlight the divisiveness of mainstream sport practices. From the evidence gained during the research it was clear that, among the majority of the men who took part, the primary reason for belonging to a gay sports group was to experience an inclusive social event. The Gay Games, may have valiantly attempted to make participation as inclusive as possible, but for many gay men and women the opportunity to participate in such an event is still not an option. It seems that it would be more beneficial for gay sport which aims to be queer, or, at least, 'gay' in that it is able to contest the discriminatory practices found in mainstream sport, to promote activities which have the potential to cater for those with a variety of bodies and not place specific bodily performance as the prerequisite for participation. There are many forms of sport and play which could be adapted to fit these criteria. As Keith made a point of reminding me:

> *Because [sport] is not so important . . . It's not as important as not making somebody feel humiliated and excluded . . they might have been excluded all their lives, cos I know, we all know what it feels like to be excluded.*

8 Conclusions
Looking at the Bigger Picture

I have attempted throughout all aspects of the research to incorporate a reflexive approach, although whether one can remain completely 'reflexive' at every stage may be at times difficult. I have also attempted to demonstrate that the combination of social forces, individual constructions of identity and the physiological experiences of the body all play a part in how one engages in a social encounter. There may be occasions when one aspect takes precedence, either consciously or unconsciously. As I have shown, there were times during the research, such as the match with Tim, where I 'lost control' of the original intentions of the research and could not escape my social presence within such an encounter. Similarly there were times when I was overcome by the thrill of winning or felt dejected after losing. There were also times I was caught up in the moment and felt the thrill of being physically strong and alive, only to discover that the feelings I was experiencing were completely different from those of my opponent. For example, in one tournament match, the thrill which I experienced in my body was interpreted differently by the person I was playing. On that occasion I was feeling confident in my physical abilities, whereas my opponent explained after the match that he had felt intimidated by my 'aggressive' play.

Consequently, it is suggested that there must be an expectation for and an awareness of 'slippage' when attempting to apply reflexive approaches to fieldwork. Thus, careful reflection upon the encounters during the fieldwork is important in mapping out the next stages and courses of action as well as theorising about the events. Being reflexive is about attempting to predict as well as incorporating reflections during and after the research process. However, the intention was not to psychoanalyse myself, but rather make an attempt to comment upon the social world. Like any other researcher, I had an agenda which, in this case, was shaped by my own formulations of sport, masculinities and the body, which were, in turn, shaped by my location within specific historical, social and geo-political contexts. The research was, subsequently, developed as a means of exploring these themes further through the utilisation of empirical evidence.

REVELATIONS

The research revealed that within the social arena of sport there are versions of masculinity which carry greater kudos or cultural capital. These are located in bodily performance and are learnt at an early age, particularly through comparison and evaluation of the individual body and others. The evaluation of bodily performances helps the individual to construct an understanding of his or her position within the social world, or in this case the social space of sport. However, this position is not necessarily fixed and there are ways in which the individual can (or has to) move within this formulation.

The prevalent form of masculinity (which carries the greater kudos) is based on bodily performance where masculinity continues to be presented as diametrically opposed to the feminine. This supports Butler's (1993) and Segal's (1997) reading of gender binaries where performing gender becomes central to the establishment of an identity. In the interviews it was clear that a central concern for the men when they were children was to establish an identity as 'normal' in terms of their perceived understanding of masculine behaviour. The ability to demonstrate to others signs of accepted masculinity, in contrast to signs of femininity, was an essential requirement. Among the gay and the straight men interviewed, this was achieved to varying levels of success.

Homosexuality was not a threat to the presentation of 'popular' masculinity unless it was presented overtly in a 'non-masculine' way. Many of the gay men in the sample provided examples of how hegemonic masculine bodily performances could be used to mask their alternative sexuality and the possible risk of alienation, not only within mainstream sport, but in other social spaces, such as school. Consequently, the men who were able to demonstrate hegemonic masculinity through their bodies, and particularly through sporting performances, were able to navigate childhood, school and youth relatively easily compared with the gay men who presented 'feminine' characteristics. In their accounts, many of the men who were less able to 'pass' as 'masculine' reported being victims of bullying and discrimination.

Body Practices and Masculinity in the Specific Context of Sport

There is a dominant form of masculinity in organised sport which has managed to continue relatively unchallenged in contrast to other versions of masculinity in wider society. I suggested the term 'expected sporting masculinity' to describe a form of masculinity revealed during the research which is based on bodily performances which applies generally to performances in sport, for example, on the field or in the ring. The characteristic and desired qualities are those of being hard, a fighter, powerful, dominant, muscular, strong, fit, athletic, and, ultimately, a winner. All of these characteristics are seen as necessary qualities for the successful participation in sport. They are generally considered (heterosexual) 'male' traits, but are also available to gay men and women who enter sport.

Expected sporting masculinity may cross over into other areas of society, but this is more problematic. In fashion and popular music, versions of this form of masculinity are clearly popular and carry cultural capital, but there does not appear the same expectation for a particular display of the body as seen within organised sport. For example, an outwardly effeminate male can be successful in fashion circles through designing and wearing clothes with a 'sport' theme, however, the boundaries remain more rigid in sport where the focus is specific bodily performances where others are excluded.

A Pathway to Adult Sport

One of the themes which emerged during the research was the marked contrast in the men's accounts between the more inclusive primary school world of fun and games where all body types and both genders could, to a greater extent, enjoy their bodies safely, without fear of discrimination or resentment in comparison to the world of adult, male, serious sport where rigid boundaries are created and entrance requirements are set. Although there was no clear-cut stage where the enjoyment of games by all, regardless of gender and ability, finished and exclusive or divisive organised 'serious' sport began, the later stages of primary school and early years at secondary school were generally seen as times when participation increased or virtually stopped. For many of the men I talked to, the aggressive, competitive nature of secondary school sport was a negative factor. During this time, the fun and enjoyment previously experienced at primary school was overtaken by the constant demand to display expected sporting masculinity which led many to opt out completely or only to return at a much later stage. There was evidence to suggest that broader hegemonic masculine bodily performances were significant during this period in terms of shaping masculine identities. The accounts from the gay men highlighted how sexuality was less problematic for those who were able to perform the expected form of masculinity (particularly in sport). However, those who displayed marked physical differences in their bodily presentation found the experience of adolescence problematic. The men who were effeminate in their bodily displays experienced greater conflict throughout their schooldays, not only from other children but from teachers as well. Consequently, it is suggested that bodily performances *are* a central factor in the construction of and understanding of masculine identities and not purely related to supposed biological gender characteristics.

There was also evidence from the men in the sample (gay and straight) that they were not always comfortable with their 'roles' but felt constrained within them because the alternative was the possibility of being subjected to the same ridicule faced by other less-athletic men (and women). As such, within hegemonic masculine discourse, 'gayness' was constructed in terms of performances of weakness, and, subsequently, associated with

femininity. Within mainstream sport, heterosexuality was taken as 'given' unless there was evidence to suggest otherwise. Evidence of 'failed masculinity' was generally found in bodily displays which 'betrayed' the performance of expected sporting masculinity.

Body Practices Intersecting with Relations of Class, Race Age and (Dis)ability

In the early stages of the research, I had originally intended to focus upon three tennis clubs. There were two 'straight' tennis clubs, one a working-class tennis club which was part of a works-based sports facility provided by a large employer and, the other, a middle-class tennis club situated in an affluent area. The third was a gay tennis club in the centre of a large city. Although, at face value, the class location of the clubs did appear significant, it was not as encompassing as I had envisaged at the start of the research. The focus on bodily performance, through displays of gender and physicality emerged as the primary source for acceptance within the clubs. There were varying levels of economic capital on display at all the clubs. Although the works-based sports club was located historically within a working-class subtext, it was not a factor which caused apparent distinction or divisions. The same applied to the middle-class tennis club. In the gay tennis club, there was a variety of class backgrounds, but, again, this could not be considered a factor in their ability or inability to take part successfully. For example, Peter's father was a market trader, whereas Matthew's was an actor and Fraser's was a doctor. Each could be seen as having differing class backgrounds, but it was their ability to perform expected sporting masculinity which provided a greater sense of their masculine identities.

The gay tennis club and the middle-class tennis club also had a broad membership in terms of ethnic origin in comparison to the works-based club which was predominantly white. This relationship could be more easily explained by the geographical location of the gay and middle-class tennis clubs in a large cosmopolitan city and the works-based club in a small suburban town. In a similar manner to class, taking into account race as a factor in the construction of expected sporting masculinity was considered less important as the research progressed. I observed similar bodily displays within the context of sport among men from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

I was unable to consider disability as a factor in the research as there were no disabled members in any of the clubs. Although this may be considered a limitation of the research, the wider implications of continued dominance of expected sporting masculinity, with its emphasis upon bodily performance, not only effects gays and women but all groups considered subordinate to hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, whereas within school sport and physical education considerable effort has been made to ensure more inclusive practices catering to a broader range of physical needs, the adult

world of amateur sport appears less accommodating. Part of the blame may rest with the continued focus upon and understanding of ability, based on elite, able-bodied sport (men) as a model. At the same time, within professional sport, disabled athletes have been allocated separate spaces in a similar manner to women's sports and gay sports. Although it may be claimed that opportunities are provided for marginalised groups, the existing hierarchical framework remains unchallenged.

Gay Sport as a Challenge to Hegemonic Masculinity?

Gay sports clubs find it difficult to establish alternative practices and invariably reinforce discriminatory attitudes which prevail in mainstream organised sports. The dominance of hegemonic masculinity within mainstream sport is such that when an 'alternative' sports club is established, it is based on a conventional understanding of 'sport'. The gay tennis club used in the research was initially set up to escape the prejudices found in many straight clubs where heterosexual masculine aggressiveness is accepted. However, the manner in which the club was established was based on conventional understandings of what a tennis club should be. Thus a 'mirror' version of a heterosexual club was developed. Instead of establishing a club based foremost on sexuality, the objective became traditional sport and along with it many of the prejudices found in it. For example, I described how, in order to combat varying playing abilities, members were awarded categories of playing standard which in turn led to a similar 'pecking order' found in 'straight' clubs. The focus on competitive play contributed to the emphasis placed upon physical ability and skill with greater status to be gained from success on court. Consequently, the original aims to provide an 'alternative', and more inclusive, form of sports club were overshadowed and the gay tennis club became a version of a mainstream sport club where heterosexual hegemonic masculinity prevails.

I found that there are a complex range of differing experiences in relation to sexuality, masculinity and sport which means that it is difficult to clearly identify unifying factors in gay sport practice. There were apparent conflicts of interest in terms of the initial aims expressed within gay liberation politics and the established conventions of mainstream sport. Pronger's (2000) suggestion that the emancipatory power that appeared initially within the Gay and Lesbian community, particularly in its approach to sport, has been quelled in recent years through the attempts to 'normalise' and become part of mainstream sport is supported by this research. The gay tennis club included in this research can be considered successful in many respects. However, it did appear that those who were more likely to participate in gay sport displayed characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity which, invariably, meant the continued exclusion of other versions of masculinity (and women). One of the factors that appeared to be not taken into consideration (in particular by those who participated in organised events

such as the gay games) was the significance of an individual's previous experiences of sport in childhood. Many had had conventional (in the heteronormative sense) experiences of school sports and through their ability to display expected sporting masculinity had developed not only the skills to take part, but taken on board the expected ways of being a sportsperson. So, whereas they were able to continue to take part in mainstream sport, they failed to understand how other gay men (and women) who could not (or had not been able to) perform expected sporting masculinity were unable to develop the sporting skills they had taken for granted.

Whether it was intended or not, a focus on ability created a situation where there were those who could and those who could not 'do sport'. The initial suggestion that a gay group or large gay sporting event was united through the experience of being gay was immediately brought into question as the practices and expectations inherent in conventional sport, along with the mixed experiences of the participants created (particularly on the field) different experiences and, ultimately, divisions. Indeed, the evidence from this research suggests that amateur sporting practices in gay sport continue to reinforce discriminatory practices based on bodily performance and heterosexual-based understandings of gender.

'Real' Masculinity

I found that there was often an assumption of a 'real' or authentic version of masculinity. Although, it was not always clear what this meant and in many cases there appeared to be a slippage in the use of the term. However, the themes which recurred in the descriptions highlighted interplay between formulations of working-class sensibilities, heterosexuality and evidence of hard work and effort. The use of the body was central in the presentation of this version of masculinity. The 'ordinary kind of run-of-the-mill' description of masculinity that Gary provided in Chapter 6 was comparable to the 'benchmark' of masculinity which the PE teachers in Chapter 5 constructed and indicates a process through which individuals learn how to distinguish between perceived appropriate ways of social being. In both cases, the men found it difficult to accept alternative versions of masculinity and the body played a significant part in how it was interpreted. For the PE teachers, the understanding of 'normal' masculine behaviour extended to ways in which the body could move. In the case of dance, the 'ordinary' movements constructed through a combination of perceptions of class, expected performances in sport and the sporting body were in opposition to the movements found in dance. Dance was equated with non-sporting movements which were at the same time, associated with the feminine, considered non working-class and required a different approach to the body, both physically and emotionally.

Consequently, although there was a general sense of an authentic version of masculinity among nearly all the men I interviewed, their interpretations

did not hold up to theoretical unpacking or scrutiny. The very fact that the men were positioning their identities within a 'central' territory that was considered normal suggested that they felt little need to unduly question masculinity in general. To an extent, many of the gay men who played sport also considered themselves 'real' men who happened to be gay. Often, criticisms of 'real' masculinity were considered to be voiced from those 'outside' of what was considered to be a legitimate worldview. As such, alternative arguments were considered less valid.

Belief that there is a real version of masculinity continues to reinforce gender binaries. This is particularly the case in what Connell (2008) describes as the recent 'boys as victims discourse', which has, according to her, reproduced a drastically simplified view of men, boys and masculinity. It has also reinforced the belief 'that only men can truly understand masculinity. Men have it, and women do not' (Connell 2008: 132). As a consequence, and particularly in relation to sport, there is a continued perception that only 'real' men appreciate the importance of sport, and with the associated elements of it, such as fighting and competition.

This argument could be taken further if applied to the specific arena of sport where there is the expectation that only 'real' men know or appreciate sport. Those without 'evidence' of such knowledge are considered 'less than' real men. These simplistic formulations not only consolidate the belief that there is an authentic version of masculinity which creates unnecessary distinctions between groups of men but also continues to position women as occupying a separate gender binary.

It is because of the continued presence of a general perception of real masculinity as a basis for identity formation, that hegemony as a theoretical concept remains relevant. It still has value in that it can be read as a way of explaining how particular sections of society remain subordinate—in that the claims made for authenticity do not destabilise the broader distributions of power—but rather offer useful justifications or appeals to less material forms of self-worth.

GRADUAL STEPS FORWARD

The focus of the research upon male bodies and masculinities within the context of sport was directed by many factors, both theoretical and practical. The evidence led me to suggest that there is a form of hegemonic masculinity, expected sporting masculinity, which is based upon bodily performances particularly located in sport and also available to some gay men and, in certain circumstances, women. I made these claims by investigating groups of men, both gay and straight. From my observations I noted that, similar to women in mainstream sport, gay women were less represented in gay sport which may be a direct result of the replication of these hegemonic masculine practices (by way of expected sporting masculinity).

Consequently, like most worthwhile research, the findings in this research generate another series of questions. In this case, to what extent are women able to experience sport and their bodies in the same way that men can and in what contexts do pressures upon them to perform expected sporting masculinity apply?

Gendered bodies are significant in any study of sport and implicate both men and women. Too often, within the context of sport, focus on gender has concentrated on women whereas the accepted body for sport is the male. However, it is clear that gender and bodies need to be read together and then applied in relation to other contributing social factors. The particular forms of bodily display highlighted in this book have been interpreted as signs of 'authentic' masculinity and this has contributed to a situation where certain physical activities become normalised. If we think of this in terms of 'limits' or constraints placed upon the individual potential to experience the body it is easier to question why there remain social restrictions upon ways of being. For instance, Judith Halberstam describes her early experiences of being restricted from taking part in boxing:

> When I was thirteen, I wanted a punching bag and boxing gloves for my birthday. I believe that these accoutrements of masculine competition signified for me a way to keep womanhood at bay . . . I was told that boxing was not appropriate for a girl my age and that I should pick out something more *feminine*. This was the first time that I remember being told that I could not do something because I was a girl.
>
> (Halberstam 1998: 267)

What is telling is that Halberstam then describes her 'rage' in having to accept social formulations of feminine behaviour. However, the rage stems from the knowledge that she has acquired as an adult academic—one who is able to deconstruct the irrational constructions of gender which restrict alternative ways of being for both boys and girls. So here is precisely the point at which we need to focus: the gap between the acceptance of expected gendered behaviours (because it is 'the way it is') and the realisation of the irrationalities and limitations of socially constructed gender pathways.

That is why I was interested in the potential of 'queer', when applied to sport, as a means of revealing many of its limitations and challenging many of the prevalent attitudes found within it. However, as the research progressed, it did appear that there was a wide gulf between the theoretical claims of academic queer theory and the 'real' or lived practices of those who took part in sport. Although there were instances of performances which could be considered 'queer', it is difficult to assess the impact of these instances when it could be equally argued that they did not 'destabilise' the current order. Much of the research chronicled instances of discriminatory practices within the field of sport and the continued dominance of a

heterosexual-based hegemonic masculinity. I'm more inclined to see the relevance of queer in approaches which seek to reveal irrationalities in the present and within the context of sport at ground level. Rather than unpack a previous (sometimes obscure) literary text, in order to make people reconsider their everyday actions it would be more worthwhile to 'do queer' so that reformulations of gendered being can be made. However, the emphasis must be made in terms of highlighting the limits of current practice rather than attempting to replace it.

Much of the research highlighted how sport and physical activity was considered enjoyable and this aspect may provide a useful entry point into further investigations. Although the research was primarily located within a sociological evaluation of masculinities and body practices, the sport setting provided the opportunity to consider developments within contemporary sport. I described how the men who took part in the study had varying abilities and differing experiences of sport, but in almost every case there was a common sense of enjoyment from the physical experience of taking part in a sporting activity. Much of the sense of pleasure was experienced during early childhood in various forms. As Keith explained to me, he felt that there was a certain thrill to be physically active, where pleasure was not fully explained by simple descriptions found in childhood play or sport.

> *From an early age I felt, I felt sort of aware, maybe not sexually, but sensuously, you know, my body and sort of stimulating my body. I mean to say when we used to climb ropes in gym and obviously our legs were wrapped around them, I think I can remember getting a frisson of excitement . . . but I didn't know what it was, I just got the, you know, the very sort of warm feeling about. We all do when we're children, by accident in some ways, something you found a new area of sensation . . . I think I did that . . . it's funny how it's sort of associated with climbing ropes, gym work and things like that, sport actually does make you more aware of that.*
>
> (Keith)

These activities, for Keith, were at the same time a pleasurable physical activity as well as a means to learn and experience his body. However, as he found out later, the practice of sport was also clearly biased towards specific abilities and bodily performances. These may be appropriate for elite, professional sports, but in the context of amateur participation, where the initial reason for wanting to take part is based on social enjoyment of the body, requirements of sporting excellence become less relevant. However, as I have indicated in the research, it is the dominance of expected sporting masculinity and the broader continued prevalence of hegemonic masculinity which reinforces these discriminatory requirements.

Another significant factor in the prevalence of expected sporting masculinity is the emphasis upon competition. Probyn (2000) rightly points out

that the negative effects of competition are still overlooked. A focus upon winning (and losing) may be justifiable within elite and professional sports, as the potential rewards provide the incentive. However, at a social level, competitive sport places too much emphasis upon winning, with the consequence that taking part can produce a fear of losing and shame about one's performance. As already mentioned, taking into account that the majority of people take part in sport voluntarily, at an amateur level, the context is distorted and the emphasis upon enjoyment is played down. Although these sentiments are often displayed by liberal approaches to sport, the notion of competition is still considered as an aspect of society that is essentially positive. Consequently, competition in sport reflects broader capitalist values and is believed to be 'character' building. For example, it was of little surprise that the current UK prime minister, Gordon Brown became caught up in the hype surrounding the Beijing Olympic games and the London 2012 Olympics when he declared that 'we want to encourage competitive sports in schools, not the "medals for all" culture we have seen in previous years," (Summers 2008).

Further research would also be productive if it could evaluate the experiences of gay and straight women in a similar manner to the research I conducted with the men. At the same time, it would also be worthwhile to explore those men (and women) who do not actively take part in sport in order to take into consideration the significance of bodily performances in other social spaces. There has been much written about watching sport (Whannel 1992, Blackshaw 2003, Weed 2006), but in many cases there is little challenge to the taken-for-granted assumption about the male spaces where sport is watched. I suggest this because, although I focused specifically on sporting practices, it could be suggested that developments in the late twentieth century in relation to youth culture and leisure practices (both gay and straight) have also placed great emphasis upon bodily performances. The social arena of youth and dance culture as another social context may appear to be more inclusive, if considered in terms of the discriminatory practices found in sport demonstrated in this research, however specific bodily practices also seem to be a requirement for the display of particular types of 'cool' performances. These spaces, where the body is positioned at the foreground are particularly resonant for the young and economically disadvantaged as the body provides a prime source of capital.

It is clear that the importance of non-elite social sport and physical activity needs to be reasserted, where emphasis is placed upon enjoyment of the physical body at any level. Recognising that sport in its current form, rather than produce winners, is more likely to create an understanding of fear in relation to the failed performances is a gradual step in the right direction. At the same time, more research which focuses upon bodily experiences and performances of those not considered a part of mainstream sport will highlight the fact that sport does not necessarily have to be the domain of 'real men' (whoever they are).

Appendix

NOTES ABOUT METHODS USED

Observations

In all forms of social research there is always some element of observation. Throughout, I have made claims for the need to recognise the importance of the body when theorising the social construction of masculine identity. I identified Connell's (1995) concept of bodily practices as a productive argument in that it clearly demonstrates how social processes and corporeality are involved in individual and social formulations of gender and sexual identities. Connell based her arguments on the interviews obtained from a range of men and I had initially envisaged incorporating interviews, conducted in a similar manner to the life history approach she used, in order to analyse further some of the issues relating to masculinities, and in particular body practices and sexuality within the context of sport. Participant observation was originally considered a means to gain access to men within suitable research sites and supplement the interviews. However, as the research progressed it became rapidly apparent that there were limitations in using only interviews. A focus on body practices appeared to create a greater requirement for observations of the various bodily techniques and gendered performances at play within different social situations. Especially within the context of sport, it appeared even more appropriate to utilise aspects of participant observation in order to record body practices at large and in the present and then supplement these with recorded interviews which would provide an opportunity to reflect upon social process and the life course.

When I began to develop the research themes, I also did not presume that any men who took part in subsequent conversations or interviews would want to discuss their bodies openly. Participant observation was, therefore, a useful means of gaining information about and watching bodily performances and also provided opportunities to engage in or listen to conversations which I did not necessarily have to instigate or take an active part in. I was able to participate and observe at the same time, for example,

whilst on a running machine or in a changing room, which meant that I could observe other men and how they presented their bodies as well as how they interacted with other men and women. The same applied to the tennis clubs, where I was able to participate and observe either during a game or whilst waiting to play at club sessions or in journeys to play other teams. Within the tennis club environment, as a participant, I could listen and observe others and also, occasionally, direct topics of conversation although I generally maintained a watching and listening approach as the interviews provided the opportunity to focus on specific themes.

As is well known, interactionist sociology has utilised observation in order to demonstrate how actors learn and then perform 'normal' behaviour. For example, Goffman (1972) adopted observational techniques to show how the body is a central factor in the process of learning social conventions. He compares the body to units which are either 'vehicular' or 'participation' units. Vehicular units are comparable to a car in the way that pedestrians move about and negotiate public spaces, literally performing bodily manoeuvres. Participation units describe the process where individuals navigate the streets (i.e. the social space) either accompanied or alone. Using observation, he was able to describe the organizational structures at play when bodies perform these manoeuvres in social spaces.

More recently, Duneier (1999) adopted a traditional form of interactionist observation in his study of working-class street traders in New York. The detailed descriptions provide valuable insights into areas of social life often neglected in wider society. In the case of Duneier, he was an outsider and much of the appeal of his work is found in his attempts to gain access to the group and his experiences once 'inside'. However, I did not have to encounter the problems faced by an anthropologist who has to unravel and interpret the social codes of another culture. I have been exposed throughout my life to the social expectations of a culture which has specific codes in relation not only to the body and masculinity but also age, gender, race and class. I have not always been a researcher and have had to deal with negotiating society and other people in the same ways that others have to in their lives. I have acquired a history of observations and experiences which have been formed in earlier stages of my life but can now be reflected upon in a more sociological framework. The men in my research sites have had similar experiences, but at the same time have collected these in differing individual circumstances and may or may not assess their lives in the same sociological manner. It is the purpose of this study, therefore, to explore my subjective account of men's bodies and masculinity, which I have constructed during my life, by exploring the accounts of other men. However, as I have mentioned earlier in the chapter, awareness of the reflexive nature of the research process enables recognition of the problems of being over familiar with the research settings. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 103) suggest, it can be sometimes difficult to suspend one's preconceptions. In my case, I needed to take into consideration many

of my preconceptions, in particular those relating to masculinity, sport, the body and the research process.

However, the ability to participate 'inside' the research site is a major strength of observational ethnography. There are many worthy examples to be found in early interactionist studies, such as Foot-Whyte (1955) or Becker (1963), but more recently there have been many studies which address masculinity and the body and incorporate participant observation (for example; Aycock, 1992; Fussell, 1992; Klein, 1993; De Garis, 2000). Although not specifically intended as sociological research, Fussell's study is particularly interesting in that it adopts a reflective approach to his own experiences as a novice body builder and charts the process through which he transformed both his body and social identity and, consequently, was able to occupy the role of 'body builder'. Fussell's autobiographical reflections of the physical routines and social practices, which he had to learn and then ritually perform, demonstrates the significance of Connell's (1995) argument that the physical body is both informed by and a contributory factor in social processes.

Occupying an insider position offers the researcher the opportunity to witness and record many social activities and processes not available to other forms of sociological research. In the case of Aycock (1992), he was able to observe other men during regular sessions at a gym in order to apply a theoretical interpretation of the disciplinary practices which inform the body as well as gender that are apparent in such an activity.

In all of these insider accounts there is an acknowledgement of a process which has to be experienced over a period of time. Consequently, participant observation is highly time consuming and relatively costly. Fussell's experiences of body building covered a period of four years and in most cases of worthwhile observation, several years is the norm.

On a broader level, I was attempting to explore some aspects of everyday life which could be considered potentially subversive, in particular gay sport. Observation can be highly effective in such circumstances. For example, Kates and Belk (2001) used observation as a means of analysing the significance of lesbian and gay pride days. They attended and observed annual gay pride marches and events over several years and were able to conclude that even though commercial processes had become a major part of what had originally been political motivated activities there still remained an emphasis on resistance. On a similar level, I had also wanted to gauge whether political motivations were apparent at the gay tennis club and observations and conversations provided the opportunity to monitor this.

Interviews

During the research I became familiar with a variety of men and even though I cannot presume to know every part of their lives there were many shared experiences which eased the formal barriers which can sometimes

exist between researcher and interviewee. As I was studying an area with which I was already familiar, I could also talk with confidence to the other men not only about sport but about shared social experiences. For example, at the straight club I could discuss freely local issues and events or at the gay club, issues relating to sexuality. Participants' understanding of me was thus informed by the fact that I was one of them. Most of the men I later selected for the interview sample were familiar to me before the interviews and this prior knowledge was gained mainly through my activities in the clubs during the early stages. To an extent, all interviews are affected by information outside of the interview itself, such as, the motivation of the interviewer immediately prior to the interview, the background to the study, or the setting of the interview. It is impossible and undesirable to eliminate factors of this kind. As described previously, much criticism of interviews is directed at the authenticity of 'naturally' occurring data, with the idea that the role of the researcher upsets the balance of these data. However, there are a variety of ways in which interviews can be conducted. I wanted the interviews to be part of a broader social process of interaction which included playing a game of tennis, chatting and sharing experiences in a similar way to interactions and conversations between friends. In these cases, talk often adopts a form of interviewing, for example, questions like 'where did you learn to play?' or 'what do you do for a living?' In most cases people like to talk about themselves and are happy, in the right conditions, to have the opportunity to put their lives into some form of perspective. It is, therefore, the task of the researcher to translate these 'life' conversations into sociological text. In terms of the interview, I am obviously constructing the conversation in some way by the very fact that I have an agenda and a series of themes which I want to discuss. However, as I have outlined , remaining aware of the process of co-construction enables the researcher to analyse subsequent material with this in mind.

All the men in my study were willing to be interviewed, although for the sake of anonymity I changed their names. I was aware of the problems of 'trusting' the accounts of the respondents but, again, in this case the respondents did not divulge information about themselves which could be considered potentially incriminating. However, I was also aware of the 'sensitive' nature of talking about masculinity and sexuality. Talking about sexuality is not an everyday practice, and this seems so especially for men and I attempted to overcome this through the initial approach of the interview and the focus upon life history in relation to sport, leisure and lifestyle rather than a direct assault upon the body and sexual identity. For example, Young et al. (1994) were able to draw useful conclusions about masculinity in general from their interviewees in research which used participation in violent sports as the focus for discussion. Although, the topic of sexuality may be considered problematic for some of the men at the mainstream tennis club, it may be less so for the members of the gay tennis club bearing in mind that attending a gay venue is, to an extent, making some form of declaration or conscious decision about one's own sexuality. However, by

adopting a similar format in the interviews with all the men in the form of sporting a 'life history', I was able to gain some access to the relevance of sexuality in relation to the men's everyday practices and bodily performances. As such I was able to assess the significance placed on important issues, for example, whether the gay men in the sample articulated their own sexuality as being a factor in their ability to participate in sport in comparison to heterosexual men.

Sport was initially offered as an explanation to the men of the purpose for the research project. I ventured, when asked, that my research was based on a study of sport, the body and participation among men living in the south-east of England. It was often difficult to explain fully the aims if my research and I did not assume that all the men would be as enthusiastic about the topic as I was. I was more concerned that I should obtain informal consent to the interviews and that I should explain the context of the study and my position as a researcher. The fact that I was also a member of the clubs and intended to continue taking part after the interviews meant that the men had the opportunity to clarify any points after the actual interview. I attempted to adhere to the principles of active research, where

> meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter.
>
> (Holstein and Gubrium 1997: 114)

I also wanted to be able to share aspects of the research with the men. I intentionally offered broad explanations of the research aims, rather than detailed descriptions, so that I would not influence the responses in the subsequent interviews and build reactivity into the process. Therefore, as sport was essentially the topic of my research, I focussed on this aspect and avoided direct reference to the masculinity and sexuality, unless it was raised by the respondent in the interview.

I felt that in-depth interviews in the manner of life histories were the most appropriate form of research tool. The life history approach provides the chance to assess how other individuals account for their lives over a period of time whilst at the same time gives the researcher an opportunity to assess these accounts in relation to other social factors and the accounts of others. I adopted methods similar to Connell (1995) and Skeggs (1997) as I felt they share similar concerns. Connell successfully used interviews to demonstrate the importance of bodily practices. The men in her sample were able to reflect upon their experiences growing up and, consequently, Connell was able to demonstrate how the body informed individual lived practices as well as wider social practices. Connell conducted thirty interviews which were taken from four different social groups. Life history was used to gather information about social and historical change. There was not only a comparison made between the lives of different men but also in the groups selected. Three groups were identified as being marginalized or

subordinated to society in some manner, whilst the forth group represented patriarchal heterosexual middle-class men. I attempted to adopt a similar approach by gathering a series of life histories, but at the same time, I wanted to address some of the issues which were not fully explored, particularly in relation to sexuality.

Anderson and Jack (1991) highlight the strengths of life histories by providing examples of their own work. By critically examining some of their own interviews they demonstrate ways to obtain full benefit from the accounts given by the respondents and at the same time gain deeper understanding of women's lives. Anderson demonstrates the need to 'shed agenda' in order to gain access to relevant information. The relationship with the interviewee is vital and can sometimes be hampered by the unconscious need to focus on the specific project. Quoting an example of an interview with a woman from a similar background, Anderson shows how she missed the opportunity to gather important information. She writes:

> The interview's potential is severely limited, however, by my failure to encourage her to expand upon her spontaneous reflections and by my eagerness to document the details of her farming activity. Not until later did I realise that I do not know what she meant by 'nervous breakdown' or 'overdoing'. The fact that other farm women used the same or similar terms to parts of their lives alerted me to the need for further clarification.
>
> (Anderson and Jack 1991: 15)

The need to clarify what the respondent means is an important factor in any research. Particularly as I wanted to compare different social groups of men, I could not presume to know all the ways they express and account for their lives. Anderson also provides a useful insight into the value of reflective and considered interview techniques. She writes:

> What I learned by listening carefully to my interviews is that women's oral history requires much more than a set of questions to explore women's unique experiences and unique perspectives; we need to refine our methods for probing more deeply by listening to the levels on which the narrator responds to the original questions. To do so we need to hear about what women implied, suggested, and started to say but didn't. We need to interpret their pauses and, when it happens, their unwillingness or inability to respond. We need to consider carefully whether our interviews create a context in which women feel comfortable exploring the subjective feelings that give meaning to actions, things and events, whether they allow women to explore 'unwomanly' feelings and behaviours, and whether they encourage women to explain what they mean in their own terms.
>
> (Anderson and Jack 1991: 17)

Jack stresses the importance of being aware that the researcher is an active participant in the research process. Listening becomes crucial in the interview situation. Jack argues that one of the most critical areas for attention is where the interviewer feels they know what the respondent is saying. This implies that the researcher is already appropriating what the respondent says to an existing schema, which means he/she is no longer listening to the respondent but fitting the response into what they already know. Jack suggests the need to be careful to elaborate meanings from the respondent and not presume understanding of phrases or words but ask for clarification.

> Because women have internalised the categories by which to interpret their experience and activities, categories that 'represent a deposit of the desires and disappointments of men', what is often missing is the woman's own interpretation of her experience, or her own perspective on her life and activity. Interviews allow us to hear, if we will, the particular meanings of a language that both women and men use but each translates differently.
>
> (Anderson and Jack 1991: 19)

Jack suggests that by immersing oneself in the interview and being aware of moral language the researcher can listen to interviews. Anderson and Jack provide examples of how the oral history interview needs a shift from information gathering, where the focus is upon the right questions and interaction, to a focus upon the process or unfolding of the subject's viewpoint. By adopting this form of oral history interview technique I was able to draw upon a range of subjects' viewpoints and a range of experiences. For instance, during the interviews, the men were able to tell me about areas of their lives which would probably not emerge in general conversations. I was able to ask about past experiences of sport during their childhood and school days which meant that the conversation was focussed more upon the interviewee than the interviewer. Consequently, a simple question such as 'tell me about your experiences of sport at school' would enable the respondent to describe a range of significant experiences, not only for him but for the research.

The need to account for historical process was also an important aspect in my decision to use life history as a main research tool. It is the relationship to historical change which provides an additional factor in assessing the extent to which body practices influence making and remaking of specific versions of masculinity. As Plummer (1983) points out, a subject will be constantly moving between developments in their own life-cycle and external factors, for example, political changes, developments in technology or economic changes. Plummer refers to work he carried out with Jeffrey Weeks where they gathered life histories of elderly and young gay men. Although the subjects faced common problems related to the general stigma of homosexuality, the experiences of a twenty one year old and

a seventy year old were vastly different. This related particularly to the different historical circumstances each confronted. For example, the older man had experienced economic depression, two world wars and a denial both legal and socially of his sexuality. Plummer suggests that through the subject's accounts 'we can glimpse not only the social life of England between 1920 and 1975, we can also begin to grasp how the very experience of homosexuality has shifted' (Plummer 1983: 70).

Plummer's use of the life-history method clearly demonstrates how effective it is as a research tool in gathering information (in this case) about men and their bodies. It is a method which produces rich material and at the same time the opportunity to evaluate the differing experiences of men at different stages in their lives. The interviews I conducted, although not specifically aimed at providing a detailed account of historical change, did provide material which I could use to assess the ways in which expected sporting masculinity did or did not inform masculinity at different stages in the life course.

REFLECTIONS ON METHODS

The utilisation of qualitative methods has been justified on several accounts and I feel the approaches employed have uncovered revealing material in a number of ways which were not predicted at the outset.

I found that the observations worked well in conjunction with the interviews. Observing in the tennis clubs also provided a useful contrast to observing covertly in the health club. I was drawn into the activities of the tennis clubs to a much greater extent than I originally envisaged which meant that I was constantly observing a range of activities, both on and off court, and paying attention in closer detail than if I was merely there to record an interview and then leave. However, it did mean that the research was mentally exhausting and was also more physically exhausting than I had imagined. At one stage I was taking an active part in three tennis clubs and one health club. Although demanding, it created a greater range of observations and sources for conversations and interviews.

During the research at the sports clubs, the strategy of playing a game of tennis with a respondent prior to an interview worked extremely well, particularly with the men that I did not know so well. It created a space before the interview where many barriers could be broken down. It meant that there was an initial period meeting up, going to the club, playing a game, talking after the game and then having the interview. Consequently, by the time we reached the interview stage and started recording, both of us were relaxed and it became easier for the interview to adopt the form of an extended conversation. In effect, this process not only made the interviewee feel more relaxed, but also helped me concentrate upon the interview itself and not worry unduly about other factors, such as the atmosphere

or initially establishing a relationship with the interviewee. Therefore, I was able to adopt active and reflective methodologies more successfully. This highlights the strengths of qualitative research when applied to an appropriate situation. However, the approach was time consuming in that the recorded interview also required several hours beforehand talking to and playing tennis with the interviewee. Like other ethnographic investigations, it meant spending an extended period taking part at the research sites whilst attempting to become familiar with the other members so that when I did ask someone for an interview, I could be reasonably certain that they would accept.

As I was able to generate a greater level of familiarity with the men in comparison to interviews conducted with total strangers, it meant that the accounts could be considered, to an extent, more honest and less 'staged'. Sometimes I was surprised by the openness of the revelations made by the men, without apparent prompting. At the same time (and another strength of qualitative research), I was able to empathise more effectively with the men because of the shared experiences gained through participation in the clubs. On many occasions during an interview I thought to myself that an experience described by one of the respondents was remarkably similar to an event in my life. More often than not, this was related to experiences of family life, school and work. These shared experiences created a deeper relationship with the respondents and influenced the research in that I felt I was able to understand the men's lives in more depth. This was particularly the case for those I initially did not know that well. Qualitative research is often criticised because of its subjectivity, however, my ability to gain access to a range of men and explore many aspects of their lives may provide further justification for this branch of research as a valuable method for making claims about social life.

MATERIAL FOR CHAPTER 5

The material for this chapter was drawn from observations and interviews conducted with male students who took part in a BA Physical Education degree (with QTS) at a University in the South-East of England. (This was collected separately and at a later stage to the research described in the other chapters.) The students had to complete a dance module which was a compulsory part of the course and from this a number of men were selected to take part in a male dance group which would then perform to schools in the area. In general, the majority of the men who enrol on the course have very limited, if any, experience of dance. In most cases, they have expertise, or sporting capital, in traditional sports, such as football and rugby.

Ten sporting life history interviews were conducted. Each interview lasted approximately between one and a half to two hours. The interviews were arranged well in advance so that little disruption to the normal timetable of

the programme was encountered. Although the interviews were used as the prime source of data, like before, the observations and informal conversations during the research period contributed to the overall 'story'.

Additional material was also used in this chapter which was collected from young men who attended a well-known ballet school in a large city in the south-east of England. As part of a larger project exploring the experiences of young dancers, I was able to incorporate additional interviews which focused on their sporting life histories in the manner utilised in the other aspects of the research. A further ten interviews were conducted with young men aged between eleven and sixteen.

The intention with the young dancers as well as the trainee physical education teachers was to explore further aspects of gender and the body. This time in relation to an activity not considered part of established sports, but just as 'embodied'.

Notes

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. I initially approached a number of clubs in the South East of England with the intention that I would be able to gain access to a range of men and address aspects of age, class, race and sexuality. From these I chose organisations which would become the core setting for the ethnography (see appendix for further notes on methods).
2. I use the term 'straight' in relation to the mainstream tennis club as a generalised representation of a sports club which is based on traditional heterosexual practices. It is used in contrast to a 'gay' tennis club, which has been established directly as a result of the need to provide a space which does not hold taken for granted assumptions of (hetero)sexuality. This does not imply that all those who take part in 'straight' sports clubs are necessarily heterosexual. Many of the respondents who took part in the gay tennis club (who identified as gay) also played in straight clubs. In the gay tennis club, there was no restriction upon participation in the relation to sexuality and this was included in the club's mission statement.
3. I am thinking of, for instance, Jayne Caudwell's (2003) research into women football players. She describes a range of identities which were accommodated and performed within the confines of a specific sporting space.
4. I initially employed the term 'exclusive masculinity' (see Wellard 2002) but feel that this was slightly misleading in that performances of certain versions of masculinity do not necessarily 'exclude' but rather compel specific performances within the sport setting, particularly during play. 'Expected' sporting masculinity can be seen as a form of masculine performance considered appropriate or necessary within the specific location of taking part or playing sport and can be read alongside other 'accepted' forms of sporting masculinity which occur off the playing field, but within the social space of sport.
5. I have noticed in many tennis clubs that there is often a shortage of players aged between eighteen and twenty five. There may be several reasons for this. The most likely is related to the fact that players often take part as juniors but then lose interest when they begin employment or university. In the case of the straight tennis club, many of the younger men either took part in football or gave up organized sports in favour of drinking and clubbing. There were also many instances of older juniors (those aged between 13 and 16) facing resistance from senior members when they attempted to take part in general adult social tennis activities.
6. Players at the gay tennis club were allocated red, blue, green and yellow membership cards in order to distinguish between playing ability. The intention

was that in social sessions games of doubles could be made up with similar pairings, such as a red and blue. This is discussed further in chapter seven.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. In the UK, the model for school sport, as described in chapter 2, has been influential in the creation of similar models throughout the world. Research conducted by Bailey and Dismore (2005) as part of the SpinEd project found that there were similar patterns of school sport in all the continents that they studied. More recently, there have been concerted efforts by many countries, in particular in Asia and Africa to adopt school systems similar to 'Western' models.
2. Research was conducted with a group of trainee PE teachers in the South East of England during 2006. See appendix for further details.
3. In the UK, years 7 to 11 cover the ages of 11 through to 16. In year 10 there would be students aged between 14 and 15.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Although I do not fully explore the performances of women within this book, I am suggesting that excepted sporting masculinity can be performed by women, but with different degrees of acceptance within the specific location. Within the context of organised professional sport and many aspects of amateur sport, women still remain on the most part literally 'separated' from men.

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