

Men, sport, body performance and the maintenance of ‘exclusive masculinity’*

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Participation in sport remains an activity dominated by a particular form of masculinity based on competitiveness, aggression and elements of traditional understandings of the sporting male. At the same time, contemporary society continues to ascribe greater cultural capital to those who display evidence of this in their bodily practices. Those who approach sport have to negotiate these elements and it is their relationship to this particular understanding which influences their level of participation. Gender, sexuality, age and physical ability are foremost in creating bridges or barriers to achieving individual bodily expression through organized sport. There is a need to assess the nature of sport participation in contemporary culture and highlight the task of academic research to become more active in confronting the wider social issues which invariably exclude a large number of the population from enjoying sport and their bodies. The arguments developed in this chapter have been drawn from research conducted among male participants of sports clubs (gay and straight) in the South East of England. Using oral accounts and observation, the nature of gender performance within the sports field is assessed in relation to the wider inequalities faced by various sections of society. Feminist research and the more recent branches of research found in Sociology and Cultural Studies have highlighted the disadvantages experienced by women in general, but at the same time prevalent forms of what I term ‘exclusive masculinity’ remain to an extent unchallenged and this is particularly evident within sport.

Introduction

We used to play hours and hours and hours. You know everyday after school. Or all day during the holidays and er, god, actually I did, I thoroughly enjoyed it. (Matthew 35)

In some ways the people at [the gay tennis club], I sometimes found that their social validity, their social standing, their social progression is based on how good they are at tennis. They seem to be fixated with the idea that they will lose some kind of social standing. (Keith 46)

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. (Peter 33)¹

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Matthew, Keith and Peter are three gay men who take part in sport.² For each of them it holds many pleasures, but at the same time provides contrasting levels of participation and inclusion, not only in the sport, but the social aspects linked with it. All three have fond memories of playing sport as children but as adults their experiences of acceptance and ability to take part as much as they would like to, both within mainstream heterosexual sports clubs and gay sports clubs, vary dramatically. Both Peter and Matthew were keen sports participants whilst at school and were both reasonably successful in their chosen sports. Peter played tennis and swam for the school team and Matthew played competitive tennis and rugby for his school. Although they were both aware of their sexuality at an early age, they were able to mask this through their bodily performance and displays of sporting prowess. Subsequently, they have been able to continue participating in mainstream and gay sport without problems. Keith, on the other hand, enjoyed sport, particularly at primary school, but was unable to participate to the same extent as Matthew and Peter because his sporting ability was not considered as good and he was considered 'effeminate' in the eyes of his peers. This became more apparent during secondary school, where sporting participation became less and bullying increased. The availability of a gay tennis club provided the only opportunity for Keith to participate without fear of intimidation.

From the experiences of the three men above, and others in the study, it emerges that there is a social distinction between childhood 'play' which is more readily available (and to an extent gender neutral) and a crossover to an adult world of 'sport' which becomes formalized into a set of exclusive factors based on assumptions formed around masculine bodily performance in contrast to the feminine (Butler, 1993). Body-reflexive practice (Connell, 1995) becomes central in the creation of an understanding of the nature of sporting participation. In this particular case, Matthew, Keith and Peter all display enthusiasm for sport and are able to take part, but they experience different levels of inclusion. Their experiences provide the opportunity to assess whether liberal claims that more people are able to participate in sport is failing to address the continued maintenance of a specifically able-bodied, heterosexual male based agenda.

The simple pursuit of attempting to engage ones own body in a social physical activity becomes a series of body reflexive practices where one must negotiate and assess social understandings of appropriate bodily performance. A relatively simple individual activity such as a swim in the local pool can become a public trial of bodily presentation. For instance, it may present a challenge to accepted understandings of age or an open demonstration of sexuality. This is even before one attempts to actually swim. Similarly playing a team sport involves joining a club and negotiating a series of rituals involved in order to become a fully fledged member. However, it is not sufficient to state that one particular social group is more disadvantaged than another. What prevails in sport and in turn reflects wider social values is the presentation of a particular version of masculinity which is ascribed higher cultural capital and, especially in sporting practices, viewed as a 'natural'

form of behaviour. And although more prevalent among heterosexual men it is available to heterosexual women, lesbians and gay men alike.

This article focuses specifically upon the example of a gay tennis club in order to demonstrate how marginalized sports which seek to establish an identity in contrast to the established heterosexual male based system can in due course reinforce those same ideals. This in turn reflects the popular understanding of sporting practice that promotes an aggressive, power based, 'winner-takes-all' ethos. The problem is that the understanding of 'sport' and its associations with heterosexual male participation and competitiveness has become so entrenched in contemporary society that any new or alternative versions tend to reinforce or promote the same principles because they adopt a policy of attempting to emulate and compete with established organized sport. Also, I am not espousing a liberal agenda which would suggest that success has been achieved through the emergence of women's sport and gay sport in comparison to previous times. Trying to be 'one of the boys' is missing the point as it merely endorses the idea that this form is better than any other. Alternatives should be encouraged which provide a different perspective to established practices and at the same time challenge the assumed 'naturalness' of the hetero-gender order.

Exclusive sport

There is a continued understanding of sport within contemporary western society that it is an activity in which some are more 'able' to take part than others. Those who are able to participate most effectively adopt what I term an exclusive form of masculinity which draws upon traditional orthodox understandings of heterosexual masculinity.³ Because of this there are many men and women who, although willing to take part, are forced on to the sidelines. This in turn occurs in the context of wider social power relations and the continued dominance of heterosexual masculinity.

When I talk of sport I am thinking of traditional organized sport as opposed to more idiosyncratic leisure pastimes. Bourdieu (2001) talks of the sport we understand today as emerging from the 19th Century and the Victorian development of organized sport as an activity vital to society for the containment of masculine assertiveness and the development of 'character'. It was during this period that sport became a distinctive social institution and distinguished itself from the more individualistic or hedonistic play or games.

Sport still maintains a central position in contemporary western culture. It is a multi-billion pound industry, but at the same time a pursuit which holds significant meaning in the lives of individuals. As Hargreaves states;

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. And yet, precisely because, in other words, our understanding of sport is so impregnated with common sense – sport is, in one particular respect problematic. (Hargreaves, 1986, p. 1)

When Hargreaves wrote this, sport was problematic because of the lack of recognition of the power relations within it in comparison to other institutions which were seen as directly related to the state. Subsequently, much has been written on the role of sport in society⁴ but, for me, it is this 'common sense' understanding of sport as a 'natural' arena for men which provides the key to exploring identity, masculinity and the body. Sport is still considered to be a major part in *male* life and, subsequently, the decision to participate or not presents the individual male with various social obstacles to negotiate. Taking part in a sport is not only gender based but also governed by external factors – age, physical strength or shape, climate, location, class and economics. And the selection of a chosen sport involves an acceptance of social factors which are seen as part of the whole package. For instance, in rugby there is, along with the actual game which is based on aggressive physical contact, a need to take part in the pre and post match 'games' which tend to involve male based activities centred around training and drinking. Think of other sports, where playing the game is only one aspect of the whole process – for example; football, boxing, skiing or golf. I can 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 particular sport entailed. Not only was a particular type of body required to take part but there appeared to be an unwritten need to adopt the set social rituals associated with organized sport.

Historically, there has always been some form of 'sporting' physical activity, but only in the last century has it really started to take its present form.⁵ What is important, however, is the emergence of not only organized sport forms but the influence on the individual of the power relations expressed through gender and the body. The link between athleticism as a prescribed activity for men and the cultural understanding of leisure time has made sport a key factor in the construction of contemporary masculinity.

Sport has also maintained its position in general consciousness as being 'free-time' and as such pleasurable. Even the blatant commercialism and organization of contemporary sport and leisure time has not diminished its hegemonic status.⁶ Sport holds significance to men throughout their lives, whether as a participant, spectator or avowed non-participant. Knowledge of sport or lack of knowledge can provide an initial entry point for relationships with other men and choosing not to 'participate' in the discourse of male sport presents a challenge to the accepted social understandings of male identity. Relationships with other men are often formed through knowledge of particular sports and provide a means of negotiating cultural and class boundaries. Bourdieu (1977) has demonstrated how sport is a prime area for the acquisition of cultural capital, especially among men who use it as a means of gaining kudos. Bodily display to others provides evidence that one has been involved in some way with sport and becomes a significant aspect in the lives of the younger male. 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).

Maleness is frequently represented in association with being tough and

heroic. Segal (1990) describes the masculine ideal as that of 'tough guys' and a pursuit of heroism. She traces these ideals to what she describes as the late Victorian 'storm-troopers of a new aggressive masculinity'. In terms of being a male environment, sport is considered in many circles a euphemism for the battlefields, where men can channel their 'natural' aggressive instincts in a 'controlled' environment. It is this understanding of the 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 is hegemonic. Sporting prowess becomes a test of masculinity and even those who do not like sport have to negotiate, usually with difficulty, a way out. Participation in violent sports (especially those with a potential for injury) 'reinforces and naturalizes' the notion of masculinity that values physical dominance. Bourdieu (2001) notes the popularity of combat sports rests with them being visible signs of masculinity and a test of 'manly virtues'.

The importance of presenting a particular version of 'masculinity' is often essential. For example, White *et al.* (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. Media coverage also plays a considerable part acknowledging and making personalities out of those who prioritize physical force over skill.⁷ As such it has become acceptable for men to play sport in an intensely confrontational manner. The sports commentator and the spectator also play a part in this by condoning and expecting use of aggression in sporting contexts, particularly, for example during international contests.

Much of the research on sport has focused on the young male athlete (often professional) in mainstream organized sport.⁸ Messner (1990) argues that within this world the dominant masculinity promoted is an attitude in which the body is used as a weapon, a tool to achieve goals. Domination of the body and the bodies of others becomes important, particularly those of opponents, team-mates, women, ethnic minorities and gay men. But as the young male athlete is idealized in wider society and commands greater cultural capital there is the risk that this version of masculinity has a good deal of influence on those outside of mainstream sport. For instance, the expressions adopted by the social player in victory or defeat, such as clenching the fist or swearing.

Sport and sexuality

Particularly in sport, the physical assertion of one's masculinity is put to the test and for the gay sports player there can be a conflicting sense of identity. Segal (1990) suggests that 'the fine line between "true" masculinity (which is heterosexual) and its opposite (which is not) has been increasingly transgressed' by the gay community in its assimilation of dominant 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 the rise of

body-building and macho posturing and the growth of gay sports seeking to emulate heterosexual sports. The problem with this, as Segal points out and this paper supports, is that the valuation of this form of masculinity as a powerful identity risks being reinforced rather than challenged.

Sport powerfully interacts with discourses of sexuality. In recent years the successful sports star has been constantly promoted as the ideal form of male, for men to aspire to and women (and gay men) to attract (Whannel, 2002). So, not only as a predictor of gender identity, sport also provides an arena to learn about social values, such as, gender behaviour, competitiveness, physicality and sexuality. And, as Butler (1993) suggests, a place to learn the conflicting identities of masculinity and the subordinated femininity. Through sport, as Park (1987) notes, 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, i.e. women, disabled, homosexuals and the aged. This produces conflict at later stages when the young male sports player has to confront sports women or gay sportsmen.

There is a direct link between the role of sport in addressing gender values and individual understandings of one's body. Probyn (2000) provides an example of Ian Roberts, a successful Australian rugby player, who 'came out' in public. On the one hand Roberts is heralded by the gay community as a 'normal' and athletic man who happens to be gay. On the other hand, Probyn notes how Roberts' body was used as a cover for his gayness. For a time this was used as a means to hide possible shame of being gay. Physically he was large, white and 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. In his biography it is recorded many times, with a sense of adulation by his biographer, how Roberts beat up opponents on and off the pitch.⁹ His public 'coming out' is also presented as an even greater ordeal because of his physical presentation as a real, 'hard' man and, subsequently, having more to lose.

It is interesting to consider whether this understanding of shame can be said to derive from not being 'masculine' enough. In the case of Roberts, the negative slur of 'gayness' on his masculinity was overshadowed by his excessive outward 'masculine' appearance. This plays a large part in the construction of male identity where fear of not presenting a recognized masculine appearance is fraught with shame. Probyn relates shame to competitive drive, which in turn highlights the significance of sports relationship to the body. Sport provides an essential framework for demonstrating the way in which organized competition reflects wider social values and in its turn reflected upon the physical body in everyday activities. Probyn identifies the way in which shame and the body are incorporated:

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, p. 20)

Not only is there potential risk of shame for those taking part in the gay tennis club in terms of the wider implications of being a 'gay' sporting club as

opposed to the 'legitimate' heterosexual sports club, but there is the additional possibility of incurring shame through sporting performance. The notion of shame was a recurring theme in my interviews with both gay and straight men. Sporting participation was constantly fraught with the risk of encountering social situations which could be potentially embarrassing. Not only for oneself but to others in terms of the shame experienced in 'letting the side down'. The argument expressed here is that competition, or the social value placed upon it, is directly connected with sport and the body. In using the notion of shame, Probyn provides the example of how the individual is constantly directed towards contemplating the body, either consciously or unconsciously. Sport provides a key component in reinforcing the importance of physical/corporeal power relations. This can, in turn, be directed to gender relations and the continued acceptance of masculine assertiveness and aggressiveness being socially acceptable. In the case of Roberts, he is more readily accepted because his masculinity is not compromised by a presentation of 'gayness'. His physical and bodily displays are predominantly grounded in western, heterosexual understandings of maleness and the male body which in turn negates the shame to be derived from being gay. In this way, sport provides a useful setting for exploring masculine identity and understanding of the body.

The alternative challenge of gay sport

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, most gay sports clubs are based around competitive sport and adopt traditional sporting procedures. In recent years there has emerged more high profile, competitive gay sports clubs which have produced successful teams in mainstream leagues. For example, the London based rugby club, the Kings Cross Steelers and the swimming club, Out to Swim.

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 'normalize' and become part of mainstream sport. Although he acknowledges advances in the cause of L&G 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&G community sports, seen in the light of the socially transformative ambitions of some of the historical streams of the G&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, p. 225)

Pronger attempts to show how possibilities are limited by certain power systems. He addresses this by stating that homosexuality has traditionally been organized as negatively and prohibitively other to mainstream (heterosexual) sport. It has adopted a liberal approach 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. Subsequently, 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. Subsequently, gay sports 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 legitimization from traditional sports authorities. For example the gay tennis group in my sample follows rules of conduct laid down by the Lawn Tennis Association.

Although Pronger believes that gay sports has provided lesbian and gay people with 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.

Not so alternative sport: gay tennis club example

The club I observed meets regularly at an indoor venue in London. It was established in the mid nineties with the aim to provide a setting for gay men and women to play tennis in a safe non-threatening environment and without the fear of harassment from other heterosexual men (and women) and the subsequent prejudices inherent in traditional sports, not only to gays, but also women in general.

The club itself, however, although providing an alternative environment for gay and lesbian sports players, is based around traditionally established sporting codes. The social tennis played on club evenings is competitive and players are divided into categories according to individual playing standards. As such, there are four groups; red, blue, green and yellow with red the more advanced. The groups are similar to the ranking systems used by the Lawn Tennis Association. To an extent there is still the problem of how to address combating the 'school PE' selection process when arranging the games during the club sessions. Capital is still clearly to be gained through sporting prowess and this in turn creates (not always apparent) divisions. Probyn (2000) talks of the problems faced by the organizers of the Gay Games when they attempted to ignore the social aspects of competitiveness by focusing on the notion of 'personal best'. Similar problems occur at the club and may provide one reason for the decline in women players taking part.

An example some of these conflicting ideals can be seen in a recent observation at the club. A new member started attending regularly. He was a reasonable player and extremely competitive. He also had a great liking for Monica Seles, to the extent that he had modelled his style of play on hers (double fisted forehand and back-hand and accompanying grunt). The new

player was immediately given the nickname 'Monica' to the extent that most people at the club used this name when either addressing him or referring to him.¹⁰ The association with the real Monica Seles developed to such an extent that he started to wear similar tennis outfits to her during the club sessions. This in turn caused some consternation amongst some of the other members. Some complained that it made a mockery of the club's efforts to be a 'legitimate' sporting club, whilst others complained that it was not 'manly' or merely looked silly. Only after discussion by the committee was the original policy of the club remembered. That being the provision of an alternative space for men and women to play tennis free from the prejudice found in traditional heterosexual sports clubs. To make an issue out of a player wearing a particular form of clothing and enforce some form of sanction was, in effect, to reinforce some of the oppressive codes found in other clubs. As such, 'Monica' was allowed to continue playing in the way that he wanted.

The levels of competitiveness found in the gay tennis club are also similar to those found in 'straight' tennis clubs.¹¹ The nature of the structure of social play in the clubs where the tennis is based around competitive sets creates a focus on playing ability. Social identity within the club is based mainly on playing performance and capital is gained from demonstrating this to others. In the mainstream 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. Here, greater status was awarded to the men who played in the first or 'A' team. The lower men's teams followed, with the women's and junior teams trailing behind. This was evident in general conversations where greater respect was given to the achievement of the men's teams and priority was given to court allocation. On many occasions I noticed the sense of embarrassment and unease presented by a player who considered him or herself to be of a lesser standard than their playing partner. This was evident in the frequent pre and post game comments, such as 'I hope I don't let you down' or 'I'm sorry I didn't give you a proper game'.

The divisions were not solely based on gender, but more so on playing performance. Those considered to possess the greater sporting prowess were men (and a few women) who not only possessed the sporting ability but were able to be physical, aggressive and assertive on court. The gay tennis club was set up to escape the prejudices found in many straight clubs where heterosexual masculine aggressiveness is accepted. However, in order to combat the varying playing abilities members were awarded categories of playing standard. In effect this has led to a similar 'pecking order' with those in the red category being accorded greater status within the club. This has been further advanced by more competitive play in singles ladders and the affiliation to the GLTA and participation in organized tournaments and international player rankings.¹² Individual performance on the court has become the main focus with greater status to be gained from success on court. This has led to the principle aims of an 'alternative' form of sports club being overshadowed. Subsequently, in terms of sporting participation, the gay

tennis club has become more or less a version of mainstream heterosexual clubs.

Ironically and in contrast to the competitive focus, individual interviews with men from the gay club revealed that the main reason for initially joining was the social element and the chance to meet other gay people with similar interests. Many of the men also said that they preferred to just hit the ball to one another rather than play a competitive game. The example highlights the problems in establishing a group based on one uniting factor. In this case being gay does not automatically assume a united set of values. 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.

Promoting change

Strategies need to be developed to find ways in which groups of individuals can take part in physical, sporting activity without having to operate in the heavily value laden masculine arena of traditional sport with all its restrictions and discrimination. In terms of sport, the lesbian and gay movement has been successful in making sport more accessible to gay men and women, but at the same time it has done little to challenge the underlying framework of society which still discriminates against various sections of the community. The radical potential within the lesbian and gay community is being overlooked. As Pronger rightly suggests:

The ethical promise of homosexuality comes from its power to transgress oppressive, violent norms of masculinity, refiguring intermale desire as an expression of love. The gay embrace of the libidinal logic of domination in sport defuses this positive ethical promise by incorporating homosexual desire within the mainstream construction of sporting desire. (Pronger, 2000, p. 241)

The positive potential to be found in oppressed groups such as gays and the women's movement in general needs to be harnessed in ways which promote difference. By challenging the orthodox framework we may be able to introduce alternative ideas based on acceptance and accommodating difference. Our understanding of sport does not necessarily have to be based 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. 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 where the potential is to be found. It is particularly among sections of the community who are excluded that alternatives can be developed. Creative ways to enjoy the physical thrill of sport need not be solely based on orthodox practices.

Further research needs to be conducted which can establish whether there are forms of competition which can escape the problems discussed above or whether the way 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 'alternative' forms of play. If these become popular, they have the opportunity to challenge the established framework, not only in relation to sport but to established discriminatory practices. The liberal agenda of 'personal best' need not have to be located within a framework where judging one's personal best means comparing it to another and adopting exclusive masculine practices. This potential is shared by Bourdieu when he calls for a much needed challenge to the 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, p. 123)

Change does not necessarily occur overnight, but it does not mean that it cannot happen at all. Those involved within the leisure industry have many opportunities to initiate change. Many are involved with teaching and sport promotion and have access to grass roots level practice. It is here that ideas can be introduced and tested. We need to determine whether there are forms of competition which are more inclusive and, if not, test run other ideas which incorporate physical expression without the risk of humiliation or shame. There are many forms of sport and play which could be adapted to fit these criteria. Listening to those who take part, or those who would like to, at whatever level is important:

Because [sport] is not so important . . . It's not as important as er 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. (Keith 46)

Notes

1. The quotes and material, which forms the basis of this paper, are taken from research conducted as part of a PhD investigation into masculinities and bodily practices. The research consists of interviews and observations conducted at several sports clubs based in the south-east of England.
2. The men interviewed were members of a gay and lesbian tennis club based in London and a works based sports club in south-east England. Tennis was chosen as a research site for a number of reasons. I had wanted to investigate a sport which was available, in theory, to both men and women and a variety of age ranges. I also had prior knowledge of both clubs which made entering the site for research practices easier.

Previous experience of playing tennis also meant that I had sufficient 'playing' capital to be accepted into clubs without difficulty. Most of the men who played tennis at the works based sports club also took part in other sports, particularly football and cricket. In addition to the interviews, I also conducted observations at other tennis clubs and, more specifically, a large private health club in Kent.

3. See, for example, Connell, 1995, 2000; Hearn and Morgan, 1990; Segal, 1990; Holland *et al.*, 1998.
4. For example: Maguire, 1993; Horne *et al.*, 1993; McKay *et al.*, 2000.
5. For example: Haley, 1978; Brailsford, 1969.
6. This view is supported by Hargreaves (1986, 1993) and Clarke and Critcher (1985). See also Featherstone, 1991.
7. See, for example: Whannel 1992, 2002; Craig, 1992; Dworkin *et al.* and Gray and Moore – both in McKay *et al.* 2000.
8. For example: Messner, 1990, 1992; Klein, 2000; White *et al.*, 1995.
9. See Ian Robert's biography, 'Finding Out' by Paul Freeman (1997).
10. In the gay tennis club there was often the association with ladies tennis which included many of the players being given or adopting nicknames of players with similar styles. There were a few Chris Everts and Sue Barkers and more recently Kournikovas and Williams. Pronger (1990) talks of the irony found among gay men in their awareness of being gay in a straight world and has noted how gay sport actions on the field emulate the orthodox whereas outside of the sports arena 'campness' and irony prevail.
11. The term 'straight' tennis club is used as a generalization for traditional sports clubs which are based on heterosexual practices. It is in contrast to the 'gay' clubs, which have been set up directly as a result of a need to provide a group which does not hold a taken for granted assumption of sexuality. This does not imply that all those who take part in 'straight' clubs are necessarily heterosexual. Many of the gay respondents in the research also played or had played in straight clubs.
12. The Gay and Lesbian Tennis Alliance (GLTA) formed in 1991 'to provide rules and standards in addition to player rankings for all gay and lesbian tennis tournaments'. It claims to be one of the fastest growing gay sport organizations with over 4000 participants. Its declared status is that of a non-political and non-profit making organization.

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