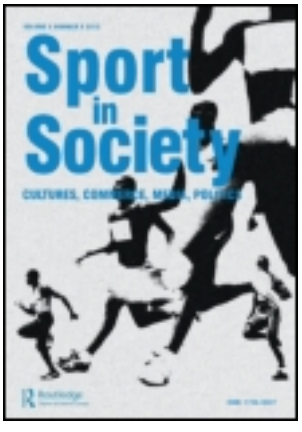

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Sports and masculinity†

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Sports and masculinity[†]

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Feminist scholarship has had a profound impact upon the study of sports. It has forced us to recognize the gendered nature of these activities and to question the traditional exclusion and marginalization of most females from sports. It has reinforced and extended the social history insight that modern sport is not the essential, universal historical practice that it was once thought to be, but a family of related activities developed under the specific conditions of rapidly industrializing Europe and spread by immigration, emulation and imperialism. We now understand sports as originating as 'male practices', developed by males for males, without the needs and experiences of females taken into account in any way, so that every generation of girls and women has had to fight to write themselves into this history. Often overlooked in the feminist struggle for opportunities and the politics of gender equity has been the effect of sports upon men. Yet sports have a profound effect upon men, our sense of 'masculinity', our relationships with other men (as well as with women) and our place in societies, whether we are players, spectators or entirely ignorant of sports. It took me a long time to recognize this and the special privilege that sports conferred upon me, far longer than it took to acknowledge the justice in feminist campaigns for fair and equitable opportunities and resources. This article was my very first attempt to come to terms with these issues. It was written for a collection on masculinities, edited by Michael Kaufman, a pioneering scholar and activist on issues of men, gender and power. In 1990, I joined with Kaufman and other men to form the White Ribbon Society to educate men about our responsibility to help end the violence against women.

Introduction

'Ideology is like B.O.', a wag once said. 'You never smell your own'. That is certainly true for men in sports. Most of us grew up playing sports, dreaming about starring in them and making lifelong friends through them. Many of us still play sports as adults, and we follow them endlessly, admiring and analysing the performances of our favourites, discussing them with friends and workmates in the daily rituals of coffee and pub, scheduling our lives around the calendar of the major sports events. Some of us actively encourage our children in sports, driving them to the rink or park, helping with coaching and officiating. Yet men have rarely subjected our engagement in sports to the systematic questioning we focus on work, life and love, and other forms of cultural expression – literature and the visual and performing arts. Because they are so engrossing and so familiar, we assume that they have always been played, and that they have been unaffected by history or politics. Even when an Olympic boycott forces us to admit some connection between the structures and conflicts of a society and its sports, our personal experience leads us to protest that the activity itself is innocent of partisanship or prejudice and beneficial to all. Yet an outpouring of feminist scholarship now compels us to revise the popular image and explore the ways in which men

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have created sports to celebrate and buttress patriarchal (and class) power. Such an examination is not without its terrors, for it requires us to question radically something that many of us have found to be joyous and validating. But it is essential if we are to understand fully what it means 'to be a man' and to promote human liberation.

The purpose of this article is to contribute to this necessary analysis by synthesizing the revisionist scholarship and then discussing its implications for men. I argue that the games we play were created by males for males without taking the needs and experiences of females into account in any way. I also argue that rather than being an 'innocent' pastime, modern sports reinforce the sexual division of labour, thereby perpetuating the great inequality between the sexes and contributing to the exploitation and repression of both males and females. I do not advocate the abolition of sports, for they can strengthen people of both sexes in beneficial, exhilarating ways. But I contend that they should be transformed, and to this end, I suggest some practical steps.

The 'naturalness' of sports

My starting point is the insight of social history that sports as we know them today are not the universal, transhistorical physical activity they are commonly thought to be, played in much the same way by all peoples in all periods of human history. They are, rather, a group of activities developed under the specific social conditions of rapidly industrializing nineteenth-century Britain and spread to the rest of the world through emigration, emulation and imperialism. Although modern sports are popularly equated to the athletic events of the ancient Olympic Games, scholars now argue that the differences between the Olympic contests of antiquity and those of our own era significantly outweigh the similarities and that we must seek to understand each of these competitions in its own terms.[1]

The classical games also celebrated class and patriarchal power, but few of us would have recognized in them what we call sport. By modern standards, they were extremely violent. The combative events, which were the most popular spectacles, were conducted with little regard for safety or fairness. There were no weight categories to equalize strength and size, no rounds and no ring. Bouts were essentially fights to the finish, which is not surprising when you consider that these competitions began as preparations for war. Victory alone brought glory; defeat brought undying shame. Although the Greeks had the technology to measure records in the running, jumping and throwing events, they rarely did so: performance for itself – pursuing the personal best despite one's placing – was meaningless to them. In fact, champions tried to intimidate their opponents so that they would withdraw and the victor could boast that he had won without having to compete. There were no team events, because competitors did not want to share the glory of victory. No competitor would have congratulated an opponent for a fairly fought or outstanding triumph. Today's handshake would have seemed an act of cowardice to them.[2] Nor were those fiercely competitive games common to all cultures living along the Mediterranean in that period. In fact, anthropologists have established that only warlike peoples have used their leisure for combative events.[3]

Sports as 'male practice'

Armed with this insight about the social specificity of the various forms of physical activity, we can begin to take a closer look at our own. Pierre de Coubertin did not revive the Olympics, as he liked to claim: he appropriated and recast the symbols of the ancient games for his own purpose, which was to combat the decadence and militarism of *fin-de-siècle*

Europe by inculcating in young men the qualities he admired in English rugby and cricket.[4] These sports had their origins in the rural folk games of the late middle ages. In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, they were fashioned into the first modern sports – characterized by standard rules, a bureaucratic structure, the overemphasis on setting records and the concept of fair play – by middle- and upper-class males in the increasingly bourgeois institutions of the public school, the university and the private club.[5] Innovators, organizers and creative publicists like Coubertin consciously regarded sports as educational, preparing boys and young men for careers in business, government, colonial administration and the military by instilling physical and mental toughness, obedience to authority and loyalty to the 'team'.[6] When working-class males began to take them up, some groups refused to accommodate them: at the Royal Henley Regatta, for example, working-class oarsmen were excluded by definition until 1933.[7] Most groups, however, eventually adopted the strategy of 'rational recreation', incorporating works as players and spectators, under strict middle-class leadership, as a means of fostering respect for the established order and reducing class tensions.[8] In the sports contested in Coubertin's Olympics, the tactic most frequently employed to regulate class relations was the amateur code. As sociologist Richard Gruneau has written, sports 'mobilize middle class bias' to this day.[9]

Education or socialization through sport was consciously understood to be 'masculinizing'. At the outset of Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the romanticization of the all-male Rugby School under Thomas Arnold, Squire Brown ponders what advice to give his son who is departing for Rugby:

> Shall I tell him to mind his work, and say he's sent to school to make himself a good scholar? Well, but he isn't sent to school for that – at any rate, not for that mainly. I don't care a straw for Greek particles, or the digamma; no more does his mother. What is he sent to school for? Well, partly because he wanted so to go. If he'll only turn out a brave, helpful, truthtelling Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian, that's all I want.[10]

Then in the course of six years of rugby, cricket, cross-country running and impromptu fist fighting, young Brown acquires courage and stamina, ingenuity, close friendships and leadership, attributes traditionally associated with maleness by the dominant class. Hughes's bestseller persuaded schoolmasters and youth leaders throughout the English-speaking world to encourage sports as a 'toughener' for their male charges and inspired Coubertin to develop the ideology of the modern Olympics. Working-class men also imbued sports with notions of masculinity.[11] The most popular nineteenth-century games and contests – football, hockey, lacrosse, track and field and boxing – were termed 'the manly sports'. Although they have now lost the epithet, they continue to be encouraged for the same reason.

To be sure, there have been differences in the values emphasized by sports and in the approaches different participants may take to single sport. Soccer and rugby have always encouraged more spontaneous creativity than North American football. The Montreal Canadians have never practised the 'beat-'em-in-the-alley' tactics of their traditional rivals, the Toronto Maple Leafs. These differences should be read in part as contributions to a continuing debate about which aspects of masculinity are most attractive. When Charles Dickens championed boxing in the pages of *The Pickwick Papers* against the contemporary prohibition, he was not endorsing brutality, but a more scientific, humane and democratic method for men to settle their disputes than the duel.[12] When Wayne Gretzky skated away from a fight in a play-off game several years ago, he made it clear that he was rejecting the dominant code of 'masculinity' in North American hockey – which emphasizes defending your 'honor' by dropping you stick and gloves to fight – in favour of the intelligence of staying out of the penalty box.[13] The frequent vehemence of

these debates only serves to underline the importance of sports as signifiers of 'masculinity'.

Sports as male preserves

The men who developed and promoted sports in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were careful to ensure that only males were masculinized in this way. They kept sports as male preserves by actively discouraging females from participating. They denied them adequate facilities and programmes, ridiculed their attempts and threatened them with the spectre of ill health and 'race suicide'. Male doctors and physical educators argued that humans had only a finite quantity of energy, which in the case of women was needed for reproduction, an energy drain 'which would make the stroke oar of the University crew falter'.[14] If women used up their energy in vigorous athletic activity, went the argument, they would not only be undermining their own health, but the future of the white race. Working-class men generally shared these prejudices and contributed to the exclusionary practices. Thus, sports helped strengthen and extend male bonds between classes. Many girls and women were also deterred from taking part in sports by economic and social conditions – long hours of domestic labour, differential and generally less adequate diets and restrictive dress.[15]

Women persisted, however. During the 1920s and the 1970s especially, girls and women engaged in competitive sports in growing numbers. But males have contributed to excluding them from their own games and contests, requiring them to play on women's teams with inferior resources.[16] Despite the examples from agriculture, industry and sports of women performing arduous 'men's tasks', many persist in the belief that a distinct female biology prevents women from competing in the male realm. (The argument falsely assumes that all men are the same in size, strength and fitness, and that all women are uniformly inferior. In reality, many so blithely ignore, there is a tremendous range in male and female size, strength, fitness and so on. For most of the population, including trained athletes, those ranges overlap.)[17] Organizers have also tried to confine females to those sports believed to enhance traditional 'femininity', such as swimming, tennis and gymnastics, and to devise 'girl's rules' to discourage the ambitious and aggressive play expected of boys and men.[18] Women athletes have also faced inordinate pressure to conform to the heterosexual expectations of most men.[19]

Sports as patriarchal ideology

One legacy of this pattern of development is the well-known inequalities that continue to plague females seeking sporting opportunities and careers. In North America, despite a decade of 'progress', males still have more than twice the opportunities and public resources available for sport. There is little evidence that the men who control sport are genuinely committed to redressing the balance. In the Olympic Games, there are still more than twice as many events for men as for women.[20] But if we were to conclude that the problem is simply one of allocation, we would be missing the most important insight of the feminist critique. The effect of sports is also to perpetuate patriarchy by reinforcing the sexual division of labour. By giving males exciting opportunities, preaching that the qualities they learn from them are 'masculine' and preventing girls and women from learning in the same situations, sports confirm the prejudice that males are a breed apart. By encouraging us to spend our most creative and engrossing moments as children and our favourite forms of recreation as adults in the company of other males, they condition us to

trust each other much more than women. By publicly celebrating the dramatic achievements of the best male, which marginalizes females as cheerleaders and spectators, they validate the male claim to the most important positions in society. Abby Hoffman, a four-time Canadian Olympian and now Director-General of Sport Canada, has written:

> The overall place of women in the labor force is in the lower-paying and sedentary occupations. There are of course many reasons for this, but certainly arguments about the physical inferiority of women learned and repeated through sport help buttress a system where women become stenographers, typist, retail salespersons, telephone operator, etc., and men become truck drivers, carpenters, labourers, construction workers, and workers in a host of manual trades which involve a modicum of physical capacity.[21]

Sports contribute to the underdevelopment of the female majority of the population and the undervaluation of those traditionally 'feminine' skills of nurturing and emotional maintenance essential to human survival and growth.

I believe these relationships are understood by sportsmen as well. In nineteenth-century Canada and the USA, men introduced sports to public-school boys and the adolescent members of organizations such as the YMCA to combat the feminization of teaching.[22] British sociologists Kevin Sheard and Eric Dunning have suggested a direct relationship between the development of the boorish, sexist subculture of rugby – the public moonings, songs of male sexual conquest of women and exaggerated drinking – and first-wave feminism:

> The historical conjuncture represented by the simultaneous rise of rugby football and the suffragette movement within the upper and middle classes may have been of some significance with respect to the emergence of the specific pattern of socially tolerated taboo breaking. For women were increasingly becoming a threat to men, and men responded by developing rugby football as a male preserve in which they could bolster up their threatened masculinity and at the same time mock, objectify, and vilify women, the principal source of the threat.[23]

We are witnessing a similar conjuncture today. In Toronto, where there is a strong women's movement, the city fathers have just given final approval to a new domed stadium, to be built on prime public land and subsidized by municipal and provincial grants. The architect calls it 'a secular cathedral'. I suggest it be called a 'men's cultural centre'. It is being developed by an almost exclusively male board of a provincial crown corporation. Its primary tenants will be the local franchises of the commercial baseball and football cartels, the Blue Jays and the Argonauts, which stage male team games for largely male audiences. The other major beneficiaries will be the public and private media corporations, which sell the predominantly male audiences to the sponsoring advertisers.[24] There is no doubt the stadium is popular, among both men and women. It will be a great improvement over the existing stadium, increasing the pleasure derived from watching gifted athletes. But at the ideological level, especially in the absence of comparable opportunities for female athletes, coaches, managers and sports impresarios, it will celebrate male privilege, displaying male prowess while leaving the gendered nature of sport unchallenged. Women as well as men are capable of difficult, dramatic and pleasing feats of grace, agility, strength and teamwork, but we will never know this from this stadium. They will be either rendered invisible or exploited as sex objects (cheerleaders) along the sidelines. Males who identify with the athletes on the field are also basking in the privilege that sports bring them and in the 'symbolic annihilation'[25] of women. If a city were to devote 25 acres of prime downtown real estate and at least US$85 million of public funds to a stadium in which only Anglo-Saxons could play, there would be howls of protest, but in the matter of sex, most of us take such favouritism for granted. Needless to

say, there are other factors at work – in Toronto's case, the deal was initiated by land developers and the holding company of the brewery that owns the baseball team – but it is more than a coincidence that during the period of second-wave feminism, male political leaders and business and media executives have worked hard to place the male-only sports on a more commodious and visible stage, while women's crisis centres go underfunded. The stadium will even look like a men's cultural centre. Standing at the foot of the world's tallest free-standing telecommunications tower, it will be a gigantic Klaes Oldenberg-like sculpture of the male genitals.

Men's fears

Australian social biologist Ken Dyer has shown that women's records in the measurable sports like track and field and swimming are now being broken significantly faster than men's records in the same events and has concluded that lack of opportunity – not biology – is the primary reason why female performances have always lagged behind those of males. Projecting his findings into the future, he suggests that if opportunities for women can be equalized, in most sports the best female will eventually be able to compete on a par with the best males.[26] Imagine a woman winning the open 100 metres at the Olympics or playing in the National Hockey League! Performances once considered impossible are now common in virtually every sport, but most men balk at Dyer's suggestion. It is not only that they do not believe it could happen, but also that it frightens them. They fear that the character of sport would change if women played with men. 'You have to play softer with women', a softball official testified to the Ontario Human Rights Commission to explain why he felt integrated competition, even when the female players had been chosen for their ability, would reduce the satisfaction for males.[27] But although it is unspoken, I believe they also fear the profound social and psychological changes that might result if women were understood to be fully competent in the special domain of men. In Ontario, the 500,000-male-strong Ontario Hockey Association (OHA) had refused to allow a 13-year-old girl to play on one of its teams, although she won a place on the team in a competitive tryout. The OHA has gone to court three times in an effort to stop her, and it continues to block her participation while the matter will be heard one more time by the Ontario Human Rights Commission.[28] Is one 13-year-old female player, or even 200 female players, going to topple the male hockey leadership or drastically alter the values of this century-old sport? Hardly. There must be something deeper.

In part, what they fear is the disorientation of the male psyche. As Nancy Chodorow has argued in *The Reproduction of Mothering*,[29] boys develop their identity by differentiating themselves from their mothers. Since most child-rearing is done by women, the primary interaction for young males is with women, with the result that they have great difficulty in identifying with their fathers. So, Chodorow says, in developing a 'masculine' identity, males are essentially learning to differentiate themselves from their mothers and from women in general. They rehearse and strengthen this 'positional' masculinity in activities that accentuate male–female differences and stigmatize those characteristics generally associated with women. Although Chodorow does not discuss sports, it is clear that they were developed and serve that very purpose in the industrial capitalist societies with which we are most familiar. It was certainly my experience growing up in Toronto in the 1940s and 1950s. I played sports endlessly as a child. I gobbled up the rules, skills, strategies and lore, none of which seemed to interest my mother, her friends or the girls of my own age on the street. Certainly, we rarely included them. I also learned to accept (rather than question) physical pain, to deny anxiety and anger, and to be aggressive in

ways that were clearly valued as 'manly'. I realize now that I gained an enormous sense of my own power when I could respond to challenges in this way, for it meant I was not 'like a girl'. In fact, sometimes I teased my mother and sister to tears to confirm that I had succeeded in being different from them. Yet it shows how shaky such positional identity can be, because when I put myself into the emotional state I remember from that period, I realize that I would have been devastated if a girl had played on any of the teams I was so proud to belong to. It would have proclaimed to the world that I was inadequate. At the deepest psychological levels, the blurring of sex roles undermines not only the male-privileging sexual division of labour, but also the very process by which males raised within sexuality segregated sports have gained personal confidence and social validation.

There are other possible disruptions as well. Men also fear the loss of traditional nurturing that might result if women learned through sports (and other predominantly male activities) to be as hard and unyielding as males. This helps explain why so many men are still determined to keep sport as a male sanctuary and why in the quintessentially masculine sport of boxing many jurisdictions still prohibit women from competing at all, even against other women. It also helps us understand the psychological weight of the pressure on female athletes to be 'feminine'. To be sure, many women share these fears and support the status quo. As Dorothy Dinnerstein points out, males and females actively collaborate to maintain the existing gender arrangements: 'nostalgia for the familiar is a feeling that has … been mobilized in opposition to social change'.[30] But the price of such collaboration is high.

A men's problem

Most observers consider the inequalities and power dynamics I have described to be a 'women's problem', but I would argue that the patriarchal nature of modern sports has harmed men, too. By encouraging and reinforcing a positional identity, sports have led us to limit our options as humans, to deny feelings and to disparage – and therefore not to learn – the interpersonal skills associated with females. By teaching us a form of strength and assertiveness disconnected from emotional understanding and the skills of emotional support, they have encouraged us to ignore our own inner feelings and those of loved others. Through sports, men learn to cooperate with, care for and love other men in a myriad of rewarding ways, but they rarely learn to be intimate with each other or emotionally honest. On the contrary, the only way many of us express fondness for other men is by teasing or mock fighting (the private version of what has become a public form of tribute – the roast). Anything more openly affectionate would be suspect.

Chodorow and Dinnerstein argue that the development of positional identity has also contributed to the process by which males value abstract achievement – which in sport has meant victory and records. Because they elevate external goals over intrinsic ones, sports have encouraged those who become athletes to treat their bodies as instruments and to submit to physical and psychological injury and to inflict it on others. The active repression of pain is an everyday part of the sports world: 'no pain, no gain' is a common slogan, but it has ruined the careers of countless athletes and left many permanently crippled. There are also psychological scars: the constant emphasis on external goals such as winning and being chosen for an international team is highly pathological and leaves many forever stunted and unable to define their own goals. At the same time, sports label those who cannot meet the ever higher standards of performance expected of athletes as 'failures'.[31]

I am particularly concerned about the effect of sports on our relations with other men. Australian sociologist Bob Connell suggests that sports instruct men in two aspects of

power: the development of force ('the irresistible occupation of space') and skill ('the ability to operate on space of the objects in it, including other humans').[32] The rules of football (all codes), basketball, boxing, hockey and other sports where territorial control is important almost literally conform to this definition; they encourage athletes to treat each other as enemies to be intimidated and brutalized, when in reality they are co-players without whom the rewards of playing cannot be obtained. This is the other side of 'that sweet spot in time', or 'walking tall', the exhilaration of doping it right in sport. Thomas Tutko, the noted American sports psychologist, likes to say that 'to be a champion, you have to be the meanest Son-of-a-Bitch in the valley'.[33] Certainly, I felt this when I was a successful middle-distance runner. I developed the sense that I owned every race, and I instinctively resented – without ever really thinking about it – any attempt by other runners to try for the lead. 'How dare they!' I would hear my inner-self say, as I surged to beat back their challenge. I also revelled in the psychological warfare that is endemic in sports and loved to probe a competitor's personality and to devise tactics to intimidate him. But as productive as aggressiveness and competitiveness were when it came to winning races, they are enormous barriers to the development and maintenance of close relationships. I have spent the past 20 years trying to bring them under control. Other athletes I know say the same.

Toward more humane sporting practices

There are no magic solutions to the problems I have described. They are deeply rooted in long-established patterns of child-rearing and human interaction, and are perpetuated by powerful economic and political interests. We cannot dismiss or abolish sports, as some on the left have suggested, nor should we want to. They can help all humans acquire self-mastery in pleasurable, healthy and popular skills and rituals. Such opportunities are particularly important in societies like our own where work is more and more automated and alienating. Sports can also provide easily understood popular dramas in ways that strengthen the sense of community and confirm some of the most widely shared human values. Hockey may be a puberty rite for Canadian boys, but it is also a celebration of the creativity, energy and élan of the human spirit in the depths of winter, the season of death. The contradictions of modern sports can sometimes undermine the very privilege they enshrine. In their claim to be democratic, sports organizations provide the arguments – though less frequently opportunities – for the disadvantaged to demonstrate their right to a better future. In the Olympic Games, for example, the universalist aspirations of the ruling International Olympic Committee (IOC) have paved the way for athletes from the poorest and smallest national communities to compete, even when they have had little chance at medals. In turn, the overwhelming presence of the Third World nations – there are now 161 national Olympic committees – has persuaded the elitist IOC, which is dominated by Western European countries, to support the international struggle against apartheid and racism and to begin a programme of technical assistance to the have-not nations.

The liberation of sports from patriarchal (and class and Western) structures of domination will be a long and complex process. It will have to be undertaken in conjunction with similar efforts in other areas of everyday life. The outcome – how humans will play sports in a more egalitarian, less oppressive age – will largely depend upon those broader struggles, because as we have seen forms of physical activity, including sport, are determined by history. But that should not dissuade us.

We can start by actively questioning the pervasive masculinist bias in the sports world. The language is rife with words that unconsciously reinforce the male preserve: 'jock', the

popular term for athlete; 'tomboy' to describe any bright, active girl who likes physical activity and is good at sports; 'suck' and 'sissy' to condemn anyone who betrays anxiety or fear – all remind us that sports were designated to harden males. We should challenge those words the way the civil rights movement did with 'nigger' and 'boy' and the women's movement has done with 'mankind' and 'girl'. We need to develop substitutes (such as 'athlete' for 'jock') and then campaign to remove the offending terms from use. In some cases, it will be necessary to change the practices as well. Although we will always admire physical courage, we do ourselves a disservice if we continue uncritically to condemn the expression of pain and uneasiness that is usually associated with being a 'sissy'.

We should challenge the gross sexism of that inner sanctuary of patriarchy, the locker and shower room. Allen Sack, an American sociologist who played on the 1966 Notre Dame championship football team, had said that in many ways football is a training ground for rape. In the game, players learn to control the field and to dominate other players, and in the dressing room, they endlessly fantasize and celebrate the male sexual conquest of women.[34] It takes a different kind of courage to contest the explicit, omnipresent misogyny of the locker room. Much of what is said is often exuberantly rich in humour. Yet it contributes to our own repression, as well as to the exploitation of women. If you contest it, you will get anger and denial – 'it's just a joke; I'm not a chauvinist!' – but it does cause a person to reconsider.

We can also help redefine the rules and values of sports to make them more inviting to everybody. Physical educators, coaches and community groups of both sexes have amended rules to make games safer and more genuinely educational. In Canada, parents, players, teachers and governmental leaders have contributed to the effort to eliminate the gratuitous violence of ice hockey. In my neighbourhood, a community softball league, to reduce collisions between players, has added a second first base (immediately adjacent to the original base, but in foul territory) and has eliminated the necessity of tagging the runner at home. These changes often require trade-offs – I was sorry to see the softballers discourage the slide – but by doing so they subtly reduced the premium on physical dominance. (When I was nine, I was taught to throw a cross-body block at second, third and home. 'There's $10 on every bag', our coach would tell us, 'and if you don't get it, he will'.) These experiments, especially when they result from open discussion about the purpose of sports, should be encouraged. To opponents who appeal to 'tradition', we can point out that the rules of games have been continually changed for other reasons, so why not make them more humane?

We should also struggle to change the tendency to see sports as battles. Competitions are viewed as zero-sum contests, and athletes are encouraged to treat each other as enemies. Military metaphors abound: quarterbacks 'throw the long bomb'; teams 'whip', 'punish', 'roll over' and 'savage' each other. This imagery is hardly coincidental: in many societies competitive physical activity has been closely associated with military training. But instead, I suggest we consider sports to be glorious improvisations, dialectical play or collective theatre where athletes are part antagonist, part partner. We can still applaud the winner, but not at the expense of other members of the cast. Such alternative descriptions fit the private experiences of many athletes. I realize now that while I defined them as combats, some of my best races came when other runners 'helped with the work' of pace-setting, and challenged me with novel tactics. In the most intrinsically rewarding races, this reciprocal process of 'let me lead the way' went on and on and invariably all of us were urged on to outstanding performances. Many other athletes have made the same point. Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics, one of the greatest basketball players of all time, has written:

> Every so often a Celtic game would heat up so that it became more than a physical or even a mental game, and would be magical. That feeling is difficult to describe, and I certainly never talked about it when I was playing. When it happened I could feel my play rise to a new level. That feeling would surround not only me, and the other Celtics, but also the players on the other team, and even the referees. To me, the key was that both teams had to be playing at their peaks, and they had to be competitive. The Celtics could not do it alone.
>
> Sometimes the feeling would last all the way to the end of the game, and when that happened I never cared who won. I can honestly say that those few times were the only ones when I did not care. I don't mean that I was a good sport about it – I did not care who had won. If we lost, I'd still be as free as a sky hawk. But I had to keep quiet about it.[35]

If confident champions have 'to keep quiet', what about the less gifted? We should strive to help all athletes understand their experiences this way.

There are powerful forces that structure games as contests and fuel the tremendous exhilaration of triumph. In North America, the mass media and governments have monopolized the interpretation of athletic performance, and the participants' voice has been distorted, if not silence. But other cultural performers – painters, dancers, actors, filmmakers – and their audiences have begun to contest the corporate media's interpretation of their work, and sportspersons could well learn from their example. A sports culture that de-emphasized winning in favour of exploring artistry and skill and the creative interaction of 'rival' athletes would be much less repressive.

Finally, we should actively support those feminists who are struggling to combat sexism and inequality in sports. In this, we should take our lead from advocacy groups, like the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport (the 'and sport' rather than 'in sport' was a conscious recognition that it will not be enough just to increase the number of opportunities), that represent females on the front lines of these issues and have developed strategies and tactics from the experience. Here, too, the most useful work we can do will be with men. It will be necessary to assure male who resist integration on the basis of ability that we are strong enough to survive an 'invasion' of outstanding female athletes. We can help defend affirmative action and hiring programmes planned to help sportswomen overcome the historic inequalities they face; we can support protections for the existing all-female programmes and the scarce resources and opportunities they enjoy. The most difficult task will be to persuade other men that sex-divided sports are not only a 'women's problem', but in dialectical interaction, harm us as well. Once that is understood, the essential redesigning of sports can really begin.

Notes

1. Elias, 'Genesis of Sport'.
2. Finlay and Pleket, *Olympic Games*; Young, *Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics.*
3. Sipes, 'War, Sports, and Aggression'.
4. MacAloon, *This Great Symbol.*
5. Cunningham, *Leisure in Industrial Revolution*; Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*; Guttman, *From Ritual to Record.*
6. Mangan, *Athleticism in Victorian Public School.*
7. Allison, 'Batsman and Bowler'.
8. Bailey, *Leisure and Class*; Mott, 'One Solution to Urban Crisis'.
9. Gruneau, *Class, Sports and Social Development*, 91–135.
10. Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, 60–1.
11. See, for example, Palmer, *Cultural in Conflict*, 35–70.
12. Marlow, 'Popular Culture, Pugilism, and Pickwick'.
13. Kidd, 'Skating Away from Fight'.

14. Atkinson, 'Fitness, Feminism and Schooling', 103. The quotation is from London medical professor Henry Maudsley.
15. Ibid. 92–133; Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds.*
16. Hall and Richardson, *Fair Ball*; Boutilier and San Giovanni, *Sporting Women*.
17. Hubbard, Henifin, and Fried, *Biological Woman*; Birke, *Women, Feminism and Biology*.
18. Many women contributed to the development of 'girls' rules'. Paul Atkinson, Helen Lenskyj and others have argued that in part this was a tactically necessary defence against male control of women's institutions, that without them girls and women would not have been allowed to play at all and that they were a creative attempt to avoid some of the most brutalizing features of male sport. Nevertheless, they confined most females interested in sports to a ghetto of inequality and left the existing stereotypes about female frailty unchallenged.
19. Kidd, 'Getting Physical'.
20. See, for example, Sopinka, *Can I play?* The Canadian sports minister, Otto Jelinek, has admitted that despite a 12-year federal effort to increase women's opportunities, very little change has occurred. 'My belief is that there hasn't been a commitment to promote the women's program', he said. See 'Ottawa Aiming to Get More Girls Involved in Sport', *The Globe and Mail*, October 7, 1986.
21. Hoffman, 'Towards Equality for Women'.
22. Kett, *Rites of Passage*; Mckee, 'Nature's Medicine'; MacLeor, *Building Character in American Boy*.
23. Sheard and Dunning, 'Rugby Football Club'.
24. Jhally, 'Spectacle of Accumulation'.
25. Boutilier and San Giovanni, *Sporting Women*, 185–218.
26. Dyer, *Challenging the Men*. For a critical feminist review, see Cathy Bray, 'Challenging the Men'.
27. *Re Ontario Softball Association and Bannerman* (1978), 21 O.R. (2d) 395 (H.C.J.-Div.Ct).
28. The player, Justine Blainey, was successful in having the Ontario Court of Appeal declare that section 19 (2) of the Ontario Human Rights Code, which had allowed sports bodies to discriminate on the basis of sex, was in violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and therefore invalid. But the court would not declare that the OHA's refusal to allow Blainey to play was a violation of the code as amended by that decision. Blainey is therefore seeking such a ruling from the ORHC. See Kidd, 'Ontario Legalizes Discrimination' and Justine Blainey v. Ontario Hockey Association and Ontario Human Rights Commission, April 17, 1986, unreported (Ont. C.A. #630/85).
29. Chodorow, *Reproduction of Mothering*.
30. Dinnerstein, *Mermail and Minotaur*, 229.
31. Butt, *Psychology of Sport*; Orlick and Botterill, *Every Kid Can Win*.
32. Connell, 'Men's Bodies', 18.
33. Tutko and Bruns, *Winning is Everything.*
34. Quoted by Varda Burstyn, 'Play, Performance and Power – the Men', CBC Radio 'Ideas', October 2, 1986. The script is available from CBC transcripts.
35. Russell and Branch, *Second Wind*.

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