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8 years ago, Brian O'Driscoll and his much vaunted Lions team came to New Zealand on what was meant to be the 'tour of the decade'. To many, O'Driscoll was the best player in the world at this point, and the games against the All Blacks were going to enthral the whole country. This tour was the first time, as a 10 year old, that I'd actually been able to properly soak up the national atmosphere, and properly understand the magnitude of these tests. For me, the memory of that tour is walking around Wellington seeing the buzz and atmosphere of the city like never before. It was seeing the All Blacks blitz the Lions in all three tests. To me, that was the first time the pride and passion of sport was on full display. But the tour now is remembered for a far different reason. 77 seconds into the first game, Kevin Mealamu and Tana Umaga spear tackled Brian O'Driscoll, ending his tour with a horrific shoulder injury. All of a sudden, the media attention of the tour swung in perspective. No longer was this tour about the beauty of the rugby the All Blacks were playing and no longer was this tour a celebration of the beauty of our national game. This tour became defined by one moment, one tackle, and two villains. In this case, violence on the sports field, and the culture our society formed around that act of violence, defined, changed, and ruined the beauty of a whole tour.

#### The O'Driscoll Tackle Aftermath - [www.the42.ie](http://www.the42.ie)

Now, as an 18 year old, after finding so much joy in naively watching that tour without understanding the society around us, after so desperately wanting to be one of those All Blacks, I find myself in a fundamentally different situation. We no longer, at this age, watch sport just for the beauty of it. I no longer aspire to be an All Black, and I find myself playing in a White-dominated rugby weight grade - telling myself I'm playing for the enjoyment, as opposed to running away from the big scary Samoans of the open grades. As five year olds, we look up to so many people. We see the best in everyone, we see the world as a happy place, and we say exactly what we think. So when we saw Cristiano Ronaldo nail a free kick from 25 yards, or Richie McCaw leading the All Blacks to a glorious victory over Australia, we saw just that. For us, when we were that young, the beauty of sport was enough. We found ourselves in wonder over the excitement, the passion and the pure skill of the athletes we watched. And as such, we saw them for exactly what they were; incredibly skilled, incredibly driven human beings. Equally, we saw sport for exactly what it was; a



manifestation of skill, passion and excellence. This is enough for the five year old. It should also be enough for a 20 year old. For, nowhere else in our world do we see so much passion and pride.

But, sitting here as an 18 year old, so often we find the beauty of sport fails us. We aren't enthralled like those five year olds are. The sight of a high jumper breaking the world record, or Trent Boult ripping apart the Australian top order isn't quite enough. We want more. The essence of sport for us no longer lies in the sport itself, but the culture around it. We want to see a big hit. We want to watch Ronda Rousey knock her opponent out in less than thirty seconds. We watch State of Origin to see the once-a-game brawl. That's awesome. We want to see Trent Boult spit and yell abuse at Michael Clarke as he walks off the field. We look up not to the people who are the most pure athletes, but the ones who are the manliest, the ones who make the biggest hits, and the ones who have no trouble knocking their opponent out. This paradigm shift in the supporting of sport mirrors the that same paradigm of society itself. As I've grown up from the 5 year old in wonderment of the world class skill of professional sportsman, to the person I am today; I have changed, society has changed, and sport itself has changed. But what is the relationship between this societal change, the individual change and the shift of sport itself? It is unquestionable that sport - through passion, power and commitment - develops and effects individuals across the planet who play or support it. It is the very power of sport to change the individual, and the power of sport as a tool for cultural change as a result of this individual morphology - the great extent to which sport is a linchpin upon which society pivots, which enthralls and defines such a large proportion of the world.

This report looks to address the changing phenomenon of sport and society - how do we change on the sports field, on an individual level, and how does this change us as individuals in our holistic lives? Equally, I want to address how these individual relationships with the world of sport are changing the culture of sport itself? Are we, as individuals across the globe actually causing a divergence from the 'essence' of what sport was, and are we actually changing sport itself? I would ultimately argue that the harmful culture we create around sport and violence on the sports field is changing how we play sport as individuals and as such the very nature of sport, from an amateur level right through to professional is changing. We see the past socio cultural influences of commitment, passion and determination beginning to be taken over by brutality, race, ethnicity and gender stereotypes. This creates a far more one-dimensional, immoral and backward sporting world which we need to be aware of in our modern world. Amongst the complexity of a commercialised, capitalist sporting society we tend to forget the very attraction of sport for most of the world - beauty.

Much has been published about how we change as people on the sports field - particularly with regard to violence on the sports field. Nowhere else in our society do we have the means to disregard moral boundaries as we do in sport. To take a usual play on the rugby field, for example, into common society would be to commit a fairly serious crime. It is this shift in moral barrier which attract many, particularly males, to the world of sport. At its best, sport provides an open, competitive forum upon which one can test themselves against others. However, this shift in morality on the sports field creates a culture which is inherently grey - as opposed to the black and white moral code we live by usually. It is unquestionable to say that sport, be it rugby, football, cricket or any other game, contains levels of violence that become unacceptable beyond the sports field. Particular levels of violence, however, are ok. It goes along with the voluntary assumption of



risk that is intrinsic in playing sport<sup>1</sup>. But a phenomenon such as violence on the sports field becomes increasingly hard to draw the line between right and wrong. At what point do we collectively say something is not ok? At what point do we collectively say that the changes on the sports field are too much?

To look at the symbiotic relationship between the individual, violence, and the culture surrounding the sports field, one must understand what violence on the sports field is defined as.

The most poignant and well-regarded theory about defining sporting violence is Michael Smith's. He defines violence on the sports field in 4 categories. 1. Brutal body contact - the 'meat and potatoes' of our most popular sports (e.g. a tackle in rugby). 2. Borderline violence - violates rules of the game, but widely accepted. 3. Quasi-criminal violence - violates formal rules, the law, and informal norms of players. 4. Criminal violence - outside of boundaries of acceptability of both sport and wider community, treated formally by criminal justice system<sup>2</sup>. What Smith's framework shows is that at any level, there will always be violence on the sports field - it is inevitable. What is also abundantly clear is the human element of the framework - the subjectivity of it. Violence in sport is very much defined by the people who play and support it - and as such these people define what is 'acceptable' and what is not. Smith shows, interestingly, that ultimately sporting boundaries are actually set by the players and supporters themselves; e.g. for an act to become criminal it has to violate acceptability of the sport *and* the wider community. As such, with a critical eye, one can see that the moral boundaries of sport are very much defined by the culture that we set up around it, and the culture of the people playing it. To be able to understand how to change the culture of sport, we need to be able to understand the roots of violence on the sports field. As, whilst Smith's theory gives a comprehensive account on the role of violence on the sports field, they do little to explain social and interpersonal aspects of sports related violence, nor do these four levels give any insight as to the reason why we commit violence on the sports field.

The literature around the reasons behind violence on the sports field is very much centred around three main theories - instinct theory, frustration aggression theory, and social learning theory. The first of these, instinct theory (Freud, Lorenz 1966), instead of showing that we change as people on the sports field, defines sport as an outlet of human instinct - instincts which, alongside the hegemonic masculinity - pertain to high levels of brutal violence<sup>3</sup>. There is no other means to release these instincts in society - and as such we see a high prevalence in sport. However, in relation to the holistic world of sport, this theory falls down in a number of places, with criticisms being mainly focussed around these four areas; 1. Levels of aggression actually tend to increase in sport not decrease as Freud suggests (Berkowitz, 1972). 2. No innate aggressive characteristics have ever actually been found and there has never been any support found for Catharsis. 3. Aggressive sports players often don't show the same aggressive characteristics in society away from their sport. 4. Aggressive behaviour is often learnt and is linked to culture not just innate<sup>4</sup>. Fundamentally, this theory also rejects the vast array of socio-cultural pressures of the holistic world of any sportsmen, and the culture around sport.

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<sup>1</sup> Young, K. (2012) *Sport, Violence and Society*. Routledge,

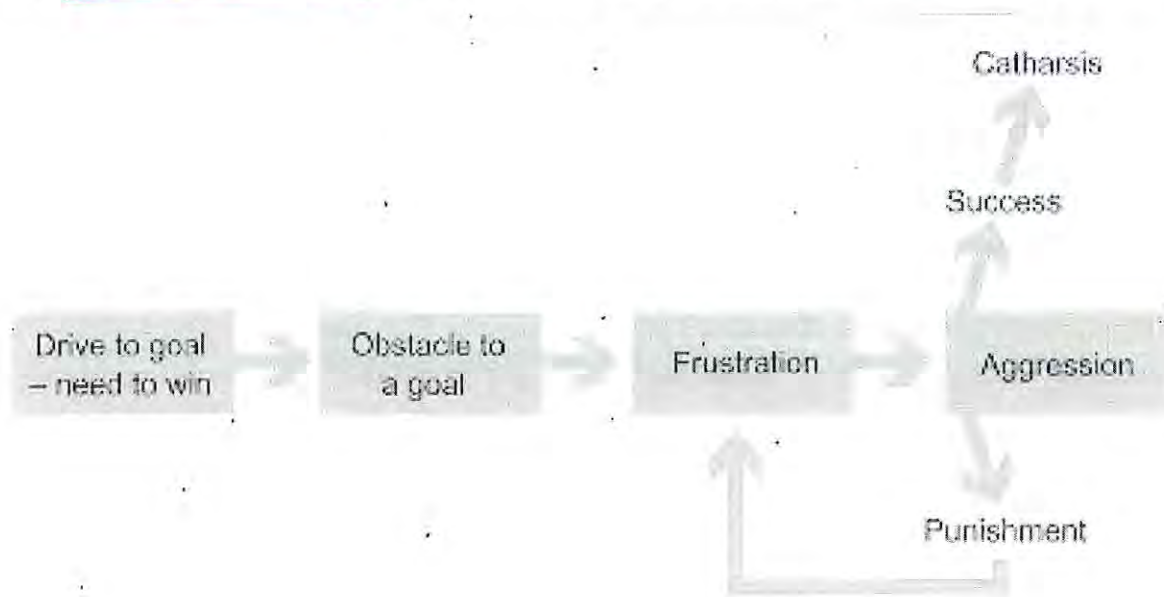
<sup>2</sup> Smith, M.D. (1983) *Violence and Sport*. Butterworths

<sup>3</sup> Lorenz, K. (2002) *On Aggression*. Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> Schwertner, A.J. (2013) *(Un)Natural Athletes: The Rhetoric of Gender Performances in Sport and the Media*



Dollard et al (1939) suggested an interactionist approach toward aggression. They argued that aggression is partly due to innate characteristics as Freud (1950) suggests but it is also partly learnt from others. *A performer becomes aggressive when the goal is blocked and this leads to frustration in the performer and eventually aggression*<sup>5</sup>. They state that frustration will always lead to aggression and aggression is always caused by frustration. Whilst this theory does attempt to engage both the bio-physical and socio-cultural interaction inherent in sporting violence, it has also been heavily criticised for a number of reasons. Firstly, whilst there is bio-physical evidence which shows that in some cases frustration certainly does lead to aggression, to say that aggression is exclusively caused by frustration on the sports field is overly simplistic. It doesn't account for the complex learning of behaviours in humans, nor does it account for the complex, multi-dimensional world of socio-cultural factors and individuality that effect every sportsperson at every level.



Conceptualising the Frustration-Aggression Theory - [matthew-belk.blogspot.com](http://matthew-belk.blogspot.com)

Building upon the interactionist frustration aggression theory, 'Social learning theory' rejects the biological drive to be aggressive in favour of supporting the idea that we learn violence from seeing it around us<sup>6</sup>. Albert Bandura (1973,1977) emphasises the role of punishment and reward in modelling behaviour. Moreover, he argues that we learn through both direct reinforcement from external stimuli, but also that we learn to 'aggress by observing the consequences of other people's actions.' Effectively, this popular theory argues that, like every other behaviour - violence is learnt. There are limitations to such an argument however. It fundamentally underestimates people's choice-making abilities, and the idea that 'watching is not the same as doing'. This theory however, unlike many of the other models, acknowledges that human behaviour is the outcome of imitation and complex forms of social learning. Society itself is based upon social control and learning, and so is the world of sport<sup>7</sup>. Still however, the holistic role of culture and human nature is underestimated.

<sup>5</sup> Dollard, John; Miller, Neal E.; Doob, Leonard W.; Mowrer, O. H.; Sears, Robert R.(1939) *Frustration and aggression*. New Haven, CT, US: Yale University Press

<sup>6</sup> Bandura, A.(1973) *Social Learning Theory*. General Learning Corporation

<sup>7</sup>Young, K. (2012) *Sport, Violence and Society*. Routledge,



All of these theories and models of violence simplify and underestimate the complexity of the behavioural and social pressures of society. Learning a behaviour, as many critics of the social learning theory have argued, is a result of a very complex interaction of factors. Moreover, this combination is different for different people. Genetics, it has been shown, (such as temperament) also play a significant role in learning behaviours. Modern research has provided evidence that temperament, more than anything else, is influenced by one's genome<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, this genome and the resulting temperament is not changed through environment. As such, to say that violence on the sports field is a derivative only of reinforcement and reward is too simplistic. It is, however, this simplicity which makes such a theory so popular and widely accepted. Equally, despite its simplicity it can give us a nice simple pathway forward. It shows us that fundamentally, athletes of future generations will model what they do upon the athletes of today. The social learning theory also gives us another directive forward - one which isn't very useful however. To get rid of violence in sport - we need to get rid of violence in society - which is effectively impossible. Moreover, one can actually learn violence in a very specific context - exclusively on the sports field, through sport itself, without having been exposed to large amounts of violence elsewhere. One can be a peaceful, non-violent person off the field, but through social control and learning in the specific context of sports - that same person can learn to be excessively violent and brutal on the sports field. Therefore, we see that in fact we don't change on the sports field at all - sport is more so a representation of the culture that society creates around it. Athletes learn their behaviour on the sports field in a complex relationship between a myriad of both bio-physical and socio-cultural factors. To eliminate violence from sport is effectively impossible, because eliminating violence from society is equally implausible. Therefore, whilst defining and contextualising violence on the sports field is heavily debated, one thing becomes clear - violence on the sports field is here to stay.

When we play sport, we are so often told that we reap the benefits as a result. These benefits lie on an individual, but also a holistic level. The question however lies in how these benefits are effected by sports related violence. When we exercise, we are happier, less stressed, smarter and have a higher self-esteem<sup>9</sup>. This is purely on an individual level, in relation to cardiovascular exercise, but on top of this sport and the structures around it give countless benefits and opportunities to the group of individuals who play it, at any level. The rigid structures, rules, teamwork and camaraderie sport brings to our society benefit the people who play it, and build tighter communities in our world<sup>10</sup>. At its best, and many theorists argue at its essence, the social world formed around a sport promotes a mind-set and norms emphasising non-violence, self control, respect for self and others, physical fitness, patience, responsibility, and humility<sup>11,12</sup>. Such a structure perpetuates ideals, values and principles which add intangible weight to our societies. A functionalist would argue that in all societies there are deeply rooted processes or social systems which work toward maintaining social stability, with changes in one area of society leading towards compensatory changes in another part of society. Society is made up of many systems that all work cooperatively and harmoniously together, like an organism, to ensure that society stay

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<sup>8</sup> [www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org) - *Temperament, Heredity and Genes*

<sup>9</sup> Ratey, J.J.(2008) *Spark*. Penguin Group

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.sportanddev.org/en/learnmore/sport\\_education\\_and\\_child\\_youth\\_development2/](http://www.sportanddev.org/en/learnmore/sport_education_and_child_youth_development2/)

<sup>11</sup> Nauright, J (2003) *The Essence of Sport*. University of Southern Denmark Press

<sup>12</sup> Coakley, J (1993) *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*. McGraw-Hill Education



healthy. Society is structured to maintain those values, beliefs, and norms which most people agree are most important. Societies are dependent on a degree of consensus within the system and are viewed as largely cohesive<sup>13</sup>. Hence, it is the role of institutions like sport to keep society in balance, and fully functioning. Without such an institution in our world, then we lose aspects of our lives not just as individuals, but as communities and nations as well. It is, therefore, unquestionable that sport on a theoretical level brings so much to our world on an individual as well as a communal level.

However, the question for the modern sportsperson is whether we actually see these benefits. If the culture surrounding sport is one which promotes such values and principles, then such benefits can be seen. But so often, many argue almost exclusively, the culture of sport in our world is centred around three pinnacles; misogyny, brutality and a distorted model of masculinity.

When examining a social institution like sport in the modern world, one sees that there is a clear issue with regard to the culture, and controlling the discourse of this culture. This problem when it comes to sport and violence in our world, as aptly noted by Kevin Young, is that the relationship between social control and sport is a paradoxical one. On the one hand, it may be that sport is 'one of the most heavily administered and policed, of all social institutions'. Yet, on the other, sport represents a 'protected social space, both on and off the field'<sup>14</sup>, where actions that would not be allowed in any other area of our society, and that 'range from assertive behaviour to dangerously violent and injurious behaviour', are absolutely championed and rewarded. This paradox is interesting, because it shows us the relationship between sport and the culture we create around it. Sport, by this definition, is a clash of human nature to thrive off structure, and the equal part of human nature to engage in conflict and competition. Such a paradox only exists in society because of the hegemonic paradigm surrounding sport. Society ultimately polices and controls the public view upon actions of our athletes on and off the field. Thus, it is irrelevant whether bio-physical factors actually cause us to be innately violent, or whether we learn violence in a specific context, because the biggest issue in the world of sport isn't the violence itself. The biggest problem is every one of us who watch it.

Everyone of us who watch sport engage with the culture around it. It is inevitable that we will always have violence on the sports field, and to deny this is to be overly naive about the complex nature of humans and sport. In terms of repercussions, many people would argue that this is a huge problem - that by having violence on the sports field we jeopardise the essence of what sport is<sup>15</sup>. To an extent, this inevitable violence on the sports field is an issue. We can't have sport in this country whereby the focus falls away from playing well to who makes the biggest hit, or who hurts the opposition the most. We cannot have tours like the 2005 Lions tour being remembered by a moment of violent controversy as opposed to a glorious, clinical and decisive series victory. We cannot have people watching State of Origin only to watch the once-a-game brawl. However, we also cannot take a one-eyed, narrow view on sports violence. It is a far more complex relationship - one which takes a great deal of critical thought to understand fully. As I said at the very beginning, fundamentally the culture which is so evident as a teenager in our modern society is one which is defined by the biggest hit of the game, or the guy who throws the biggest punch.

<sup>13</sup> McBain, S.; Gillespie (2014) *Theories of Understanding Sport, Physical activity and Movement*

<sup>14</sup> Young; K. (2012) *Sport, Violence and Society*. Routledge,

<sup>15</sup> Nauright, J (2003) *The Essence of Sport*. University of Southern Denmark Press



Violence, therefore, isn't the big problem. We can only work to control it, as opposed to eradicate it. That is not to say that we shouldn't focus on controlling it, we certainly should. The moves to make more player violence prosecuted through the criminal justice system is a good one<sup>16</sup>, and the alienation of borderline and quasi-criminal violence is certainly needed as well. However, there are much bigger issues at play which this violence is just a small part of. The major issue is the perpetuation of the culture surrounding sport and violence, and the problem that creates and continues for everyone who watches, supports and plays sport. The violence itself only effects a small portion of people. But the culture surrounding sport, and the flow-on effects to everyone who watches sport, effects every single one of us. Holistically, its not the person who throws the punch that causes the biggest problem. Whilst we shouldn't be encouraging people to throw punches, there are already rigid systems in place which deal with it. It is the culture of everyone who watches, sympathises and supports the person that threw that punch where the biggest danger lies. The culture that says that person who threw the punch is more of a man than the guy who took the hit, without retaliating. This idea perpetuates such a dangerous model of sport, masculinity, and morality to the rest of society. It is also an idea which reaches so many more people than the punch itself, which, without this culture, would be just another penalty or infringement in the game of sport. So what is this culture teaching us, as New Zealanders?

There are multiple facets to the popular culture of violence and sport which are harmful to individuals, as well as society as a whole. The first of which relates to the role models in sport. The players in sport who get the most media attention, aside from the greats like Richie McCaw, are the ones who are the most 'manly', the ones who perpetuate what it means to 'be a man' in New Zealand. Even McCaw himself, for years, has been the very embodiment of the masculine New Zealand bloke. But all this is changing. Earlier this year SKY recorded a record profit, yet they refused to pay the money to secure the TV rights to the Blackcaps' tour of South Africa. At the same time, SKY are seemingly constantly broadcasting, and getting record ratings for UFC and cage-fighting<sup>17</sup>. It has been a year of sport which seems to have been characterised by two things - Floyd Mayweather vs Manny Pacquiao and Ronda Rousey's rise to stardom. The mere fact that the ratings, and media attention surrounding these UFC fighters has sky-rocketed shows the new hegemonic class of modern masculinity. No longer is it 'manly' enough to play rugby, play within the rules, and play hard. Thats a man of 10 years ago. Now we are much harder. In 2015, to be the ultimate man, we need to be brutally fighting. We need to be putting down women, just as Floyd Mayweather has mocked Rousey, and we need to be violent. This is harmful not only for young males, but also young females. In the modern age of parenting, there have been complaints about the ideal image of women perpetuated through Barbie dolls, and other mass-media items for young females. However, in the modern world of sport, there is just as harmful a image. To be successful in the wide world through sport, these women have to fit into what it is to be a man, or else they aren't worth watching. There is huge pressure on these women in sport to be aggressive, 'manly' and violent if they want to be watched by the world. This is clear through Ronda Rousey, and the sudden rise of women's UFC in mainstream media, with ridiculous and violent taunts before the fight culminating in a brutal, violent battle. Without all this, no one would watch it, and that is wrong.

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<sup>16</sup> Young, K. (2012) *Sport, Violence and Society*. Routledge,

<sup>17</sup> [www.skytv.co.nz](http://www.skytv.co.nz)



"I swear to God I'll f\*\*\*\*\* take the ball and shove it down your f\*\*\*\*\* throat" Serena Williams' explosion towards a line judge at the US open six years ago is absolutely symbolic of the females' modern role in sports violence. The culture which modern sport produces and endorses is causing women to 'catch up' to men in terms of violent acts, but as well as the model of what it means to be a female athlete. This violence and aggression of the modern female athlete is mistaken with competitiveness, success, and passion<sup>18</sup>. One can undoubtedly be passionate, successful and competitive without threatening to kill a line judge or referee - which shows the shallow

Serena Williams Clashes with a Line Judge - [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk)

nature of such an assumption about modern athletes and supporters. However, if Serena and other women athletes did not show such aggression, they wouldn't be interesting enough for the audience. Once again, in the world of modern sport, we find the beauty of sport itself is not quite sufficient, and athletes feel the pressure from the discourse of society to be aggressive - and go that one step further.

Inherent within all of the examples from both men and women's sport mentioned above, and clearly a part of the hegemonic masculinity in sport, is misogyny. The very structure of sport is set up to show physical prowess, dominance and skill. The basis of sport and even scientific analysis portrays the male body as the 'norm' against which the female body is measured<sup>19</sup>. But we don't stop at this. We feel the need to have females dressed up in next-to-nothing on the sideline waving pom-poms and cheering the males on. We feel the need to have females in only bikinis to march round the ring before a UFC fight, or wave the start flag in motorsport. Why? well its nothing to do with the athletes themselves - it is to do with the inherently harmful nature of the popular culture surrounding sport, and the three pillars of this culture - masculinity, misogyny, and brutality.

Such an unrealistic and dangerous model of masculinity is an issue for not just male and female athletes, but also everyone in society who enjoys sport. Returning back to the very thing mentioned at the beginning - these athletes are role models. 5 year olds see them as the very best of what it is to be human. As such, the dangerous and harmful ideals we see so often are a huge issue. If we look back to the principles of social learning, when we see this sort of culture perpetuated continuously both through the media and through the behaviour of athletes, then all of a sudden we see the rest of society beginning to model their values off this same behaviour. Whilst, as acknowledged earlier, social learning is far more complex than merely seeing and doing, the nature of sport is such that it reaches so many people across the globe. All of these people engage in the culture around sport, and if it represents such a harmful model of what it is to be male (and equally

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<sup>18</sup> Schwertner, A.J. (2013) *(Un)Natural Athletes: The Rhetoric of Gender Performances in Sport and the Media*

<sup>19</sup> Schwertner, A.J. (2013) *(Un)Natural Athletes: The Rhetoric of Gender Performances in Sport and the Media*



what it is to be female), then all of these people engage in this model, and it slowly becomes the norm. A norm which is something which we should not be endorsing, or encouraging.

In the western world, we see the modern media perpetuating, if not encouraging such a culture. It is wrong how so often in our world, “masculine” performances are communicated in the media. Notions of speed, toughness, autonomy, and domination are considered a positive in male sports, yet fundamentally negative and alienating in female sports<sup>20</sup>. Casta Semanya was alienated, marginalised and villainised, following her gender testing issues from the IOC. It isn't just harmful to females, but media perpetuate a harmful, unrealistic model of masculinity as well. The uninhibited focus on and promotion of hegemonic masculinity encourages male athletes to use strength, speed, and power to achieve/maintain their status as a man. The media, according to Amanda Jean Schwertner, utilise three frames— ‘individual choice’, ‘commitment to team’, and ‘desire to play’— to normalise risk, pain, and injury in sports. These frames are so obvious in daily media. The media idealises “independence, physical strength, emotional stoicism, strict heterosexuality, and the capacity to overcome adversity and physical pain.”<sup>21</sup> Individual choice is seen through heroic narrations of an athlete ‘taking the decision into his own hands’ and playing on after a horrific brawl, or a terrible knee injury. The uninhibited commitment to team sees athletes being praised for sacrificing their body for the team, or backing his teammate up in a pointless fight. Equally, athletes are merely “part of the job” that the team must do, even if that means purposefully and knowingly breaking the rules. Finally, we see the ‘desire to play’ through the absolute ‘love of the game’: the want of all men to play through the pain of injury. An article written by Austin Murphy for Sports Illustrated states that athletes play the game of football not “for money or fame” but “quite simply, it's fun to knock the snot out of somebody”.<sup>22</sup> This is a perfect example of the naturalisation of risk taking behaviours in sports helping athletes to rationalise and accept brutal bodily violence as part of the game. This normalisation equally encourages athletes to view their bodies as machines, which they tinker and modify to use as a tool on the field<sup>23</sup>. Seeing the body as a machine, or tool, leads athletes to disregard pain and injury and silence their bodies in an effort to continue to play. Such a precedent is dangerous for all of these athletes, and all people who are watching, and playing sport.

Now don't get me wrong, I love sport. I love playing sport, I love watching sport and I love supporting sport. But we do have to look at ourselves in the mirror and ask, what are we actually supporting? If I asked anyone in the street if they supported misogyny, brutality, and the unrealistic model of masculinity, I don't think anyone would say yes. Yet, most of these people would watch sport. To solve the problem of violence and moral decay in sport, we need to stop looking towards the athletes, and we need to start looking in the mirror. If the social world formed around a sport promotes a mind-set and norms emphasising non-violence, self control, respect for self and others, physical fitness, patience, responsibility, and humility, then athletes and supporters will see all the benefits surrounding sport, exercise and competition. Moreover, if these become the pinnacles of

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<sup>20</sup> Schwertner, A.J. (2013) *(Un)Natural Athletes: The Rhetoric of Gender Performances in Sport and the Media*

<sup>21</sup> Schwertner, A.J. (2013) *(Un)Natural Athletes: The Rhetoric of Gender Performances in Sport and the Media*

<sup>22</sup> Schwertner, A.J. (2013) *(Un)Natural Athletes: The Rhetoric of Gender Performances in Sport and the Media*

<sup>23</sup> Young, K. (2012) *Sport, Violence and Society*. Routledge,



world sport, then we see structural and holistic benefits for society as well. We would no longer see the stratification of gender, race, and the pressure to 'be a man' in the same context, or most crucially, the pressure to use one's body as a weapon for the uninhibited benefit of the team.

Unfortunately, as has become clear, the social world around sport is quite the opposite. It is not organised around these norms. Instead, most sport cultures emphasise hostility, physical domination, misogyny, and a willingness to use one's body as a weapon. To fully understand the nature of this culture, and to pave the way forwards, one must look at the roots of culture itself.

Michael Richardson states that culture "is simply what human beings produce and the means by which we preserve what we have produced." Cultural assumptions are so deeply ingrained in society that we become mute without them<sup>24</sup>. Effectively, the culture of our societies are deeply seated in the values which we hold, which in turn tell every person who they are, as well as who they are not. Thus, we have an issue in our world pertaining to the deep-seated culture surrounding both sport itself, and sports related violence. It is valuable to look at what defines culture to see the most important and influential socio-cultural factors which influence the way we view sports and violence. There are four common qualities that define all cultures. First, culture is collective. Cultures are comprised of individuals who share common beliefs and values. Second, culture is rhetorical. Cultures are the result of shared symbol systems that allow members to communicate. Third, culture is historical. Cultures change, evolve, mutate, fade, and disappear over time. Finally, culture is ideological. Membership in a culture teaches members to see the world in some ways and not in others<sup>25</sup>. Thus, we can see that over time, the culture of sport has become engrained, normalised, and naturalised in our western societies. The commercial, commodified nature of media and sports media mean that the perspectives we all receive on sport are the same. Because of the commercial nature of sport, this deep seated culture is continuously shoved in our face. The media use the processes of exclusion, stereotyping, and othering in order to subordinate alternative ideologies. Exclusion is best characterised by absence. As Kenneth Burke points out, the very act of identification is embedded in the act of negation<sup>26</sup>. Thus, for every media story, there are multiple untold stories. Exclusion is the process through which alternative cultural groups are systematically written out of history through underrepresentation in the media. The process of exclusion also works to reinforce ideological power structures by over-representing them in media texts. When alternative cultural representations do appear in the media, they are often stereotyped. Stereotyping is the process of creating misleading and reductionist representations of minority groups (be it based on race, class, sexuality, or gender)<sup>27</sup>. This exclusion and stereotyping works only to deepen the harmful roots of brutality, misogyny and unrealistic masculinity which characterise modern sporting culture.

Such manipulation has unsurprisingly led to a lack of media and literature about the implications of sport and society. Whilst there is a lot of literature surrounding the nature of the relationship between the individual and sports related violence, the effects of societal discourse are unknown,

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<sup>24</sup> Richardson, M. (2001) *The Experience of Culture*. SAGE Publications Ltd

<sup>25</sup> Richardson, M. (2001) *The Experience of Culture*. SAGE Publications Ltd

<sup>26</sup> Schwertner, A.J. (2013) *(Un)Natural Athletes: The Rhetoric of Gender Performances in Sport and the Media*

<sup>27</sup> Schwertner, A.J. (2013) *(Un)Natural Athletes: The Rhetoric of Gender Performances in Sport and the Media*



and relatively untouched. Amanda Jean Schwertner attempts to analyse the nature of the relationship between over-arching culture and sport. "The study of sports offers a unique view of how bodily performances are evaluated because sports are a place in which the discourses that are produced in and around it produce, or reproduce dominant ideologies and identities."<sup>28</sup> Sports, she argues, act as a space for identification, one in which membership is gained and lost through participation. For me, sport should represent cultural ideologies of gender relations and proper performances of masculinity and femininity as if they were natural. Sport, at its essence, should be the last place in which gender images or racial stratification is seen as necessary to promote fairness and equality. Due to the naturalisation of gender in sports however, few people critically think about the effects that hegemonic gender and cultural ideologies have on individual athletes and their sporting performances. Moreover, because of the normalisation of this violent culture, few people think critically about how society is being moulded by our relationship with sport, and how the pressures on future generations are being changed. Referring back to the functional view on sport and society, by the pinnacles of the sporting world changing, we see the balance of our society change as well. The uninhibited commercial pursuit of modern sport is changing the institution to fit the modern generation. Twenty20 cricket is a prime example of this - society and sport are part of a symbiotic relationship. Characteristics which define the young generation of today are impatience and the need for instant gratification. As such, we see the popularity of Twenty20 cricket sky-rocketing to cater for these very needs. What this shows, at a very simple level, is that ultimately sport and society are dependent upon each other. And, if we don't change the ideals surrounding modern sport then such ideals will be reflected not only in the sporting world, but also in our generation, and the many generations to come.

Sport remains one of the most culturally important social institutions in all developed countries that touches almost everyone's lives, and (rightly or wrongly) is being used as a panacea and instrument of progress and peace in developing societies all over the world<sup>29</sup>. Hence, it is crucial that we use such a panacea for what it is. Sport needs to be a pinnacle of fairness, equality and passion. It needs to be the very embodiment of hard work, determination and success because of it. At its heart, sport is about bringing the beauty of performance to the world. Thus, the question remains - have we drifted away from this essence of sport as a result of sports related violence and the harmful culture around it?

The essence of sport is a broad, ambiguous term. But it is very much relative. Relative to what it was in the past, that is<sup>30</sup>. Hence, it is the effects that violence on the sports field, and the culture it creates is having on sport itself, which is the crucial factor. The extent to which sport itself is changing. A big part of the increase in sports related violence is the commercialisation of sport, and the commodification of athletes. This, in effect, has brought sport into the professional era, and has completely shifted the culture around it. Does it change the nature of sport itself? Absolutely - it goes along with the media attention surrounding sport mentioned earlier, as well as changing the socio-cultural influences that affect athletes and their support networks. Without the pressures of money and making a living, many of the pressures which often break down the morals of athletes

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<sup>28</sup> Schwertner, A.J. (2013) *(Un)Natural Athletes: The Rhetoric of Gender Performances in Sport and the Media*

<sup>29</sup> Young, K. (2012) *Sport, Violence and Society*. Routledge,

<sup>30</sup> Nauright, J (2003) *The Essence of Sport*. University of Southern Denmark Press



and coaches in breaking barriers would not occur. For example, it would be far easier to walk away from a team environment where you do not agree with dirty tactics the coach is endorsing if one's income did not rely on involvement in that team. However, money cannot explain every problem we have with sport. The harmful principles outlined earlier still play a huge role in amateur and college sport in New Zealand, for example. One has to look no further back than the U18 rugby league test match between NZ and Australia - where there was an all-out brawl at the end of the game. However, there is the extra pressure upon these players to perform well to remain in the pathway in which they can carve out a lucrative career. If they disregard coaches, agents or other players, they fall off this pathway and potentially lose the prospect of such a career. Moreover, this commodification, and the certain glorification of athletes, has another effect on sport. That is the emergence of greed. To say that greed was never a part of sport before the professional era would be naive. However, the commercialisation of sport has merely made greed more prominent, and a lot more lucrative. In the past it was purely about pride and attention. Now it becomes about income, status and a brand. In essence, that what commercialisation has done - it has branded athletes, and in doing so, branded the culture they represent. A brand which is dangerously being sold to millions of people across the globe.

The U18 League brawl between NZ and Aus 2015 - [www.tvnz.co.nz/onenews](http://www.tvnz.co.nz/onenews)

There are countless other examples whereby the harmful culture surrounding sport, commercialisation and violence actually further stratifies society - changing the makeup of people who play sport. Much has been published about the role of UFC and boxing manipulating and offering poor, lower-socio-economic kids pathways into the sport - when, in fact, these people do not at all want to be the subject of brutal entertainment for the middle class white man. Growing up in the slums of Brazil, Jose Aldo would often go to Wagnney Fabiano's training facility with an empty stomach<sup>31</sup>. He would tell him to go eat first, then he could train. On the surface, the media

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<sup>31</sup> Coakley, J (1993) *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*. McGraw-Hill Education



has fed society an Allen Iverson-like rise from the ashes of Jose Aldo. Yet, for Aldo himself, there were no other options. After becoming world champion, he has spoken out about his life as a UFC cage fighter. It's not what it is on the surface, according to Aldo. By this, he refers to the hegemonic class of predominantly white men who control and run this franchise that is UFC. The actual fighters, however, are hardly ever white, or well off socio-economically. Ethnic minorities are far over-represented, and the greatest proportion of the fighters come from extremely poor backgrounds<sup>32</sup>. What does this point to? At its best its a manifestation of an instinctual culture of human nature. At its worst, its a racial manipulation to feed the desire of the middle class who are hungry to fill their desire for brutality, misogyny and the modern model of a man. It is the very manifestation of the harmful culture we have created around sport. One would assume, with a critical eye, that such a franchise would not be popular. Yet, once again, SKY's ratings for UFC and boxing have sky-rocketed this year. At the same time, they refused to pay for the rights to the Blackcaps' tour of South Africa, despite that very team enthralling the whole country only 9 months ago. This example shows how sport has changed - the old principles of 'the gentleman's game' being replaced by the new principles of modern sporting culture - brutality, misogyny and mindless violence. So, when asked if we have drifted from the essence of sport - look no further than SKY and UFC - two franchises which mirror the new principles of the modern sporting world.

The very essence of the sporting world is built on fair play and equality on the field. Whilst it is overly idealistic to say that sport is equal, or fair, it is reasonable to assume that as a society we strive for such principles in a social institution which touches, and defines so many lives. The history of the black athlete with regard to violence, commercialisation and the hegemonic power structures of sport reveals a striking pattern as to the nature of professionalism. From Jackie Robinson to Muhammad Ali and Arthur Ashe, African American athletes have been at the centre of modern culture, their on-the-field heroics admired and stratospheric earnings envied. But for all their money, fame, and achievement, New York Times columnist William C. Rhoden, argues that black athletes still find themselves on the periphery of true power in the multibillion-dollar industry of sport. He shows, in his book *40 million dollar slaves* that black athletes' "evolution" has merely been a journey from literal plantations, where he shows sports were introduced as diversions to quell revolutionary stirrings, to today's figurative ones, in the form of professional sports programmes. He tells of a "conveyor belt" that brings kids from inner cities and small towns these programmes, where they're cut off from their roots and exploited by team owners, sports agents, and the media<sup>33</sup>. Rhoden's argument is a poignant one in regard to the whole sporting world. It shows, even in our modern world, that sport is not in fact the pinnacle of values and morality. If anything, Rhoden suggests that sport is a manifestation of all major issues in our society today - in the sense that any power black athletes have today is as limited as when masters forced their slaves to race and fight. The primary difference is, today's shackles are often the athletes' own making. The complex pressures of modern sport, and the society we form around it, not only stratify gender and socio-economic background, but they also fundamentally stratify race.

My point here is that violence in our sporting world barely touches the surface of the issues we face. To only focus on stopping violence - a battle which is almost impossible to win - would be overly naive about the bigger issues in the sporting world. It is the culture around sport, that

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<sup>32</sup> Coakley, J (1993) *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*. McGraw-Hill Education

<sup>33</sup> Rhoden, W.C. (2007) *40 Million Dollar Slaves*. Broadway Books



everyone endorses and engages in, where the biggest problems lie. We need to expose and understand the stratification of not only gender, but ethnicity, and socio-economic background as well. What we see in the modern world of sport, stemming from the culture of brutality, masculinity and misogyny, are racial and socio-economic stereotypes and manipulations which are harmful for present and future generations. It is all too easy for sporting bodies to crack down on shoulder charges and throwing punches, whilst turning a blind eye to the real issues which underpin the culture surrounding sport. Equally, it is all too easy to scoff at the magnitude of these issues, or as an individual hide behind the sheer numbers of people who participate and endorse the culture of sport. But we all participate in the perpetual cycle of brutality, misogyny and unrealistic masculinity. Whether it is accepting an elite model of sport, or it might be some gendered version of sport where certain behaviours are viewed as inappropriate or appropriate, or enjoyable or reprehensible<sup>34</sup>. It might be that you, as a player, fan or coach accept the risky or dangerous nature of sport. It might even be as simple as a video game you play where graphic violence seems removed from reality<sup>35</sup>. Violence in sport is so much more than just the people who play it. It is so much more than engaging with the typical stereotypes and stratification that sport tends to throw at us. Violence is about scratching the surface of a culture which is about gender race, social class, religion, ethnicity; all of which are fundamentally socio-cultural factors. Such factors propel violence in sport from an elite issue, to an issue which is about ordinary people. It becomes an issue which effects every single one of us on a Saturday night when we watch the All Blacks. It becomes an issue for every parent who watches their kid play sport on a cool Saturday morning. It becomes an issue for every single one of us who are passionate about any sport.

It is becoming an issue for ordinary sport. For the sportsmen who, like myself, play sport for the enjoyment, the fun and the passion. We are beginning to see the ripples of this culture as low as college sport. These ripples hit very close to home for me in particular. The social factors of race in particular has led to a modern phenomenon of 'white-flight' in rugby in our country. Whereby society, and in particular teenage boys and their parents generally believe that to be successful in rugby, one must be Polynesian or Maori. As such, the proportion of Pakeha students in first XV's is plummeting. Equally, schools who have large amounts of money are beginning to 'scout' players from the Pacific islands to come and play in their top teams, consigning the other not-quite-up-to-scratch boys to the lower teams, or weight-restricted grades. Rugby is slowly, at the college level morphing into a game of ethnicity. I am absolutely complicit in this issue. This year I played in a white-dominated weight grade. A grade, where, at the crudest level, parents send their kids to play rugby away from the big hits and aggression of the Samoans and the Maori. At a school where there used to be countless rugby teams in the past, the 35 football teams now eclipse the 11 rugby teams. The culture of violence, gender and race is changing sport at its grass roots. Every athlete, every sportsperson is complicit in hiding this culture.

The major problem we all face moving forward is that, even when challenged, embarrassed and disciplined, Kevin Young shows, we know from the past that sport changes slowly as an institution. Equally, it is easy for such a deep-rooted culture to show both elasticity, but also very easily 'bounce back' to what it has been<sup>36</sup>. To change the social institution of sport, we need to

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<sup>34</sup> Young, K. (2012) *Sport, Violence and Society*. Routledge,

<sup>35</sup> Young, K. (2012) *Sport, Violence and Society*. Routledge,

<sup>36</sup> Young, K. (2012) *Sport, Violence and Society*. Routledge,



understand what we are supporting. We need to understand the pillars of modern sporting culture, and how sport as a phenomenon is changing. We need to understand that every ordinary individual is complicit in endorsing such a culture. Most importantly, we need to understand that supporting the sport itself, and supporting the culture around it are two independent things.

However, whilst it is plausible and realistic to change how we participate and endorse sport, I suspect because of the meaningful, poignant and fundamentally ordinary social factors which define sporting culture, one would suspect that we are stuck with it. The paradox with sport is that, on the one hand, it is based on tradition, rules and barriers of history. Yet, on the other, it morphs and moulds to the oscillations of the society of the time. The result is a fundamentally social institution which becomes so entrenched with the values of the past, but as well as the present. Thus, for us as a generation to change the course of the sporting world, we need to address both. We need to look to the past pinnacles of tradition, but we also need to look forward to the sort of society we want to pave for ourselves. If we do this, the sporting world will mould itself back to the essence of what it should be - mirroring the very society that we want to create for ourselves. Having said this, I fear that such a paradigm shift is too much to ask of our generation. I fear that eventually, such a perpetual decline of morals will finally take away the very thing that drew us towards sport as 5 year olds - beauty. The raw sense of beauty and anticipation I felt that very first time I walked around wellington before watching the All Blacks will be replaced by a facade that is modern sport. 5 year olds will no longer be able to look up to the great men and women that are professional athletes. For, no longer will they necessarily represent the very best of our world - but the very worst. Such a warning, I hope, should be sufficient to propel our generation into action. Not just the athletes, but the ordinary person. It is possible - for it is the very power of sport to bring unity, passion and brilliance to our world. Let's support the sport itself, not the culture around it. Let us continue to look up to these men and woman at the top of their game. Most of all, let's celebrate the beauty, passion and unity that sport has the potential to perpetuate.