“Power, Sport and Masculinities”

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Module 1: Structures and Processes focused on a macro/societal level of analysis.

In Module 2: Bodies and Identities, we are going to focus on a micro/individual level of analysis, and focus on the various ways that contemporary physical culture is lived and experienced.

Theme 1:

De-Naturalizing the Body and Sex/Gender Differences

The ACTIVE BODY is not a WHOLLY NATURAL entity.
It is also PHYSICAL and SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION:

The ACTIVE BODY is shaped by, as it helps to shape, the SOCIAL CONTEXT/ENVIRONMENT in which it is located.

How do we begin to understand the socially constructed active body?
The Social Construction of the Individual

**Ideological Formations** (values, beliefs, ideas)

**Cultural Texts** (media forms and content)

**Institutional Structures** (rules, codes, organization)

**Cultural Practices and Relations** (acts, performances and routines)

**Experiences, Identities, and Bodies**

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**SEX?**
A system of classifications determined by biological structure and function.

Sex:
- **Male** [Body]
- **Female** [Body]

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**SEX?**
A Biological Binary

**SEX?**
A Biological Continuum?
- Physiological variation
- Chromosome variation

Most of us are somewhere in the middle...

"Absolute" Maleness
"Absolute" Femaleness

In terms of culture/language, we only have two categories with which to understand sex differences (male/female) hence we live our lives by falling into these loose approximations.

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**GENDER?**
A system of culturally determined roles, expectations, and identities associated with the two sex types.

**GENDER?**
The Naturalization of Gender Difference
Essentializing Gender

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There is nothing NATURAL or essential about gender differences, rather, they are:

**LEARNED CULTURAL NORMS** and **CONVENTIONS**, through which our **GENDERED SELVES** (experiences, identities, and bodies) are CREATED...
“There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”


Gender Performance

Gender Performance: The acting/role playing of our gendered selves through the performing of established gendered practices (we are often unknowingly partaking of these roles through our actions).

The performance of gender is thus the faithful reproduction of traditional gender roles and identities.

Gender Performativity

Gender Performativity: The more conscious acting/production/re-production of gender roles with the intent of producing certain effects. This could be either the conscious decision to constitute/perform our gendered identities in traditional ways, or the conscious decision to constitute/perform our gender in non-traditional or progressive ways.

Gender performativity is more political, since it involves conscious decision making (to either conform to or oppose traditional gender identities) rather than the faithful mirroring of gender performance.

Which is more common?

GENDER PERFORMANCE

Or

GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

Gender as Corporeal Performance

Masculine Performance

Feminine Performance

We learn, experience, and communicate our GENDERED SELVES, through the often unconscious structuring, adornment, and actions (PERFORMANCE) of our GENDERED BODIES.
**Gendered Identity/Performance/Body and SELF-POLICING?**

To what extent, and in what ways, do we as individuals **REPRODUCE/REINFORCE**, or perhaps **RESIST** dominant gender norms through the performance of our **GENDER IDENTITIES/SELVES**?

**Theme 2:**

The Gender Binary and Patriarchy

**Gender: A Cultural Binary**

The roles, expectations, and identities of males and females have—through historical and social forces—come to be understood as the **gender opposites** of masculinity and femininity.
Traditionally Male/Masculine Bodies and Identities

Leader
Actor
Aggressive
Powerful
Strong
Calm
Pragmatic
Subject
DOMINANT

Traditionally Female/Feminine Bodies and Identities

Follower
Nurturer
Passive
Powerless
Weak
Emotional
Romantic
Object
SUBORDINATE

The Hierarchical Inequality of the Gender Binary

Masculinity (males)

Superior social value, influence and power:
DOMINANT

Femininity (females)

SUBORDINATE

Patriarchal Institutions

Patriarchal institutions work in such a way as to assert:

MEN and MASCULINITY as being associated with social leadership, power, and authority.

WOMEN and FEMININITY as being associated with social support, care, and nurturing.

PATRIARCHY

A system of UNEQUAL gender roles, identities, and experiences, which privilege the position of men.

"a set of personal, social, and economic relationships that enable men to have power over women and the services they provide"


Masculinity (males)

Superior social value, influence and power:
DOMINANT

Femininity (females)

SUBORDINATE
Patriarchal Commercial Relations and Values

2000 census:
- Male median income: $35,303
- Female median income: $20,007

2010 census:
- Male median income: $47,715
- Female median income: $36,931

But where do patriarchal relations come from?

Why is it that, in most societies, men are viewed as occupying a position of power, authority, and superiority?

In earlier stages of societal evolution, males gained their SOCIAL POWER and DOMINANCE through their relative physical:
- STRENGTH
- AGGRESSION
- VIOLENCE

Which granted men positions of LEADERSHIP and AUTHORITY over others.

Theme 3:

Sport and Performative Gender Difference

Perhaps more than any other social institution, sport/physical culture plays a central role in the constitution and advancement of our gendered beings.

SPORT:
A gendered (and gender differentiating) culture of learnt PHYSICAL practices, bodies, and identities

Sport, as a social institution, is both GENDERED and GENDERING.

It is structured in dialectic relation to the DOMINANT GENDER ORDER and GENDER PRACTICES and GENDER IDENTITIES within society.

Hence, individuals become SOCIALIZED into the GENDERED SELVES (experiences, identities, and bodies) through their particular involvement (or lack of involvement) in sport.)
ORGANIZED SPORT is considered to be a MALE ORIENTED social institution, because at its core, are SPORTING PRACTICES which are based upon, and thereby both NORMALIZE and ADVANCE personal attributes traditionally associated with MALES and MASCULINITY:

- STRENGTH
- TOUGHNESS
- AGGRESSION
- VIOLENCE

Many organized sports are structured around particular attributes which are SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS/NORMAL for MALES and SOCIAL EXCEPTIONS/ABNORMAL for FEMALES.

So, males tend to be at a SPORTING ADVANTAGE because within organized sport they are PERFORMING/EMBODYING the MASCULINE NORMS they have already been exposed to/learnt through their experience in wider society.

Of course, any observer of youth sport at the lower age levels (under 11 especially), is likely to observe similar expressions of strength, toughness, aggression, and violence (or lack thereof) among girls as well as boys.

As children mature socially and culturally as much as physically (particularly 11 plus), they learn and are channeled into gender specific physical cultures, bodies, and identities:

IDEOLOGIES INSTITUTIONS PRACTICES TEXTS

FEMININE EXPERIENCES, IDENTITIES, AND BODIES

MASCULINE EXPERIENCES, IDENTITIES, AND BODIES

Social Context

More From Friday Night Tykes

Perhaps GENDERING through sport occurs considerably earlier than adolescence? Policing pre-adolescent bodies: Strength = MASCULINITY Weakness = FEMININITY
The Social Construction/POLICING of Sporting Gender

Ideological Formations (values, beliefs, ideas)
Cultural Texts (media forms and content)
Cultural Practices and Relations (acts, performances and routines)
Gendered Experiences, Identities, and Bodies
Institutional Structures (rules, codes, organization)

Gendered and Sporting Gendering
Ideological Formations (values, beliefs, ideas)

Ideological Assumptions:

Women, by the very fact of them being women, are physically inferior to men.
Being more physically able and adept, men are better suited to excelling in sporting practices.
Sport is a predominantly male preserve, infiltrated by physically inferior women to its detriment.

Gendered and Gendering Sporting
Institutional Structures (rules, codes, hierarchies, organization)

Lacrosse and Sex/Gender Differentiation

• Equipment
• Field dimensions
• Number of players
• Penalties for fouls
• Checking rules
• Ways of defending

The game is structured in order to encourage men to play more aggressively, and women to play more “gracefully”.

Gendered and Gendering Sporting
Cultural Texts (media forms and content)

Gendered and Gendering Sporting
Cultural Relations and Practices (acts, performances and routines)

Contemporary Sport’s Gender Binary

Leader: Actor Aggressive Powerful
Strong Calm Pragmatic Subject
DOMINANT

Follower: Nurturer Passive Weak Emotional Romantic Object
SUBORDINATE

Hyper-Masculine Experiences, Identities, and Bodies
Hyper-Feminine Experiences, Identities, and Bodies

This binary may be based on extremes, however, elements of it continue to pervade most elements of contemporary sport culture.
Thus, through sport, the active and aggressive body became synonymous with the male body and masculinity.

Whilst, through sport, the female body and femininity is further tied to expressions of creativity and passivity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditionally Male Sports</th>
<th>Traditionally Female Sports</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FOOTBALL</td>
<td>VOLLEYBALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOCKEY</td>
<td>TENNIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASKETBALL</td>
<td>GYMNASTICS</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOXING</td>
<td>S. SWIMMING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASEBALL</td>
<td>SOFTBALL</td>
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(Yes, this is changing, and we will discuss that in Topic B)

Theme 4:

The Hyper-Masculine Centre and Performances of American Sport Culture

Understandings of masculinity continue to be largely shaped by expressions of **physicality** (strength, power, aggression).

"sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity"


"sport is important because it allows males to prove their masculinity"

Sport could be said to be a PATRIARCHAL institution, because it PRIVILEGES MALES, and both the ATTRIBUTES and PRACTICES traditionally associated with MASCULINITY.

"we tend to culturally elevate sports that entail explosive physical power and domination expressed through aggressive bodily contact and collision. In other words, we most highly value and reward those sports that express the most extreme possibilities of male bodies." (Messner, 2002, pp. 145-146)


The Gendered Institutional Centre of American Sport
(the hyper-masculine epicentre and gender ambiguous periphery)

Hyper-Masculine Sport Performances
- Physical strength and stamina
- Physical toughness and bravery
- Capacity for physical violence
- Unemotional pragmatism
- Assumed/Compulsory Heterosexuality

Mainstream sport is a HETERONORMATIVE space, in that it advances an ASSUMED HETEROSEXUALITY as being linked with certain SPORTING PRACTICES and BODIES.

Clearly, violence is a core and anticipated element of the hyper-masculine sport performance.

Messner (2002) characterises this as the "triad of violence" men's sport, the dimensions of which could be viewed as follows:
1. Violence Against Other Athletes

“When I first started playing, if I would hit a guy hard and he wouldn’t get up, it would bother me. [But] when I was a sophomore in high school, first game, I knocked out two quarterbacks, and people loved it. The coach loved it. Everybody loved it. You never stop feeling sorry for [your injured opponent]. If somebody doesn’t get up, you want him to get up. You hope the wind’s just knocked out of him or something. The more you play, though, the more you realize that it is just part of the game—somebody’s gonna get hurt. It could be you, it could be him—most of the time it’s better if it’s him. So you know, you just go out and play your game.”

A former NFL defensive back known for his ferocious and violent hits.


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Hyper-Masculine Sport Performances demand:

A body which is large, muscular, strong, quick, and capable of effective physical violence.

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2. Violence Against Themselves

“Doctors don’t coerce players into going out on the field. They don’t have to. Players have been conveniently conditioned their entire lives to take the pain and put bodies at risk. Players beg doctors for needles that numb and drugs that reduce swelling and pain. Taking the needle is something NFL players are proud to have done. It is a badge of honor, not unlike the military’s Purple Heart. It means you were in the middle of the action and you took a hit. Taking the needle in the NFL also lets everyone know that you’d do anything to play the game. It demonstrates a complete disregard for one’s well-being that is admired in the NFL between players.”

Former NFL player Tim Green.


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The Sporting Body as WEAPON

Violence against others a normalized aspect of sport performance

A Culture of Violence Against Selves and Others?
3. Violence Against Outsiders

“In the context of sport careers, you do not experience your body as a means of connecting intimately with others; rather, your body becomes a weapon, which you train to defeat an objectified, dehumanized opponent. It’s a dog-eat-dog world out there; you gotta have that killer instinct.”

Hence, many male athletes suffer from an inability to relate and empathise with others; they have difficulty expressing themselves and connecting with others; they are often involved in relationships based on symbolic and physical violence toward others.


Which is the more traditionally masculine male body?

The Possibility for Social Rejection

“Those boys who do not measure up, the effeminate, the overweight and the underweight and who do not compensate for this by engaging in other masculine activities, often related to alcohol, motorbikes or cars, are usually made to suffer the consequences of their lack of 'masculinity'.”


Sport Spectating and the Learned Performance of Masculinity

So, while hyper-masculine organized sport culture may provide some benefits to participants, there is little doubting that it also can lead to some very real physical, psychological, and social problems.
Theme 5: Hegemonic and Mosaic Masculinities

To reiterate, as Judith Butler (1990) famously noted, gender is a performance on and through the body.

We construct and display our gendered selves through our bodily dress, posture, and structure.


The Performance of Masculinity

"Masculinity is usually characterized by dominance and aggression... Typical masculine body postures tend to be expansive and aggressive. People who hold their arms and hands in positions away from their bodies, and who stand, sit, or lie with their legs apart—thus maximizing the amount of space that they physically occupy—appear most physically masculine... Masculinity can also be conveyed by stern or serious facial expressions that suggest minimal receptivity to the influence of others..."


Crucially, there is no single masculinity.

Rather there are culturally and historically specific, and oftentimes competing, MASCULINITIES.

What is learned and expressed through mainstream sport culture tends to be the dominant understanding of MASCULINITY within contemporary society...
HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY:
The commonly accepted, and seemingly natural, ideals of male form (what the male body looks like) and male function (what the male body does).

“What it means to be a man”

The embodiments of hegemonic masculinity are the CULTURAL NORMS, against which men are encouraged to define their own maleness/masculinity.

Few live up to the idealized masculine norm in all its myriad aspects, and so the majority of men choose a variety of different SITES and PRACTICES through which to express their MASCULINITY.

MOSAIC MASCULINITY

Mosaic Masculinities

“Mosaic masculinities refers to the process by which men negotiate masculinity, drawing upon fragments or pieces of hegemonic masculinity which they have the capacity to perform and piecing them together to reformulate what masculinity means to them in order to come up with their own dominant standard of masculinity. This form of masculinity is like a mosaic in that incompatible pieces or fragments that do not easily fit together are placed to form a coherent pattern.”


The INCONSISTENCIES and CONTRADICTORY NATURE of contemporary MASCULINITIES

Theme 6:

Expressions of Sporting Hegemonic Masculinities
1. Instrumental Masculinities

Disciplining and modification of the male body for masculine sport performance.

2. Professional Masculinities

Disciplining and modification of the male body for according to hypermasculine structural norms.

Socio-Psycho-Physiological Problems

An overwhelming drive for lean muscle mass has been termed:

"reverse anorexia"

"bigorexia"

"muscle dysmorphia"

Brings with it some not inconsiderable problems and issues...

The drive for muscular enormity enormous counters the drive for thinness associated with anorexia nervosa.

This alarming socio-psychological syndrome may motivate bodybuilders and weightlifters, and to a lesser extent some other athletes, to:

- relinquish friends
- give up responsibilities
- pursue unusual diets
- overtrain
- risk their health by abusing steroids and other artificial bodily enhancements
Because we live in a relatively sedentary society—and there are few other acceptable physical forums—fit and healthy bodies have come to play an increasing role in the informal expression of masculinity for the professional male.

3. Exercising Masculinities

**Why Men Want Muscles?**

They are, quite literally, the **EMBODIMENT** of social power, authority, and control.

In other words, they are the **EMBODIED** expression of HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY.

Whether knowingly, or otherwise, male muscles are an expression/confirmation of the MASCULINE NORM.

Exercise culture (body shaping practices, structures and meanings) is a means by which men empower themselves in ways which reinforce traditional gender ideologies, hierarchies, and relations.

Exercise culture is a site through which men’s bodies are controlled/shaped/experienced according norms of “hegemonic masculinity”.

Mosaic Masculinities Alert
Deriving sense of maleness through consumption of spectacles of hegemonic masculinity.

4. Representative Masculinities

Interestingly, while the majority of males fail to live up to the HEGEMONIC MASCULINE IDEAL, the mere fact that they accept it as a cultural ideal, and consume it in various forms, effectively reinforces male AUTHORITY, POWER, AND PRIVILEGE OVER WOMEN more generally.

Mosaic Masculinities Alert

Theme 7:
Emergent Sporting Masculinities

5. Cosmetic Masculinities

Disciplining and modification of the male body according to dominant aesthetic norms of masculinity.

For some men, muscles are not:

Utilitarian/Instrumental Forms

They are:

Aesthetic/Expressive Forms
The normative centre of masculine sport culture is HETEROSEXUAL.

In recent times, this normative centre has been challenged by the emergence of alternative forms, CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL understandings of masculinity.
As a HETERONORMATIVE SPACE, expressions of sporting masculinity are closely tied to HETEROSEXUALITY, however, physical vulnerabilities or sporting failings were often understood as markers of HOMOSEXUALITY.

Sport thus becomes a context for advancing HOMOPHOBIA (fear and hostility toward homosexuals).

However, no longer is physicality uniquely associated with an exclusive heterosexuality...thus demonstrating new forms of homosexual masculinity?


Many gay men reject and challenge the assumed heterosexuality associated with mainstream sport/exercise culture, while simultaneously advancing/performing other elements of hegemonic masculinity.

Mosaic Masculinities Alert
In recent times, the normative centre of masculine sport culture as being PHYSICALLY ABL ED has also been challenged.

Men with physical impairments have historically been challenged to express and perform their masculine identity.

They are often compelled to involve themselves in ADAPTIVE physical activities (adapted to the limits of their compromised bodies), as a setting for masculine performativity.

Mosaic Masculinities Alert
However, the emergence and popularity of paralympic sport has provided many with a context for the advancement of many elements/expressions of the hyper-masculine ideal.

In conclusion, masculinity is an embodied performance, of which sport/physical culture is an important part. It is also a performative GENDERED AND GENDERING act, at least partially measured and defined against the embodied sport/physical culture femininities to which we turn next.
See course website for related required readings, video clips, key concepts, thematic review questions, and essay question.