

TRENDS

COMMODIFYING THE MALE BODY, PROBLEMATIZING "HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY?"

Toby Miller

This article offers a critique of the hegemonic masculinity thesis, initially from ethnomethodology and psychology. It then proposes an approach that combines the idea of "categorials" from the work of Harvey Sacks with a new political economy of looking. The article examines the situation of gay athletes in the context of the commodification of male beauty and the spread of ocularity onto men. A case study is made of Ian Roberts, footballer and gay icon.

In competitive team sports there are at least two givens: One is that players want to win. The other is that being or appearing homosexual will bring shame to the team and the sport. (Schwartz, 1997, p. 56)

All the "hunks" of league are gathered in a carpark known as The Spit. The aim is to show off the musclemen of the game to an adoring female audience. The irony is that the place they chose is one of the most notorious gay "beats" in Australia. (Sleeman, 1990, p. 14)

[T]his glittering metropolis [Sydney] could conceivably be described as the camp capital of the universe, if only because Sydney-siders enjoy more drag cabaret per capita than any other city in the world. . . . Except, of course, when everyone's too busy ogling the homoerotic spectacle of professional football. (Cahill, 1997, p. 44)

[Terry] Bradshaw began saying of [Mike] Webster, "I loved him from the very first moment I put my hands under his butt," and he followed with an anecdote about how Iron Mike liked to drink a gallon of buttermilk and take liver pills before games, which meant that by the fourth quarter he was ripping eye-watering farts as Bradshaw squatted over him. . . . At the end of his speech, Bradshaw produced a football and hollered, "Jes' one more time!" Webster took off his gold jacket and squatted, and . . . [Bradshaw] got up under his butt for old times' sake. (Seabrook, 1997, p. 51)

More tackles, less tutus—advertisement for ESPN in *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine. ("There's life outside sports," 1998)

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY?

We have seen a burst of writing and thinking about men across the 1980s and 1990s, from self-help to feminist and queer criticism (Connell, 1992, p. 735; Kimmel, 1992). Most critical research into men and sport draws its inspiration from the idea that we live in an era of hegemonic masculinity (HM). The concept's lineage is in the writings of Antonio Gramsci, as picked up and redisposed by Bob Connell. For Gramsci, an Italian Marxist writing from jail in the mid-1930s, hegemony is a contest of meanings in

which a class gains consent to the social order it rules by making its power appear normal and natural. In addition to these ideas, the society contains old cultural meanings and practices, no longer dominant but still influential, and emergent ones, either propagated by an upcoming class or incorporated by the ruling elite. These are contained by hegemonic incorporation, which is achieved via intellectuals working at the "superstructural 'levels'" that make up the "hegemony which the dominant group exercises throughout society." Ordinary people give "spontaneous" consent to the "general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Gramsci, 1978, p. 12) as a consequence of the education and entertainment provided by intellectuals. In other words, popular culture legitimizes the socio-political order.

Connell, an Australian Marxist writing from Californian and Australian universities in the 1990s, applies the notion of consent-through-incorporation to gender relations, especially masculinity, combining Marxist theories of imperialism with feminism. Connell articulates the history of North Atlantic commercial republics expanding into the rest of the world with anthropological study. The result makes Western European and North American White male sexuality isomorphic with power: Men are equated with global dominion and desire, orchestrated to oppress women. HM encompasses obvious sexism—rape, domestic violence, and obstacles to women's occupational advancement—and more subtle tactics of domination, such as exclusion from social environments and sports teams, and lopsided media interest in the lives and bodies of men (Connell, 1987; 1995, pp. 185-199; 1996). Connell (1993) calls for critical investigations of masculinity across the state, work, the family, sexual practice, and organizational life (p. 602).

This model seems to fit sport's ideological apparatus, in which aggression, bodily force, competition, and physical skill are primarily associated with straight maleness (Cahn, 1993, p. 344). For example, Jim McKay (1991) says that "any male Australian athlete will verify . . . the most insulting accusation a coach can make about a player's performance is to say that he 'played like a sheila' or a 'poofster'" (p. 55). Sport has been a crucial site for the "legitimate" training in, and expression of, male violence, both on and off the field. This is evident from the record of domestic assault and public attacks on bystanders by athletes. It includes 56 pro U.S. footballers charged with domestic violence between 1989 and 1994 ("Out of bounds," 1996, p. 1050; Rowe, 1997, p. 123).

Of course, HM (straight, strong, domineering) also oppresses the many men excluded from it, whereas even "subscribers" may find its norms unattainable (Messner, 1997, pp. 7-8). HM's articulation against women and homosexuals makes it unpopular with vast numbers of people (Rowe, 1997, p. 124). Although men who feel socially weak (the working class, Black men in White-dominated countries, and many immigrants) may find the hegemonic model appealing, the real sources of their powerlessness lie in

the monetary and racial economy, not in struggles against women and gays (Messner, 1997, p. 12).

Connell's social theory is impressive, notably in its attention to history. But does it allow for a time when men are not being men, when their activities might be understood as discontinuous, conflicted, and ordinary, rather than interconnected, functional, and dominant—when nothing they do relates to the overall domination of women or their own self-formation as a gendered group? The thing about hegemony as a concept is that it explains everything and nothing in a circular motion, tending to lack a dynamic of history made at specific sites. It accounts for seemingly resistive moves to domination as a function of repressive tolerance, or as incorporated in ruling logics via cooptation; such moves are rarely investigated for themselves, but as symptoms of politics from elsewhere, and this “elsewhere” is the given of whoever currently rules. Aspects of everyday conduct or reading that are inconsistent with standard political or textual moves are understood in the same way. But perhaps they have nothing to do with consent to domination elsewhere. Perhaps they are site-specific or articulated with dynamics other than HM.

Kathy Davis (1997) is right to argue that White, middle-class, straight men have often been the point of reference in Western discourses against which others are found wanting (p. 555). Is the reverse operation also undertaken, that is, if such men are equated with the social, then when people are disaffected with that social world, is masculinity held responsible, regardless of the facts? I do not think so. Critics point to the fact that the histories Connell sketches tend to be brief and conveniently selected, his neat ideal types supported by messy evidence (Davis, 1997, p. 563). Counterexamples from the Third World abound to his narrative of Western domination, and there are also significant aspects of everyday male conduct that are about selflessness and the desire to build, not to destroy (Badinter, 1995, pp. 25-26; Kimmel, 1992, p. 167). Wil Coleman (1990), by contrast, calls for a focus on masculinity in use—not as a term freighted-in from ideal types, as per Connell, but when maleness appears in the vocabulary of everyday life (pp. 193, 196). American football is one such occasion because it involves repeated elaboration of what is “manly,” associated with “guys in huddles, accepting orders” (Seabrook, 1997, p. 44). We shall turn to that shortly. But first, some more on the HM thesis.

Using HM-style formulations, many gender-studies sociolinguists claim that stereotypes subjugate women. This is undoubtedly true. But although some stereotypes can be removed or discredited through critique, their overall existence as genres of speech is ineradicable. Harvey Sacks (1992) argues that stereotypes (he calls them “categoricals”) are vital techniques in the culture of everyday life. All of us generalize about *we* and *they* as routine cultural devices that explain both mundane and unusual intersubjective events (p. 568). I do not suggest that all categoricals are equally desirable or that they cannot be policed in the interests of a more

democratically accountable media. Rather, I doubt that language exists without them (see McHoul, 1997, for an application of this thesis to sport).

Much queer theory and postcolonial writing seeks to rearticulate existing categorials, not destroy them. To use Hannah Arendt's maxim, "One can resist only in terms of the identity that is under attack" (quoted in Gross, 1991, p. 377). Taken a step further, this is D.A. Miller's (1992) plea for gay creativity to avoid the boredom and orthodoxy of "positive images" (p. 41) and Stuart Hall (1991) calling for "a piece of [the] action" that once stereotyped Blackness—not denying or replacing existing images, but rearticulating what is in any case always already internalized and dispersed (p. 54). Within feminism, this has been around as an argument for 20 years, at least since the *m/f* crowd pointed out the impossibility of identifying accurate generic images of women that might displace categorials (see the Adams & Cowie, 1990, collection of *m/f*'s greatest hits).

From inside psychoanalysis, Elisabeth Badinter (1995) explains this trend as a function of the requirement of masculinity to differentiate itself from women. Men's lives come from the bodies of women, from whom they must disentangle their identities, a struggle that produces numerous effects, such as that women are less emotionally disturbed during adolescence and live longer. Men resent women while also questioning the role of their fathers (Badinter, 1995, pp. x, 32-33).

The Oedipus myth, found in many times and places, is about a man who has his feet brutally bound and disfigured as a child by his father and later unwittingly carries out a prediction that he will kill his father and marry his mother. On discovering the fact, he tears out his eyes. This story helps to explain the transference of boys' affection from mothers to other women and accounts for succession and rivalry in male life. Violence is the narrative touchstone, then, to masculinity (Barratt & Straus, 1994, pp. 43-45).

René Girard (1992) suggests there is a tripartite and mimetic character to desire, "not only a subject and an object but a third presence as well: the rival." Both the subject and the rival want the object. This is not due to its innate properties. Rather, the rival's desire "alerts the subject to the desirability of the object." Girard suggests that sacrificial violence is the key to holding together social formations that lack a fully achieved juridical apparatus. A subject is selected onto whom the tensions of a group can be projected: sometimes an enemy (a footballer from another club) and sometimes a friend (casual violence among teammates at practice or socially). This sacrificial figure is a surrogate (pp. 145-149). Such an argument sees a way of dealing with male violence as a necessary part of the social order, not of HM.

However we differ, most analysts agree that the crucial issue for discussing men is power: that everywhere one turns, men seem to be in power, but everywhere one listens, they seem to feel powerless (Kimmel, 1992, p. 162). I want to suggest, contra Connell, that this feeling is a positive by-product of the commodification of male beauty, and contra Badinter and Girard, that it is historically contingent rather than a timeless universal.

SELLING BOYHOOD

David Rowe (1997) believes that the commodification of sports stars may destabilize the HM thesis (pp. 124-125). Commodification has been so dramatic that it may also invalidate generalized psychological accounts of male identity. Attempts to professionalize sport for sponsorship purposes, a loosening of working-class masculinist domination, the appearance of women as broadcasters and journalists in the area, feminist sports scholarship, the "pink dollar" market among gay and lesbian consumers, increasing desires on the part of cable TV to broaden coverage as traditional sports are purchased by the networks, and political inquiries into biases against women's sport in the media all problematize the old shibboleths about male domination of sport. In 1995, more women than men in Britain watched Wimbledon tennis on television, and the numbers were nearly equal for boxing ("Sport from the settee," 1995). NBC targeted women and families in its 1996 Olympic coverage to such effect that 50% of the audience was adult women, 35% men (Remnick, 1996, p. 27). And in the NBA playoffs, more women watched Game 7 of the Bulls-Pacers series than tuned in to *ER* or *Veronica's Closet* (Demo Derby, 1998).

In addition, the very homosocial world of men's sport touches on the erotic. Sport allows men to watch and dissect other men's bodies—a legitimate space for gazing at the male form without homosexuality being alleged or feared. Admiring individuated body parts ("look at those triceps") gives a scientific pleasure and alibi. To see a man weightlifting is to experience at close proximity physiognomic signs of pleasure akin to facial correlatives of the male orgasm, in a way otherwise denied to men defining themselves as straight. As one lifter has said, a good pump is "better than coming" (quoted in Shilling, 1994, p. 144). This is "the paradoxical play of masculinity," whereby "a satisfying sports competition is much the same as a satisfying homosexual, that is paradoxical, fuck." It amounts to an erotic meeting of coeval power displaced from the site of the overtly carnal. The contestants are accomplices in a bizarre combination of struggle and cooperation that characterizes this intensely rule-governed set of practices (Pronger, 1990, p. 181). Hence, the prevalence of cross-dressing by footballers (think of Australia's "Footy Show" on the Nine television network or endless rugby-club tours), signs of same-sex desire that frequently accompany not only its disavowal but also physical assaults on gay men (Horrocks, 1995, p. 152). What is going on when the "Footy Show" has a "Pick Your Bum" contest in which four players attired in nothing but G-strings poke their bottoms through holes in a divider on the set and women on camera guess the anus that belongs to each participant (Carlton, 1997)?

Even though sport plays up physicality and plays down sexuality, the act/art of looking can cause problems. In 1995, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that people in sports changing rooms have a diminished right to privacy (Flannery, 1996, p. 8), and Paul Foss (1985) suggests that "shower-room banter, that slightly nervous parading of one's personal capital before

the other boys at school or after sport, never entirely leaves us when we finally grow up to learn that this is a forbidden subject" (p. 8). Jon Stratton (1986) connects sexuality to sporting vigor, with desire simulated through work and spiritual uplift: Corporal Hitler meets Cardinal Newman and Lord Reith on Eton fields. This reached its apogee in the 19th century at Oxbridge, where some colleges placed a premium on sport over academic performance. Empire and nation became identified with male team sports, perhaps an abiding reason why "coming out" seems easier in individual games, where the stakes of representativeness are lower (Hearn, 1992, p. 215; Horrocks, 1995, p. 149). But a less politically and personally dubious reading practice is available as well: For the gay man in 1950s Britain starved of images, boxing, wrestling, and bodybuilding magazines became a significant pleasure (Lewis, 1985, p. 23).

Is the examination of the male body an historic shift for sports? Are they rejecting violence in favor of inclusive audience strategies, with boxers displaced by or transformed into pinups? Perhaps the replacement of speech by sight as a critical hermeneutic method in early modern Europe has moved onto men in the sexualized way it colonized women much earlier (Elias & Dunning, 1986). As Sam Fussell (1993) says, "Muscles are the latest props of the dandy" (p. 577). None of this is to argue for a model of repression, where an innate homosexuality in all men is finally allowed free play. Rather, it suggests sports lead the way for other commercial forms (Rowe, 1997, p. 127). So in the mid-1980s, the Sydney Swans Australian Rules Club self-consciously marketed itself to the gay community, hiring a public relations firm that designed form-hugging shorts for full-forward Warwick Capper (Pronger, 1990, p. 190). (Capper came to be known on JJJ-FM's "This Sporting Life" as Captain Cucumber.)

This was part of emergent advertising trends. The 1980s saw two crucial conferences that helped to shift the direction of global advertising: "Reclassifying People" and "Classifying People." The traditional ways of understanding consumers—race and class—were supplanted by categories of self-display, with market researchers dubbing the 1990s the decade of the "new man" (Fox, 1989). Lifestyle and psychographic research became central issues in targeting consumers, who were divided among "moralists," "trendies," "the indifferent," "working-class puritans," "sociable spenders," and "pleasure seekers," with men further subdivided into "pontificators," "self-admirers," "self-exploiters," "token triers," "chameleons," "avant-gardicians," "sleepwalkers," and "passive endurers" (Nixon, 1996, pp. 96-99).

As a consequence, male centerfolds have become common in teen magazines and British tabloid newspapers, while male striptease shows performed for female audiences reference not only changes in the direction of power and money, but also a public site where "women have come to see exposed male genitalia; they have come to treat male bodies as objects only" (Barham, 1985, p. 62; Dyer, 1992, p. 104; Harari, 1993)—*The Full Monty* writ large. The North American middle-class labor market now sees wage

discrimination by beauty as much among men as women, and major corporations frequently require executives to tailor their body shapes to the company ethos (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Wells, 1994). American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery figures indicate that more than 6,500 men had face-lifts in 1996 (Lemon, 1997b, p. 30). Gay magazines circulate information to businesses about the spending power of their childless, middle-class readership; *Campaign's* slogan in advertising circles is "Gay Money Big Market Gay Market Big Money" (Rawlings, 1993).

The mid-1990s brought Ikea's famous commercial showing two men furnishing their apartment together, and Toyota's male car-buying couple, while Hyundai began appointing gay-friendly staff to dealerships, Polygram's classical music division began a special gay promotional budget, and Miller beer became a major sponsor of Gay Games '94 (Rawlings, 1993). In the late 1990s, Sony, Smirnoff, and Telstra sponsored Sydney's Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival (Cahill, 1997, p. 34). And the spring 1997 season saw 22 gay characters across the U.S. prime-time network schedule—clear signs of niche targeting (O'Connor, 1997). Thanks to commodification of the male subject, he is brought out into the bright light of narcissism and purchase.

Consider the turnabout of rugby league in Australia, the "working-man's game" that inscribed a model of suburban labor and Roman Catholic masculinity throughout most of eastern Australia for the first 70 years of the century. It was dying in the early 1980s. Clubs were losing money, crowds were down, merchandise was not being sold, and the schools could not condone requiring young men to play so violent and unprotected a sport (Shoebridge, 1989, p. 164). The *Sydney Morning Herald* published an editorial in 1983 that accused the "thuggery" of the game of locking it in "a 1950s time-warp" (quoted in Huxley, 1989). Much of that rough play was then forced out of the sport, in keeping with rugby league's self-civilizing mission to win back mothers, Catholic schools, and TV ratings by eradicating most of the violence: "Players with evil reputations were rubbed out" (Sleeman, 1990, p. 11). People started allowing their students and sons to play rugby league again, and TV ratings, plus attendances at games, increased (Shoebridge, 1989). For some, it represented a loss. The trade publication *Rugby League Week* ran a 1990 cover story entitled "WIMPS: Is the Modern Forward Going Soft . . . ?" in which an interviewer inquired "if the men were as hard as they once were." Interviewee Les Davidson, a former teammate of Ian Roberts (of whom more below), claimed that "wimps" had "wormed" their way into the national side. Men whom it was assumed "had guts, went to water" under physical intimidation (quoted in Roveré, 1990).

The renewal of rugby league involved an attempt to sexualize the game, supposedly as a hook for straight women. Tina Turner was hired to do commercials from 1989, and women's attendance went up 21.5% that year and to 30% of total spectatorship within 4 years (Pearce & Campbell, 1993, p. 18; Shoebridge, 1989, p. 167). The game's general manager, John Quayle, argued for the commercials because the footballers with Turner were "good-

looking, they're sexy" (quoted in Oram at large, 1990, p. 8). Sexy to whom, and how would he know? The answer came in an interview with the *Financial Review*, where he said Turner was "sexy" and the men had "sex appeal" because they "play a physical sport that relates to her performance" (quoted in Lynch & May, 1989, p. 50). Of course, this has not meant an end to the aura of rugged straight maleness surrounding the sport; Fox promoted its Super League as "HIGH SPEED CHASES. SPECTACULAR COLLISIONS. EXPLOSIVE CONFLICTS. NO STUNTMEN" (Advertisement, 1997).

Something similar is happening in the NFL. In the mid-1990s, administrators realized a threat from other media forms, such as video games, and the youth market's interest in basketball, and they also faced mothers who objected to their sons playing so mindlessly violent a sport. The league hired Sara Levinson to run marketing—the first female employed in its central office executive group other than secretaries. She was selected because her previous job had been as copresident of MTV. The NFL wanted her to push merchandising spin-offs and attract female audience members. This became known as the Women's Initiative, chosen because "our research indicates that women like the tight pants on the players." High-school coeducational football has also been introduced, along with Levinson's new argot, which talks of the NFL as a brand, not something quasi-holy (Seabrook, 1997). Where is HM now? And what happens when this targeting hits gay sports fans and players?

GAYS AND SPORT: DON'T BE, DON'T TELL

Despite the "pink dollar" market and these other commercial determinations, there are enormous barriers confronting gay and lesbian athletes. The U.S. Olympic Committee sued the Gay Games over ownership of the Olympic name in the Supreme Court in 1987 and placed the home of founder Tom Waddell, a decathlete from the 1968 Mexico Olympics, under lien as he was dying. It did not take such actions against the Police, Diaper, or Dog Olympics (Clark, 1994; Villarosa, 1994, p. 18). These actions may have encouraged the Gay Games' ethos, which is inclusive—you do not have to be gay to participate, and no minimum level of competence is required. The notion is of a contest with one's own record as much as against others, and the idea is to meet as much as to defeat (Krane & Romont, 1997). The media have hardly been friendly; when heterosexual ABC telecaster Dick Schaap (1994) wrote an obituary on Waddell for *Sports Illustrated*, the editors deleted a reference to his kissing the decathlete farewell (p. 33).

Locker-room argot is resolutely misogynistic and gay-hating (Connell, 1992, p. 741; Curry, 1991; Rowe, 1997, p. 127). Twenty years ago, David Kopay, a running back in the NFL, became the first major sportsman to come out. He did so in the hope that this would improve matters for others but claims that many on-field brawls still result from players being called "fag," a sign of continued intolerance. Kopay was out to many teammates, finding particular solace from African Americans, whose knowledge of straight White male bigotry made them excellent confidants. He says

obstacles lie with franchise owners, who believe openly gay players will lose them money through diminished sponsorship and TV audiences. Kopay calls for football associations and players' unions to issue a civil-rights statement of support for gay athletes and provide assistance to high school and college players, where suicide rates are high (Lipsyte, 1997). Since he came out, only two other major U.S. team sportsmen have followed: retired baseballer Glenn Burke and footballer Roy Simmons. In Britain, the late footballer Justin Fashanu stood alone (Frey, 1994; Perner, 1994; Rowe, 1997, p. 127). We all know the anxiously repeated insistence that Earvin Johnson did not catch HIV from a homosexual encounter (Rowe, 1994).

The noted gay magazine, *The Advocate*, ran a 1996 cover story entitled "Inside the NFL Closet: Why Pro Football Players Can't Come Out." It quotes major media commentators explaining why gay and lesbian football fans may have to wait to claim another out footballer; it is felt that life on and off the field, plus endorsement issues, make such moves impractical. But rumors about players are intense. While gay fans want to out players who are in the closet, so do their straight opponents. Dallas Cowboys quarterback Troy Aikman is subject to much innuendo, as both proponents and critics seek to claim him. His ex-coach Barry Switzer made this notable remark to a journalist: "I have to take so much shit off that kid, and he's gay." Aikman's denials are lost on many audiences (Stockwell & McAuley, 1996, p. 54). It is claimed that gay footballers have extensive clauses in their contracts prescribing public behavior and prohibiting attendance at gay bars ("Name withheld," 1997).

Of course, Martina Navratilova is out, but where are her endorsements and opportunities to comment on major TV networks? Similarly, when the multiple Olympic gold medal winning diver Greg Louganis came out, his action appeared to cost him a position calling the Atlanta Games. In addition, a state senator tried to prevent him from speaking at the University of Southern Florida on the grounds that it would "promote homosexuality" and "moral decadence" (quoted in Berkow, 1997). Female colleagues once stuffed a gerbil with its legs tied together in Louganis's sports bag at a competition, and male rivals formed a "Beat The Faggot Club" (Simmons, 1997, p. 46). These incidents were on a par with Arsenio Hall's talk-show remark that "if we can put a man on the moon, why can't we get one on Martina Navratilova?" (quoted in Cahn, 1993, p. 343).

Instead of Louganis on NBC, we heard from athletes who never made it to the Top 10 or were one-off successes. The next U.S. No. 1, David Pichler, has run into bizarre abuse since announcing his homosexuality, to the point of his ex-coach seeking restraining orders on the diver's boyfriend to keep him away from the coach and his son (Pichler & Louganis, 1997). But the sport now sees a lot of people coming out, despite taunts from straights. The only Olympic gold medal swimmer on the list is Bruce Hayes (Lipsyte, 1991). In skating, Rudy Galindo, the 1996 U.S. national champion, is publicly gay, as is Gene Kuffel, Mr. USA International 1997. Bob Paris, a former

Mr. America, was married to his boyfriend during his tenure; he suffered jibes from other competitors (Lemon, 1997a; Pela, 1997).

Perhaps the second most famous American athlete today, at least for his sexual fantasies, is Chicago Bulls power forward Dennis Rodman. Renowned in the late 1980s as one of the "bad boys" who hustled and bumped the Detroit Pistons to two NBA championships, and known for his obsessive exercising after games, Rodman is now prominent not just for his peerless rebounding but also for dressing in boas, frequenting bars, sleeping with Madonna (and telling), and imagining sex with other men. Rodman is also interesting because he rejects comfortable pigeon-holing by gay politicians; he says he is not in the closet, he just has not yet wanted to sleep with men. Further complexities flow from the way he uses queer talk to trash opponents—most notoriously asking them for dates during games and drawing fouls from their hysterical reactions (Berkow, 1998; Galvin, 1997). This refusal to be gay, straight, or bisexual asks us to think again about tight definitions of personhood in terms of sexual practice: Rodman might fuck a guy or he might not, but he would still be the best defensive rebounder in the history of the NBA. In turn, this encourages us to problematize the essentialism of the impost to come out, not to mention its ethnocentrism; Black critics point to the way that the White gay movement's privileging of being out has ignored the importance in many heteronormative Black families of unity against racism, which could be put in doubt by such conduct (Mercer & Julien, 1992, p. 43).

Some openness to sexual diversity may derive from the flow-on of the 1970s uptake of built bodies by gay men, a fascinating counter to the long-held sense that, as *Outrage* magazine put it, sport is high on the list of "things and jobs that poofers can't/won't do" (Kirby, 1986). By the early 1990s, the Australian gay magazine *Campaign* ran a story on "the rise of gay footy" (Rowe, 1997, p. 129). The buff-bodied gay man became so powerful a categorial that having huge muscles sometimes coded a man as homosexual by the 1980s: the classic V-torso, a washboard abdominal musculature, and bulging biceps (Lemon, 1997b). Of course, this produced—for example, in Gay Games advertising—a neat, clean, beatified, sanitary signification of lesbianism and homosexuality, associated with sporting prowess and an overcompensation—for men—against the older categorial of effeminate physical insufficiency (Solomon, 1994, p. 4). It bought into parts of dominant masculinity, becoming doubly an affront and an exemplification; although gay men appropriated conventional signifiers of male power, thereby destabilizing a straight monopoly, they were also further typifying such forms of life as the acme of maleness. This hypermasculinity hardened emotions and bodies—a tribute to the very models that had traditionally excluded and brutalized gays. We could either view this as seizing the signage to counter categorials or as a gruesome throwback to racist and fascist imagery (a particular affront to gay Black men) (Mercer & Julien, 1992, p. 42; Messner, 1997, pp. 81-83). Clearly, this is a time of great contradiction, which is

precisely where we meet Ian Roberts, admiringly described by *Campaign* as "a hit-load of raw physical power" (Dunne, 1997, p. 10).

IAN ROBERTS—PROP FORWARD

For a century, there was nothing about gay sportsmen in the Australian press. Lesbians only gained attention through panic-laden conversion narratives about young women (Cashman, 1995, p. 81). This changed in the mid-1990s, when massive publicity was given to the claim that Denise Annetts was dropped from the Australian cricket team because she was straight (Burroughs, Ashburn, & Seeböhm, 1995) and to Roberts's coming out and subsequent biography.

There he is on the front cover, the space from chin to hairline occupying the page, fingers spread across the mouth and jaw, with his eyes fixed on a point in the distance. The authorized biography *Finding out* (Freeman, 1997) sees Roberts pensive, weighing the pros and cons of a professional rugby league player declaring his homosexuality (the image equally calls up the poet pondering the infinite or a polar explorer wondering about which clothes to pack). But on the spine and back cover, the image is quite different. A half-body shot from the waist up, unclothed, muscles taught and veins visible, pectorals bulging, is on the cusp of bodybuilding and eroticism. Other photographs in the book veer between happy family snappies to Roberts in leather gear and posing naked for a gay magazine. This is quite a contrast with his colleague from the national team, Andrew Ettingshausen, who sued Australian Consolidated Press for showing his naked body in a women's magazine (T. Miller, 1995).

Roberts is a front-row forward, or prop, in rugby league, still the most systematically daunting and rugged sport I know after boxing, motor racing, and ice hockey. Props need to be able to tackle other big men, run with the ball and pass it to colleagues, and support the hooker in scrums (though the latter skill has become less important since the 1980s). Kevin Ryan, a famous prop, says that "the only secret to success is to be fit and hard" (quoted in Freeman, 1997, p. 45). Roberts has long been known for what the *Mirror* newspaper called his "bone-crunching hits" (quoted in Dunne, 1997, p. 10). For journalist Peter Wilkins (1996), recalling his adolescence, "other footballing codes were mere flyweight warm-ups compared to the chin to boots jarring of the heavyweight League match," where the principal goal was "to instill fear and to inflict pain." Wilkins (1996) recounts admiringly the case of a player who stayed on the field in a premiership match in 1990 despite serious damage to his cruciate ligament, offering almost as an afterthought that the man's knee "never fully recovered and he slipped from top-grade view" (pp. 198, 200). This self-destructive heroism is integral to the ethos of the game, a frightening testimony to the price placed on working-class men.

Roberts's (1997a) brief introduction to the book sees him make an interestingly Foucauldian use of truth as a technique for living, a method of becoming free and fulfilled. It is not a moral obligation but part of ethical

practice. The moral part comes in his desire for others to come out and join him in providing "the gay role models that future generations of Australians truly and obviously need" (p. x). The book proper begins with a set of epistolary confessions, a compilation of public reactions to his coming out, offered in montage form via differing typefaces. These include encouragement from a 70-year-old gay lapsed prop, tales of sex with international footballers, support from straights, confusion from teenage players, and denigration from an ex-professional athlete who "had a brush with this so-called life-style" and warns him that hellfires await should he continue to be gay (Freeman, 1997, pp. 1-9). We move on to the Roberts's family history, including the one moment in the book I actually found perverse: How could a sane 7-year-old kiss a poster of a Bay City Roller (Freeman, 1997, p. 26)?

Ian is having secret sex with boys from a young age. By the time he discovers the taunts made by school students about homosexuality, he is already sleeping with prominent young sportsmen. The prevailing presumption as he is growing up is that sexual preference can be read off from size and demeanor; as a large star footballer, Roberts could only be straight (Freeman, 1997, p. 31). His teen years were in other ways typical of working-class Australian White men; packed with violence, they involve a strong sense of turf and pride, with weekend evenings commonly given over to territorial and personal battles. Fighting is both a rite of passage and a physical necessity (Freeman, 1997, p. 54; see also Connell, 1996, pp. 170-171). From that point, the story is about wondering how football can fit with being gay and whether his parents will accept a homosexual son. There are twists and turns along the way: personal and business disasters, horrendous playing injuries, and antigay/intragay violence, quite apart from battles on the field. The tales of everyday advice from teammates are galling, encouraging him to bite and kick opponents and regard them as barely human (Freeman, 1997, pp. 72-74). The book covers the days when the brutal coach Roy Masters, trumpeting his psychology degree, instructed players to slap each other in the face as a warm-up. (It is interesting that after failing to win a Premiership as a coach, Masters [1997] continued his contributions to Australian maleness with a regular newspaper column, in which he famously wrote on one occasion of the collective beauty and rugged individualism of Australian soldiers.)

These developments took place across Roberts's career, but his special reputation for toughness endured. Those who worked with him dealt with rumors about his sexuality and their own observations in interesting ways. George Piggins, one of his first coaches at South Sydney and a former international player, is quoted as saying, "It's got to be a defect to be born with the makings of a man and the emotions of a woman. But it doesn't mean you don't have the same rights as everyone else" (Freeman, 1997, p. 82). This is hardly a positive embrace of Roberts's subjectivity, and it is not phrased in the polite social-constructionist terms of the educated middle classes, but Piggins does acknowledge the issue of equal rights. The South Sydney tradition of poverty and social distress bred people used to hard times and who

understood life on the margin, whether through Aboriginality or class background. But when Roberts announced plans to leave the club for a wealthy rival team in Manly-Warringah—long-known for buying young players from Souths—former teammates started to criticize his sexuality, and crowds engaged in ritual abuse. Attempts to commodify his image via the *Ian Roberts Total Energy* poster book countered this scuttlebutt by featuring (unacknowledged) his sister in the background, and he typically told reporters he had girlfriends (Freeman, 1997, pp. 168-170, 187, 240).

After finally coming out, Roberts (1997b) experienced much acceptance from colleagues—he refers to football as “an incredibly accepting community”—and some savage treatment. The gay press was the same, with accusations that he came out to make himself more marketable (Dunne, 1997, p. 12; Freeman, 1997, pp. 274-276, 307-310). But Roberts also mentions that league officials did not attempt to make him hide his sexual preference (unlike, it seems, those in the NFL) and have supported him since, not least because “it took their audience to a wider audience in the community” (Roberts, 1997b).

Again, we see the power of the “pink dollar.” The much-maligned “Footy Show” had a positive interview with Roberts, and its ex-footballer presenters Paul Vautin, Steve Roach, and Peter Sterling subsequently appeared in posters supporting The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (Freeman, 1997, p. 321). The month Roberts’s book was published, *Rugby League Week* ran a story on tough players, referring to Roberts’s “crash-tackling form . . . ferocious front-on defence,” but also his concern for opponents. The article noted that he had never been sent off the field or suspended for rough play and listed him alongside other powerful but fair players versus those regularly breaking the rules (Page, 1997). There is now an “Ian Roberts Tribute Page” on the World Wide Web, complete with nude shots and a series of articles about his career. He is a spokesperson for Puma and Telstra, models clothes for Ella Bache, and has been appointed as captain of his new club.

Not surprisingly, Roberts celebrates the idea of a split subjectivity, insisting that the experience of football and physical violence “has nothing to do with the fact that I’m gay. Some people think everything relates to that” (quoted in West, 1997). Damien Millar (1997) notes in his review of *Finding out* how laughable it is to assume that we have continuous, logical, or even interlocking selves, with our sexuality central to all of life. And anti-gay stereotypes/categorials shouted on-field? “I don’t condone it, but I don’t accept that as pure hatred like I’ve seen prejudice displayed otherwise” (quoted in Dunne, 1997, p. 13). In the first year after the book’s release, Roberts received a thousand letters detailing discrimination, which he publicized as part of a campaign to have gay sex-education material distributed through the public schools. Does HM help us explain this? Or do we need to think about (a) the inevitability of stereotyping, and work to seize its signification, and (b) the political economy of looking?

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