

Negotiating The Boundary: The Challenge to Hegemonism in Australian Sport

By Brad Cooper

*Studying sport provides many insights into what it is to be male and female in Australia.*¹

Richard Cashman - *Paradise of Sport*, 1995.

In 1990, sociologist Jim McKay wrote an article that portrayed Australian sport as a vehicle of inegalitarianism. As one manifestation of inegalitarianism he specifically wrote that, “Studies of gender inequality in Australian sport have generally concluded that sport is a hypermasculine, misogynist institution that ritually oppresses women”². This paper rejects McKay's proposition as a flawed and simplistic reading of sport as it is consumed in the realm of popular culture.

To begin, it is first necessary to analyse McKay's own rationale and to also establish and clarify the theoretical models on which this particular body of research will be based. For McKay, the culture of Australian sport consists of a large, unified, patriarchal network. It is this network which reflects the ideals of the ruling orders operating within the parameters of competitive, masculine, industrialist capitalism. Australian sport, therefore, represents the interests of the dominant and the powerful. Those who are denied access to the culture of Australian sport, through many diverse mediums, are the weak and the “ritually oppressed”.

By implication, the culture of Australian sport is a rigid imposition that dictates the terms, defines the structure and ultimately leaves little or no room for negotiation. McKay's concept of power—capitalist, patriarchal power in particular—is totalitarian. Although he concedes that the history of leisure “is characterised by hegemonic struggles”³, both in the material and ideological spheres, his analysis is posited in the material or concrete base of popular culture. In other words, what he can grasp only with quantitative methods: i.e. graphs, statistics and tables. He himself admits that his study is limited by “the 'stratigraphic' tradition of survey research”⁴. As a consequence, McKay's conclusions are distinctly a-historical, plus they fail to elucidate sport's positive or emancipatory possibilities. Dominant and subordinate groups may lock in processes of hegemonic struggle, but no power, according to McKay, is ever stripped from the ruling interests; instead cultural change is affected through accommodation and acquiescence. The result is that the same power structures remain, impermeable to historical mutations.

Sporting culture, consumed in the realm of the popular, is the end product of all social intercourse. Unlike monolithic structures defining its *modus operandi*, popular culture is created through a vacillation of power, shaped by intersecting forces and enduring perpetual transmogrification. Ultimately it reveals, as Jennifer Hargreaves writes that, “Dominant and subordinate groups are not necessarily, therefore,

¹ Richard Cashman. *Paradise of Sport* (Melbourne: Oxford, 1995) p.90.

² Jim McKay. "Sport, Leisure and Social Inequality in Australia," in David Rowe and Geoff Lawrence eds. *Sport and Leisure: Trends in Australian Popular Culture* (Sydney: HBJ, 1990) p.129.

³ *Ibid.*, p.149.

⁴ *Ibid.*

unambiguously winners or losers”⁵. The whole process of how popular culture is created and how people make meaning from their everyday experience is chaotic, fragmented and difficult to disentangle. Such a position, however, does not diminish the power enjoyed by certain groups nor does it influence their willingness to put that power to use. Unlike McKay's method, this particular theoretical approach demonstrates the part so-called subordinate groups play in creating everyday life. American feminist and cultural theorist Nancy Fraser, writes that, “even under conditions of subordination, women participate in the making of culture”⁶. Similarly, Anne Hall urges “to focus on sport as a site for relations of domination and subordination ... and on how sport serves as a site of resistance and transformation”⁷.

Australian sport has a long history of masculine power displays, coercive tactics, entrenched ideals and propaganda. It has also witnessed heroic resistance and profound transformation, not only from women but also from men. The following research is based on the experience of men and women, engaged in the process of negotiating the ruling ideals, that sought, and still to this day seek, to define their activity, their space and ultimately their lives, on account of circumscribed concepts of masculinity and femininity.

*We few, we happy few. We band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother.*
- William Shakespeare, *Henry V*

Indigenous culture never figured in the construction of Empire. There is evidence to support the claim that before the arrival of Europeans, Aborigines in Australia participated in leisure activities that were structured around the use of balls and other playing equipment.⁸ The cultural genocide that ensued in the process of colonisation, did not spare the sport that had previously been played on the continent for thousands of years. Like the convicts who arrived in 1788, plus the multitudes of other migrants who would follow in the next century, sport and sporting culture was transported cargo. Australian sporting traditions therefore, take their root from British sporting traditions, and an analysis of one is incomplete without the other. It is no coincidence that the development of the Australian colony was commensurate not only with Britain's growth in industry, but also with its growth in leisure and organised sport.

The nineteenth century, particularly in Great Britain, the United States and Australia, would also see sport take on its role as a spectacle and also as a profit making venture, which in an age of industry afforded sport a unique and central position in the social, economic and political rubric. Conservative politics, classical economics and Christian Evangelicalism, joined forces to present men as active, women as passive. This idea lucidly expressed by poet Alfred Lord Tennyson in *The Princess*, towards the end of the nineteenth century, under the ‘threat’ of women's emancipation:

⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves. *Sporting Females* (London: Routledge, 1994) p.22.

⁶ Nancy Fraser. "The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theory for Feminist Politics" *Theory, Culture and Society*, 9, p.54.

⁷ Anne Hall. *Feminism and Sporting Bodies* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 1996) p.31.

⁸ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p.16.

... but this is fix'd
As are the roots of earth and base of all.
Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
All else confusion ...

The sporting spectacle was the perfect locus for witnessing the embodiment of this ideal of the active male. Sport as a male preserve was decreed by the collective voice of Church, State, Commerce, Science and Education, as the perfect training ground for manliness and masculinity, analogous to those duties performed on either the battlefield, in business or in politics. It is again no coincidence that institutionalised sport in Australia had its genesis with a tired and bored British military garrison, who wishing to alleviate their monotonous routine in the colony, instigated regular sporting contests, under the proviso that such activity was essential for fitness, morale and as a healthy outlet for physical needs.⁹

In examining the male character of nineteenth century Britain, Roberta Park identifies the word 'action' as the most prevalent and pervasive.¹⁰ Although Britain throughout this period industrialised and produced with vigour, the century was also marked by enormous social problems such as, poverty, malnutrition and disease. The Crimean War of 1854-6 sharpened this need for healthy men to defend not only the nation's material interests but essentially the nation's honour. Healthy athletic men were a sign of a nation's strength, energy and indeed, racial superiority—this was especially important when great numbers of Englishmen were being sent abroad to establish Empire.

From the realm of science, the ideas of Charles Darwin, from the 1860's, developed to have wider social implications. The school or college playground was the perfect place to watch games where the fittest would survive and ultimately triumph. Often those qualities inculcated in the English public school system were amplified in plaudits of patriotic and nationalistic fervour:

*Brave boys make brave men. Good soldiers, dauntless hunters, adventurous explorers, and good volunteers, all owe a great deal to the pastimes they enjoyed between school hours and in vacations. Indeed much of the greatness of our nation is to be attributed to the training which takes place in the playground. For summer we have a capital game in cricket, for winter ... we have football.*¹¹

The English Public School ethos was not lost either on the Grammar schools of Australia. Ideas of muscular Christianity from the British Victorian quarter of Evangelicalism, provided the masculine model on which a boy's development should be based. Muscular Christianity, “symbolised the Christianising of a man's character through moral endeavour, with a muscular dimension”.¹² Although different to the

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.19.

¹⁰ Roberta Park. "Biological Thought, Athletics and the Formation of a 'Man of Character': 1830-1900" in J.A. Mangan and James Walvin eds. *Manliness and Morality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) p.17.

¹¹ *The Boys Journal II*, 1865, Quoted in James Walvin. "Symbols of Moral Superiority" in J.A. Mangan and James Walvin eds. *Manliness and Morality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p.249.

¹² David Brown. "Muscular Christianity in the Antipodes" *Sporting Traditions*, 3, (2), May, 1987, p.174.

Social Darwinism approach, in that the training of a man's body was for the compassionate protection of the weak, instead of a display of triumphant domination, the outcomes were not dissimilar: the instilling of discipline, toughness, the forging of upright moral character and the elevation of both mind and body. Muscular Christian thought and practice, amounted to "... 'manly' qualities of British sports transplanted on Australian soil"¹³.

Ian Turner reveals that the very reason for Australian Rules Football coming into being, was the desire to emulate those qualities espoused in the games played at British public schools. Although it may have been assumed that Britain had an abundance of enviable qualities displayed in the field of sport, a singular set of rules governing the state of play had not yet been devised. At this time, each public school in Britain had their own particular brand of football, soccer or rugby or anything else between the two extremes. With the gold rush of the 1850's, the state of Victoria experienced greater levels of migration, with greater levels of 'ethnic' diversity than in any other part of the country. The football played was therefore a reflection of this mix: a chaotic state of play. In Melbourne in 1886, a specific set of 'Australian rules' were codified to regulate the football played in Victoria. According to one of the exponents of the game, John D. Cartwright, football was to be made into a national competitive sport, accessible to all and for the benefit of both individuals and the nation.¹⁴ The decision of New South Wales and Queensland not to adopt Australian Rules as their main code of football, was the only impediment to Cartwright's vision.

In the nineteenth century, England's greatness as a world power was unequalled, both in terms of industry and Empire building. If the athletic deeds of Englishmen were viewed as reflecting this greatness, then the athletic deeds of Australian men also had their part to play, in proving that English stock had transplanted well in colonial soil. It is written that feelings of racial inferiority had long been prevalent in the Australian colonial make-up, namely for two reasons: the 'convict stain' and the idea that the hot Australian sun would deteriorate Anglo-Saxon blood, thereby depriving an individual of energy or physical prowess; or worse still, the unfavourable climatic conditions could reduce the 'Australian race' to the level of primitiveness, like the much pitied and despised Aboriginal.¹⁵

Although this theory of racial retardation was only speculative at best, the idea that somehow convictism was atavistic, reared its head on several occasions. The most notable of these occurred on Saturday 8 February 1879, the second day of a game between an English side, Lord Harris' Eleven and an eleven from New South Wales at the Sydney Cricket Ground. After a dubious umpiring decision went against one of the local batsmen, a small contingent of the crowd rushed the ground and a 'riot' ensued, with play eventually being abandoned. The *Sydney Morning Herald* two days later feared the incident would harm the colony "for some years to come," but later suggested that some of the blame should be appropriated to one of the English professionals, who "made use of a grossly insulting remark to the crowd about their being nothing but 'sons of convicts'".¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.175.

¹⁴ Ian Turner. "The Emergence of Aussie Rules" in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan eds. *Sport in History* (Brisbane: UQP, 1977) pp.268-269.

¹⁵ W.F. Mandle. "Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century" *Royal Australian Historical Society*, 59, December, 1973) pp. 233-34.

¹⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 February 1879.

As the Australian colony drifted in a somewhat meandering course towards nationhood, it was viewed, that of all the sports played in the nineteenth century, cricket was a game that had the potential to galvanise Australia's sense of purpose and inflame its desire for acknowledgment and acceptance. This was for three reasons: first, because cricket was the most 'English of English games'¹⁷; second, contests were played at a regular and international level¹⁸; and third, because cricket was the only high profile, male team sport with a truly national focus. As already mentioned, football in Australia had split into four codes: the relatively unpopular soccer; Australian Rules which dominated in Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia; and Rugby League and Rugby Union, which dominated in New South Wales and Queensland. As well as regional differences, Rugby League and Rugby Union were divided along class lines, with the professional code of League taken up by the working classes and the amateur code of Union adopted by the leisured middle to upper classes.

Reports from newspapers and magazines were voluminous in their praise for the virtues of the Australian sportsmen and up-front in explaining how beating the English at their own game would overcome feelings of racial inferiority and would amalgamate the colonies. Before a wholly native born and bred Australian XI left to tour England, *The Australasian* in 1877, wrote,

*Eleven stalwart Australian natives will be seen at Sheffield and Manchester and Birmingham and other places, in the cricket field, and people will say that the country that can produce such fine men and good cricketers cannot be a bad one by any means. Their hitting powers will testify that the beef and mutton of the country they represent is the right sort, and their activity in the field will be the best argument that the climate is conducive to energy and muscle. ... And the Britishers will, if our men are properly supported, see an Australian eleven in the cricket field, and when they have won a few matches and beaten the British cock on his own ground, they will have rendered good service to the colonies, and enhanced the prestige of that 'Britain of the South' which they represent, and which everyone of the Eleven can claim as his native land.*¹⁹

From the 1877-78 cricket season, the Australians officially became known as an Australian XI. Twenty years later, at the conclusion of a successful 1897-98 Test series, *The Bulletin* wrote: "... this ruthless rout of English cricket will do—and has done—more to enhance the cause of Australian nationality than could ever be achieved by miles of erudite essays and impassioned appeal".²⁰

If cricket contests were used as a stick to beat the 'mother' country, then it could also be fashioned to build bridges, to symbolise what Richard Cashman regards as 'Imperial unity'. Taken further, nascent Australian nationalism was not in any way distinctly anti-British. The prevailing attitude, especially among the middle class and ruling elites, was that Australians were both citizens of their place of residence and the wider British Empire. Cricket played on a regular basis within the spirit of fair minded competition, was seen to further cement the 'cultural bond'.²¹

¹⁷ Richard Cashman. "Symbols of Imperial Unity" in J.A. Mangan ed. *The Cultural Bond* (London: Frank Cass, 1992) p.129.

¹⁸ Mandle, *Cricket and Australian Nationalism*, p.225.

¹⁹ *The Australasian*, 29 December 1877.

²⁰ *The Bulletin*, 19 March 1898, Quoted in Mandle, "Cricket and Nationalism" p.241.

²¹ Cashman, *Symbols of Imperial Unity*, p.129.

Working from the same position, Ken Inglis, with saccharine sentiment, concludes that cricket is that most special and sacred of English male preserves, of which both women and foreigners are never capable of understanding. Cricket between England and Australia, united players as “fellow-subjects of the Queen, British kinsmen.” Recounting the words of former Prime Minister, John Curtin, “Australians will always fight for those 22 yards ...”, Inglis concludes that imperial cricket played a huge part in delivering young Australian men as volunteer soldiers to fight for England in South Africa, and also established precedents for the thousands who would follow abroad in the two subsequent World Wars.²² This account from Inglis, however, is extremely problematic for two reasons. First, he develops his conclusions after recording only the rhetoric of the ruling elites; second, nowhere has he sought to validate his argument by attempting to uncover the prior sporting experience of the soldiers sent to the front line. Again this is making the same false assumption that ruling ideas are automatically hegemonic; consumed and reproduced uniformly by the subordinates, or in this case young males, who were exhorted to give their lives in war.

Michael McKernan (ironically in the same edited volume) rebuffs Inglis’ glorification through his research into the reaction of sporting clubs to the 1914-18 war. McKernan found that although sport purported to prepare men for battle, many clubs at the height of recruitment were reluctant to either release their players or encourage their patrons to volunteer; the main reason was fear of losing revenue.²³ As for cricket amalgamating the colonies, there is ample evidence to suggest that, in fact, the contests had the opposite effect, in creating a divergence away from the political process of Federation, as *The Morning Post* from Cairns in 1897 attests,

*The whole of Australia has been so busily engaged in fitting itself for a lunatic asylum over the cricket matches between England and Australia that it has not found time to remember that last week the third Federal Convention met for another attempt at nation making.*²⁴

While most sports played and watched in Australia would have sufficed as examples, this paper thus far, has primarily examined cricket and to a lesser extent Rugby Union, Rugby League and Australian Rules Football. The reasons are simple: they are all well documented and well recognised as male dominated sports, containing long traditions, but also maintaining consistent if not rising popularity across the contemporary Australian sporting scene. Hence, they are also more adroit in demonstrating their connection to those archaic nineteenth century ideals of manhood, that persist in one guise or another, across sporting culture.

Yet briefly evinced by the two preceding disclaimers from McKernan and *The Morning Post*, the general perception of sport by various journalists and commentators, was far from being accepted uniformly, nor was it coterminous with the experience of all men. As will be seen from the next section of the paper, sport and the creation of sporting culture, was also an outcome of women's involvement. If inquiry is not conducted into how women reacted to, consumed or reproduced sport—whether or not that sport was controlled by men or by themselves—then the picture remains incomplete,

²² Ken Inglis, "Imperial Cricket" in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan eds. *Sport in History* (Brisbane: UQP, 1979) p.173.

²³ Michael McKernan. "Sport, War and Australia" in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan eds. *Sport in History* (Brisbane: UQP, 1979) p.3.

²⁴ *The Cairns Morning Post*, 3 February, 1897.

or at worst, incorrect. In essence, it becomes impossible to refute McKay's argument, when only men's experience is probed. As Helen King asks, "How can such judgements ... be made if women's contributions are not sought?"²⁵

I hated the easy assumption that girls had to be slower than boys
Dawn Fraser (1965)

While it was encouraged in the nineteenth century for men to be active in the field, women were given no such latitude. Designated leisure pursuits for women were those that matched their social reality: indoors, segregated and definitely genteel and 'ladylike'. It should be crystallised, however, that the state of women's health was, like men's, a primary point of concern amongst governments, the medical fraternity and educationalists. What separated women from men in this particular instance, was the purpose that such good health should serve. United States industrialist and President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-09), summarised the newly developed world's position perfectly, when he warned that a 'race' is, "worthless and contemptible if its men cease to be willing and able to work hard and, when needed, fight hard, and its women cease to breed freely".²⁶

While the achievements of the women's emancipation movements of the 1890's should never be under-valued, it would not be until the accumulated effects of World War II, the counter-culture of the 1960's and the feminist movements of the 1970's that women's 'rights' would get their proper airing. Before this time, in the twentieth century, women were unrepresented in politics and severely under-represented in business. The nineteenth century was even worse: women had little or no autonomy both physically and economically; a woman's best chance at securing any form of financial security was through marriage, which inevitably entailed housework duties and the bearing and rearing of children. If the rough and tumble of sport was the crucible in which to test a boy's suitability for the rough and tumble world, it was expected that girls should only participate in activities that would develop their domestic skills and cultivate their feminine wiles, in order to capture husbands. In 1895, J.H. Kellog recommended:

*The various movements required in the process of "putting a room in order", clearing off the table, washing or wiping dishes, running errands, replenishing the fire, ... afford almost as good an opportunity for the exercise and development of muscles as the most complicated maneuvers [sic] of systematic calisthenics [sic] in a gymnasium.*²⁷

As well as being considered superfluous to a woman's needs and irrelevant to her matrimonial and motherly preparation, vigorous and competitive sports were also seen as positively dangerous to a woman's physical condition, particularly her reproductive organs. Donald Walker's *Exercise for Ladies*, warned against over-exertion as it "produced an unnatural consolidation of the bones of the lower part of the body,

²⁵ Helen King. 'The Sexual Politics of Sport: an Australian Perspective' in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan eds. *Sport in History* (Brisbane: UQP, 1979) p.69.

²⁶ Quoted in Roberta Park, *Biological Thought, Athletics and the Formation of a 'Man of Character'*, p.23.

²⁷ J.H Kellog, *The Ladies Guide in Health and Disease* (London: International Tract Society, 1895) p.136.

ensuring a frightful impediment of future function, which need not be dwelt on".²⁸ If the picture of menstruation and childbirth was anathema to even the 'scientific' writers, then the idea that strenuous sport produced masculine qualities in women was far more palatable and prevailing in the popular press. Even as late as 1924, with women's sports already beginning to flourish, the *Australian Women's Mirror* was replete with such warnings:

*The woman who goes in for sports generally does it so strenuously or might it be more correct to say stridently, that she becomes too muscular and ungainly to ever attain the grace, ease and smoothness requisite for the ideal of feminine loveliness. Yet moderate sports are the ideal mode for keeping fit and young, provided one eats judiciously and cares for the skin and hair at the same time.*²⁹

The dubiety surrounding a woman's sex, on account of her participation in competitive activity has continued to plague women's sport along two lines. First, physically, such as the sex tests at the Olympics, which in the early years entailed a hand examination, later to be replaced with a urine sample; and second, ideologically, in that women's sport is perceived as 'other', while men's sport is seen as the norm.³⁰ Within this cultural context, again inherited from the older northern hemisphere societies, the development of women's sport in Australia has been one of little encouragement, little recognition and limited resources—both monetary and materially. Yet as unfortunate as it may be, the story of women's sport is one of struggle, tenacity and ultimately survival.

After moving away from the more genial leisure pursuits like pedestrianism (walking), or the aristocratic, stationary sports like archery, the first sport introduced for Australian women that actually involved movement of all the muscles was callisthenics. In 1879, two Englishwomen, Harriet Elphinstone Dick and Alice Moon opened the Melbourne Ladies' Gymnasium, teaching the Ling Swedish method. This rather inauspicious beginning would mark the first occasion on which resources for women's sport were developed on a continual basis.³¹

Although callisthenics maintained modest standards of dress and required the skills of grace, rhythm and poise, thereby defining a demure femininity, it was Dick and Moon's foray into private girls' schools that would develop in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a physical culture in the curriculum akin to that of the active male. In fact, it is now well regarded that sport in girls' schools was introduced to attract enrolments, citing that physical activity would better enable girls to cope with the rigours of intellectual study.³²

Marion Stell, in her history of women in Australian sport, *Half the Race*, argues that it was the consolidation of girls' education from the 1880's, that rendered the most irrevocable emancipatory changes to women's culture.³³ This interpretation has a touch of the unreal and glorified, considering that outside the confines of the schoolyard, the world was still governed and controlled both financially and spatially by men; the

²⁸ Don Walker. *Exercise for Ladies* (1836) Quoted in Allen Guttman. *Women's Sports* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), p.90.

²⁹ The *Australian Women's Mirror*, 25 November 1924, p.8.

³⁰ L.M. Randall. "Women and Sport in Australia" *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 70, (3), August, 1993, p.25.

³¹ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p.86.

³² Marion Stell. *Half the Race* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991) p.26.

³³ *Ibid.*

organisation of sport reflected this reality. From the 1880's to the turn of the century, team games, such as, hockey, lacrosse, cricket and football jostled alongside the more traditional, comparatively sedate pursuits of callisthenics and military drill. Although these were great gains, in that they allowed women to re-define themselves outside constructs of passivity, women's sport was still seen very much as the exception to the rule, with no intrinsic value, instead having to contend with men's sport as the benchmark. Studying the culture of physical education of independent girls' schools in Victoria in the 1880's, historian Ray Crawford observes:

*Manliness and the gentlemanly tradition ... were no longer confined to the playing fields of boys' schools. Girls were being expected to display those admired and respected traits of a muscular Christianity.*³⁴

Sport in schools did not always serve the higher purpose of arming girls against the rigours of intellectual study, as this excerpt from an 1875 Brisbane Girls Grammar prospectus reveals:

*Let us rejoice that, at last, good common sense has decided that our girls shall have the unspeakable advantage of physical training; that there shall be no shirking this obvious, but as yet neglected duty ... With gymnastic exercises for girls, as the Spartan women had, let us hope that we shall have healthy, strong, well-proportioned women, as the Spartan women were -- mothers of heroes, themselves virtuous and heroic.*³⁵

Defining the spatial parameters in which sport is to be conducted, is another tactic used to reinforce separate gender roles. Although not organised as a form of competitive sport until the end of the nineteenth century, swimming was recognised and accepted early, as an appropriate leisure activity for women. There were many reasons for this: it was graceful, perspiration was able to be hidden, it could be performed in isolation, and above all it could be segregated. At many beaches and swimming baths around the country, different coloured flags placed in strategic positions would designate the different sexes' space; usually white for women—red for men.³⁶ Other sports, such as tennis were encouraged for women, much for the same reasons as swimming. Tennis also had a distinct social dimension, in that most tennis courts were privately owned by the leisured middle to upper classes. Possibly one of the main reasons for tennis receiving official approval, was that it was seen as an excellent way for women to court male partners—not just for a game of mixed doubles.³⁷

Lois Bryson argues that it is not sport itself that excludes women, only the sport that encroaches on traditional male territory, such as the more competitive team or body contact sports³⁸; it can also be added, those sports that re-define the traditional wife/mother role. This position is valuable when viewing the reactions to those women who first played cricket in Sydney in 1886. From the *Sydney Mail*, 17 April, “We have

³⁴ Ray Crawford, "Sport for Young Ladies" *Sporting Traditions*, 1 (1), November, 1984, p.68.

³⁵ Fred Swanwick. *Our Girls and Their Secondary Education* (Brisbane: Geo Slater, 1875) p.14.

³⁶ Stell, *Half the Race*, p.5.

³⁷ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p.87.

³⁸ Lois Bryson. "Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony" *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10, (4), 1987, p.350.

had a ladies' cricket match in Sydney, but it is hoped that we shall never have another, for as a spectacle it was not edifying".³⁹ Cycling, popular in the 1890's, allowed women greater access to public (male) space and by its very nature also rendered the modest but traditional long skirts of women functionally useless. From this situation ensued the development of rational dress, such as bloomers and trousers. The various innovations in streamlined and tailored sports underwear played a significant role, alongside the opinion makers and the feminists, in elevating women's sport.⁴⁰

In Australia, the one game that women have dominated in their own right is netball. Adapted from men's basketball which was devised by James Naismith in America in 1891, netball first arrived in England in 1895, and although conclusive evidence is scarce, it is probable the game was being played in Australia by 1906. It progressed with amazing speed: by 1926 interstate competition was regular and in 1927 the All-Australian Women's Basket Ball Association was formed. The term netball would not be formally adopted until 1970.⁴¹

The rise of netball in Australia deserves more attention and thorough research. Its administration and financing, plus the codification of its rules and playing conditions was achieved through the efforts of women, not just in Australia but also in New Zealand and England. While not specifically encroaching on male space, netball did challenge prevailing ideas of what women's sport was supposed to be and how women's sport was supposed to be organised. In the 1990's, netball is valued as a sport in its own right without having to still labour under the comparisons to a male equivalent, such as, women's cricket labours. Netball is currently Australia's fifth largest team sport and enjoys an active following, consisting of both women and men.⁴²

The statistics are absolutely legion in detailing the importance that sport has played in the lives of many Australian women. They are testament to their skill, dedication and achievements, despite enduring the early hostility from both men and other women. Studying women in sporting history is like studying women's history in general: the research does not have to be too deep nor meticulous to uncover their presence; it is the reporting of such history that has kept women largely hidden. Across the board of Australian sporting achievements, women have coopted an almost equal share: they have obtained 42% of all gold medals won by Australia at Olympic competition since 1900; Australian women have been consistent world champions in hockey, water polo, squash, swimming, tennis, athletics, cricket, netball and rowing. The list is extensive and so are the household names in the Australian sporting pantheon.⁴³

It would be extremely short sighted to deny that some of the old traditions and practices still play a part in trying to control, belittle or even suppress women's sport. Women athletes still receive unequal standards in pay, their games are seldom televised, (except for the ABC's commitment to netball), and they have to contend with a male dominated press, which seems pre-occupied with presenting women as sex objects,

³⁹ Quoted in Richard Cashman and Amanda Weaver. *Wicket Women: Cricket and Women in Australia* (Kensington: NSWUP, 1991) p.2.

⁴⁰ Janet and Peter Phillips. "History from Below: Women's Underwear and the Rise of Women's Sport" *Journal of Popular Culture*, 27, (2), 1993 p.143.

⁴¹ Ian Jobling and Pamela Barham. "The Development of Netball" *Sporting Traditions*, 8 (1), November, 1991, pp.29-48.

⁴² *Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* 2nd Ed. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 305.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.506-13.

wives or mothers before presenting them as athletes—what Jim McKay refers to as the ‘*dolly-bird*. style of sports journalism.⁴⁴

Yet despite these obvious obstacles, many women, (although in less numbers compared to men), still actively participate in the culture of sport by either watching or playing. A survey conducted at the behest of the Commonwealth Government in 1995, found that 16% of men participated in vigorous activity, as opposed to 14% of women. It also summarised that there were few differences that separated women and men in their preferred sporting pursuits; the main determining factor being age not gender.⁴⁵

Since the nineteenth century women have used sport as a channel of both ideological and physical expression—and have succeeded, despite the best efforts of a patriarchal society that thought sport to be the preserve of men. No better is this point illustrated, nor is their perhaps a better allegory of womens consumption and use of sport in Australia, than in Michael Roper's vivid account of the Bendigo Easter Fair. In 1875, women cricketers from Melbourne and Bendigo played a charity match at the Fair. They received a hostile response from the crowd, especially the young 'larrikins' and the local and metropolitan press, in particular the *Melbourne Herald*, 1 April, which concluded the match had been, “lowering to the females engaged and depraving to the young spectators of the other sex.” The club's secretary Barbara Rae, unruffled by the vociferous reception, replied in the *Advertiser*, 6 April, “eleven of us will meet eleven ladies in Melbourne and play for the joint benefit of the two cities ... we will show that ladies can play cricket, and let virtue be its own defence.” Whether such an open and flagrant transgression of social mores was common in the nineteenth century is not clear, but as Roper observes:

*For the women themselves this supposed crossing of social boundaries was less important than the enjoyment and challenge which the game itself afforded. ... The women saw the match not as risque or as a burlesque, the way it had been reported, but as a perfectly legitimate recreation and fundraiser.*⁴⁶

This paper, thus far, has looked at those prevailing almost official ideas and discursive practices that tried to construct and categorise men and women into the separate spheres of active and passive. Exposing episodes of resistance from the historical record, in far greater detail than has been done here, will further prove these spheres to be indistinctly delineated. Not only does the study of sport allow insights into the ‘official’ male and female constructs, but it also elucidates the struggle—where these constructs are either endorsed or challenged. Where the points of struggle intersect, is where popular culture is produced.

What does “You rotten, bloody, lessy, commo, poofter, mongrel, bastard woman,” actually mean to people who might identify as rotten, bloody, lessy, commo, poofter, mongrel, bastard women? Why if football is such a 'sexist, racist, patriarchally compounded institution', do minority groups go along week after week after week?

-Deb Verhoven, *Melbourne Writers Week*, 1992.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Quoted in Cashman and Weaver, *Wicket Women*, p.185.

⁴⁵ *Active and Inactive Australians*, Office of Recreation Development, Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, p.3.

⁴⁶ Michael Roper. "Bendigo's Easter Fair" *Journal of Australian Studies*, 17, November 1985, pp.34-5.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Brian Nankervis ed. *Boys and Balls* (St Leonard's, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994), p.119.

In the concluding stages of the paper it is salient to juxtapose the preceding narrative with some of the theoretical positions briefly outlined in the overview. It is also salutary to consider the post-structuralist work of cultural theorists such as John Fiske, Michel de Certeau and Frederic Jameson. Social historians in their study of sport as popular culture, in particular Australian sport, have been remiss in utilising their respective insights.

Fiske, argues that ruling orders, those with power—legal, moral and political—in Europe and European produced societies, have failed to construct subordinates into their own desired image. He writes further:

*Despite the presence of a range of social and disciplinary powers, the people remain uncomfortable, undisciplined, intransigent forces. The people maintain their popular culture by a never ending series of resistances, evasions and counter attacks: popular culture as guerilla warfare.*⁴⁸

Study of Australian sport has in the past largely focussed on the system itself: how it is controlled, who controls, who's interests are best served through control and ultimately who misses out on control. Analysing Australian sport from this purely material perspective, can only direct the analyser to one conclusion: that men are the victors and women are the vanquished. Men's display of power and manipulative control is hard to refute or ignore but this does not mean that it is fully successful in implementing its ideologies. To accept that this is so, is to further lock women and other disenfranchised groups into hopeless positions of powerlessness. As Jan Graydon writes, endeavouring to uncover why it is women participate in sport is the key to beating this chorus of defeatism:

*At this stage I am tempted to throw up my hands in horror and say that women should have nothing further to do with such a self-indulgent festival of masculinity. However, we do take part in sport in some numbers, and derive much pleasure, and I hope benefit, both physical and mental, from it, so I feel we must continue the discussion and analysis.*⁴⁹

Concentrating entirely on the macro, the superstructure or the system, excludes the micro or the personal, and fails to illuminate the intimate and sensitive dialectical relationship that both share. The analysis of any site of popular culture must focus not only on the system itself, but the way that system is used. As De Certeau posits, "The presence and circulation of a representation (products, procedures and power) tells us nothing about what it is for its users"⁵⁰. In short, individuals make meaning and reproduce their experience from differently informed perspectives; analysing only the system, overlooks this nuance. Jim McKay, although an insightful sociologist, has difficulty explaining away the reality of the individual as cultural consumer-producer, using such a rigid structuralist and materialist approach. His task will become even more

⁴⁸ John Fiske. "Popular Forces and the Culture of Everyday Life" *Southern Review*, 21, November, 1988, p.288.

⁴⁹ Jan Graydon. "But It's More Than a Game. It's an Institution" *Feminist Review*., 13, 1983, p.8.

⁵⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) p. xiii (my words in parenthesis).

difficult as society is increasingly atomised, where the belief of the individual is stronger than that of the ideas held by that of fragmented and imagined communities.

Marxist, post-modernist, Frederic Jameson, believes that the effects of late-capitalism and globalisation has further weakened old power structures, in their ability to order people's lives.⁵¹ Sport is no different, in that it is big business, globally controlled and consumed, and aggressively marketed. The old parameters that ordered male and female space have also broken down. As women compete with men in the market place; are freed from eternal marriage through easier access to divorce; plus freed from the expectations of motherhood through the availability of contraception, the separate spheres of the masculine and the feminine are merging rapidly. Although just as unattractive, exclusionist and exploitative, (and susceptible to challenge) the age of frenzied competition, consumerism and economic rationalism, has relegated the active male/passive female dichotomy, and replaced it with the gender neutral, winner/loser. The discourse of sport was once prescriptive in establishing separate gender roles, now it concentrates purely on performance, signposted with the glib catchphrases, that are posited in both the marketing and common idiom: **NO FEAR, PLAY HARD**, and the ubiquitous, **JUST DO IT**.

This paper has attempted to illuminate, or at least acknowledge the anomalies, contradictions and paradoxes inherent in the consumption of Australian sport as popular culture. Admittedly this paper, constructed in the main from secondary source material, reflected a large section of Australian sporting historiography, which tends to concur with hegemonic readings. As a consequence the bulk of the empirical narrative was top-heavy with the ways of the system, instead of being balanced with the ways in which people individually put that system to use.

However, it is also recognised in this particular corpus of research that, although having its ideals, sport did not successfully penetrate with any degree of synchronisation, the reality of the populous. Male dominance of Australian sport, for all its bluff, bluster and bombast, retains only a tenuous hold within the realm of ideological struggle. The very presence of women in sporting history, in areas where they were positively discouraged, must provide testament to the vulnerability and fallibility of hegemonic control. Acknowledging—*where there is power there must be resistance*—opens new and exciting possibilities for the study of Australian sport as a site of popular culture.

⁵¹ Frederic Jameson. "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" *New Left Review*, 146, 1984, pp. 82-84 .

Bibliography

- Brown, David, "Muscular Christianity in the Antipodes" *Sporting Traditions*, 3, (2), May, 1987, pp.173-187.
- Bryson, Lois, 'Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 10,(4),1987,349-60.
- Cashman, Richard, & Weaver, Amanda. *Wicket Women: Cricket and Women in Australia* (Kensington: NSWUP, 1991).
- Cashman, Richard, "Symbols of Imperial Unity: Anglo-Australian Cricketers, 1877-1900," in J.A. Mangan ed., *The Cultural Bond* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp.128-141.
- Cashman, Richard, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*. Melbourne: Oxford, 1995.
- Clark, David, *Australian Sports Almanac: 1996* (Port Melbourne, Vic: Reed Reference, 1995).
- Crawford, Ray, "Sport for Young Ladies: The Victorian Independent Schools 1875-1925" *Sporting Traditions*, 1 (1), November, 1984, pp. 61-82.
- Davies, Susanne, 'Diggers and Sportsmen.' *Arena* 97, 1991, 30-36.
- De Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (transl. S Rendall), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
- Duncan, Margaret, & Hasbrook, Cynthia A. 'Denial of Power in Televised Women's Sports.' *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5, 1, 1988, 1-21.
- Dunning, Eric, 'Sport as a Male Preserve: Notes on the Social Sources of Masculine Identity and its Transformation.' *Theory, Culture and Society* 3, 1, 1986, 79-90.
- Fiske, John, 'Popular Forces and the Culture of Everyday Life.' *Southern Review*, 21, November, 1988, 288-306.
- Fiske, John, *Reading the Popular*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1987.
- Fraser, Nancy, "The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theory for Feminist Politics" *Theory, Culture and Society*, 9, 51-71.
- Frow, John & Morris, Meaghan (eds) *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993.
- Graydon, Jan, "But It's More Than a Game. It's an Institution," *Feminist Review* 13, 1983, pp.5-16.

-
- Guttman, Allen, *Women's Sports* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991).
- Hall, Ann, *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays of Theory and Practice* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 1996).
- Hargreaves, Jennifer, *Sporting Females* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- Hargreaves, John, 'Sport and Hegemony: Some Theoretical Problems.' In *Sport, Culture and the Modern State*. Hart Cantelon and Richard Gruneau, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982, 103-41.
- Hibbins, G.M, "The Cambridge Connection: The English Origins of Australian Rules Football" in J.A. Mangan ed., *The Cultural Bond: Sport, Empire, Society* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp.128-141.
- Inglis, K.S., "Imperial Cricket: Test Matches Between Australia and England, 1877-1900," in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan eds., *Sport in History* (Brisbane: UQP, 1979), pp. 148-179.
- Jameson, Frederic, "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, 146, 1984, pp.53-92.
- Jobling, Ian, & Barham, Pamela. "The Development of Netball and the All-Australia Women's Basketball Association (AAWBBA): 1891-1939" *Sporting Traditions*, 8 (1) November, 1991, pp. 29-48.
- King, Helen, "The Sexual Politics of Sport: an Australian Perspective", in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan eds., *Sport in History* (Brisbane: UQP, 1979), pp. 68-85.
- Lake, Marilyn, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context.' *Historical Studies*, 22,86, April 1986, 116-31.
- Mandle, W.F, "Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century," *Royal Australian Historical Society*, 59, (December, 1973), pp. 225-246.
- McKay, Jim, 'Sport, Leisure and Social Inequality in Australia.' In David Rowe and Geoff Lawrence eds. *Sport and Leisure: Trends in Australian Popular Culture*. (Sydney: HBJ, 1990), pp. 125-60.
- McKernan, Michael, "Sport, War and Society: Australia 1914-1918" in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan eds., *Sport in History* (Brisbane: UQP, 1979), pp. 1-20.
- Miller, Toby, 'Sport, Media and Masculinity.' In David Rowe and Geoff Lawrence eds. *Sport and Leisure: Trends in Australian Popular Culture*. (Sydney: HBJ, 1990), pp. 74-95.
-

- Morgan, William, *Leftist Theories of Sport: A Critique and Reconstruction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
- Park, Roberta, “Biological Thought, Athletics and the Formation of a ‘Man of Character’”:1830-1900, in J.A. Mangan and James Walvin eds., *Manliness and Morality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 7-34.
- Phillips, Dennis, *Australian Women at the Olympic Games: 1912-1992* (Kenthurst, NSW: Kangaroo Press, 1992).
- Phillips, Janet, & Peter. “History from Below: Women’s Underwear and the Rise of Women’s Sport” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 27 (2) Fall, 1993 pp.129-148.
- Randall, L.M., “Women and Sport in Australia” *Current Affairs Bulletin* 70, (3), August 1993, pp.19-26.
- Roper, Michael, “Bendigo’s Easter Fair” *Journal of Australian Studies* 17, November 1985 pp.31-40
- Stell, Marion, *Half the Race* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991).
- Turner, Ian, “The Emergence of Aussie Rules,” in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan eds., *Sport in History* (Brisbane: UQP, 1977), pp. 258-271.
- Vamplew, Wray, ‘Australians and Sport’ in *Sport in Australia*. Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart eds. Cambridge University Press, 1994 1-19.
- Walvin, James, “Symbols of Moral Superiority” in J.A Mangan and James Walvin eds., *Manliness and Morality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp.242-260.