
Chapter 8

‘Queers, even in netball?’

Interpretations of the lesbian label among sportswomen

Kate Russell

Introduction

This chapter addresses the positive and negative experiences of being labelled as lesbian among sportswomen in general and female rugby players, cricketers and netballers in particular. What follows is an exploration of how the lesbian stereotype develops within sport and how women who play rugby, cricket and netball experience those stereotypes. The discussion is illustrated with empirical data from 30 interviews conducted with women who played rugby, cricket and netball and this discussion is informed by literature spanning the last 20 years in the sociology and psychology of sport.

Development of the lesbian stereotype

Much has been written concerning the development of the lesbian stereotype of women in sport (Griffin 1992; Lenskyj 1994; Krane 1996; Halbert 1997; Young 1997; Veri 1999; Wright and Clarke 1999; Choi 2000). The focus of such direct labelling stems from the acceptance or rejection of women's participation in traditionally-defined male activities such as body building, football, rugby, boxing and wrestling: all of which contain large amounts of physical contact or the presentation of a strong and muscular body. It is clear that the level of physical power these women need to play such sports, or even the outward display of a muscular body, does not reflect the hegemonic masculinity of Western societies in which women are essentially regarded as passive and weak and men as strong and powerful (Sabo and Messner 1993). Sport is often regarded as a male preserve (Dunning 1994), an area in which images of ideal masculinity are constructed and promoted (Connell 1987). In a similar fashion, sport also forms many of the ideals and beliefs we have concerning female athletes' 'femininity' and how these perceptions are constructed and supported.

Muscles equals lesbian

Investigating the sporting experiences of women in three sports that differ in levels of physicality (contact – rugby, or non-contact – cricket and netball) and social

acceptance (whether considered 'masculine' – cricket and rugby, or 'feminine' – netball) highlights how the lesbian stereotype exists irrespective of sport choice. What does differ, however, is how and why these stereotypes develop within each sporting community. For rugby players, the most striking aspect of the labelling process begins and ends in the physicality of the sport and the assumption that muscles equates to lesbianism. Perceptions of muscular women are often fixed by the strong link between masculinity and 'butch' women. Women with muscle definition are considered a novelty and treated with surprise, in particular when compared with male rugby players:

I suppose it's completely the opposite, it's like a macho thing so they [men] can't be gay but for women it's a macho thing so they must be. ... the number of people that have said 'who's that girl with the muscles?' ... nobody's sort of really said it negatively but ... they were surprised because she has got a lot of definition ... I think the main thing that it is like associated with lesbianism, you know people automatically assume women rugby players 'oh you must be butch and a lesbian' (laugh) more than the muscle thing really ... I think people who don't know anything about rugby think ... you must be butch and you must be lesbian and people who know about women's rugby think you must be fairly fit and you must be gay (laugh) (Suzie: Rugby).

For rugby women in general there does tend to be a strong connection made between lesbianism and the display of power and, in this particular instance, the open display of a muscular body. The explanation provided by others is that this is a result of or a development from her lesbianism. Whether or not this is true does not really matter, her sexuality exhibited through the display of physical prowess and control poses a threat to both women and men. Suzie's sexuality is assumed either because she is physical or because she is a rugby player. In her research on female bodybuilders, Choi (2000) points to the threat of over-developed muscularity and the fear of appearing unfeminine. In this context unfeminine equates with lesbianism. Research on other sports, including football (Kolnes 1995) and boxing (Halbert 1997), also indicates a similar perceptual relationship between women's physical expressions, the assumptions of unfeminine behaviour and the short leap to lesbian definitions. Veri (1999) points to the definition of the female athlete as deviant because of her open defiance of the discipline of femininity. Any transgression from the traditional ideals of what the feminine body should be doing labels itself as deviant, masculine and thus homosexual.

Cath, a cricketer, also recognises the link between power and lesbianism, not as an indicator of women cricketers' lesbianism but as a more general statement about women in sport. Here Cath is referring to the French tennis player Amélie Mauresmo:

... take, for example, the fuss there was over the French girl ... you know people openly know that there are a lot of gay tennis players and don't talk

about it at all, but the minute someone appears on the ... court looking powerful ... and that was what people got, you know about the size of her arms ... her sexuality suddenly became a huge issue whereas nobody really asks ... about the others who look more petite, so here again you have a woman who is strong ... who is competitive, who is aggressive ... and people immediately want to talk about who she prefers to sleep with (Cath: Cricket).

The influence of the media in the development and maintenance of the lesbian stereotype in sport is demonstrated through the trivialisation and marginalisation of women's sporting experiences (Griffin 1992; Pirinen 1997; Lenskyj 1998; Koivula 1999; Wright and Clarke 1999). In general sportsmen have been portrayed as active, strong and competent, with female athletes defined by their heterosexual attractiveness. There appears to be a strong resistance by the media to present athletic women as athletes without first identifying them as either acceptably feminine or dangerously deviant. What occurs through this 'symbolic annihilation' (Lenskyj 1998) is the exclusion of female talent as worthy with attention, instead, directed towards her sexuality.

Lesbian label as inevitable

This research highlighted how sportswomen are all too aware of the existence of the lesbian label within their own and other sports and also provided evidence of the association of greater physical contact with the likelihood of the assumption of lesbianism. This was particularly evident in the case of the netballers who accepted that if they chose to play rugby or football, the perception of lesbianism would increase. Mary discusses this point when considering whether to start playing rugby or football at her local club and the reasons behind her reluctance to do so:

I suppose if anything, people look upon netball as being more of a feminine sport rather than rugby and football, which are typically male sports ... I found it quite difficult to talk to people to say that ... I was interested because I suppose I have always had this concept that rugby is a male thing and ... I'd be looked at differently. I would, you know feel as if I had to justify why I played it ... whereas I don't feel I have to justify why I play netball ... when I started playing five a side on a Friday it was a case of 'oh you're not going to join a women's football team are you?' basically and 'oh no you can't join a women's football team, they're all gay', oh God! Whereas I think it's definitely not seen in netball ... it's definitely seen as more of an acceptable ladies sport (Mary: Netball).

Many of the cricketers, however, also attested to the notion that it was participation in sport in general (not just contact sports) that amplified the perception of lesbianism among the group from observers:

I mean they always think that you're a lesbian; obviously if you play cricket you've got to be gay ... and I'm sure it's the same in many sports that are so sort of engendered as male sports ... I would say cricket, hockey, rugby they're always the sports that people go 'oh yeah you know', they always challenge your sexuality if you play those sports, you play in all three and you've had it (laugh) (Cheryl: Cricket).

For some of the women this was a difficult issue to reconcile because they wanted to play any sport they chose but were aware that by doing so they would attract certain sexual associations. Participants in all three sports attested to the inevitability of the questioning of their sexuality because of their participation, confirming similar findings with other sportswomen (Young 1997). Although there is an acknowledgement that there are gay women who play rugby, cricket, football, tennis, netball, swimming and just about any other sport you could mention, there was also a strong feeling of having to explain and rationalise why this was so. In particular, it was women who identified themselves as heterosexual who commented most on this topic. This suggests that even when rejecting traditional ideals of acceptable behaviour, by choosing to play rugby or cricket, these women were still struggling to accept that there were gay women in their teams. Rather than just playing the game they were attempting to rationalise why this was happening and, in doing so, identifying their own prejudices. Griffin (1992) highlights the nonsensical nature of trying to ascertain the number of lesbians within sport. For her 'women in sport must come to understand that it wouldn't matter if there were no lesbians in sport. The lesbian label would still be used to intimidate and control women's athletics' (Griffin 1992: 260). For Griffin, the real question that needs addressing is why women are subject to such analysis in the first place. Only by examining those motives will the prejudices faced by women in sport be tackled.

Intrusion into the male domain

For some respondents, an explanation of the assumption of homosexuality through playing sport rests on male resentment of women's participation in 'their' activity. Clare recalls how her participation in cricket at school resulted in a wealth of verbal and physical abuse from her male peers because she had intruded on their sporting space. This continued into adulthood with male competitors in mixed cricket teams attempting to mock her performance through any means:

I did experience those sorts of comments playing cricket, even at that age ... but not [for] any other sport that I played for school ... because it's threatening isn't it? It's got to be, I couldn't explain it no other way ... they've got to find it threatening ... that I was good at a sport that is allegedly just for them ... I have found people, other blokes, abusive and offensive, whether it be about sexuality or ... just the standard of cricket ... it makes no difference really (Clare: Cricket).

Such accounts indicate how fear of women's success in sport is utilised by men to justify their ridicule of female performance and to suggest that women do not have the physical or psychological capacity to play in a sport dominated by men (Young 1997). Young (1997) also points to the transparency of such male attitudes towards women in sport and which women actively resist by developing alternative competitive philosophies. Taken to an extreme, Halbert (1997) notes the tension exhibited between men and women boxers when it comes to sparring practice. In order to demonstrate their physical superiority and to express their unhappiness at the female intrusion into their 'world', female boxers recall beatings received at the hands of more experienced men. This was regarded as an attempt by the men to persuade women that they did not belong in that environment. Young (1997) demonstrated similar findings in his research with female participants in rugby, ice hockey, wrestling, mountain climbing and martial arts. Wright and Clarke (1999) further illustrate this point by highlighting the media's rationalisation of women's participation in rugby by confirming to (male) readers that these women are not making any (feminist) statement. Rather they are playing because of a love and appreciation of the sport. This justification is rarely, if ever, given or deemed necessary when discussing male participation in rugby or any other physically demanding sport.

Sportswomen and sexuality

When discussing sexuality it is clear that the lesbian stereotype is prominent in sport, but it would be inappropriate to continue this discussion without recognising that for the netballers their identity was rendered ambiguous as they were often perceived as being both gay and straight. These assumptions were based on two different assumptions: first, that women together are already or will ultimately become lesbians and secondly, that netballers were 'up for a good time' with men. In the UK, where only women play netball competitively, it is one of most stereotypically feminine sporting activities and it is therefore surprising to note that the lesbian label was as prominent in this sport as in many others that women play. Nanette noted that the perception of netballers as lesbians was actually founded on the 'women only' nature of the sport:

Blokes think there's ... a lot of queers as well in the game

Kate: In netball?

Yeah because it's all women (Nanette: Netball).

Taking this and other accounts into consideration, it would appear that women are regarded as lesbian purely on the basis of physical activity rather than as a consequence of participation in 'male' sports such as rugby and cricket. This could reflect wider assumptions that women who are together for any length of time regardless of activity are seen as lesbian, for example, in the case of female

prisoners. Here the explanation does not depend on the level of physicality needed to play a sport but merely the fact that women are playing it.

However, contradicting this notion, many netballers also discussed the perception of their sexuality by men as reflecting a heterosexual ideal of women. Nicki recalls that the expected behaviour of netballers, especially at university, was one of overt heterosexual activity in the pursuit of men:

I think, you know, if you talk to people and you say oh you're in a netball team, especially blokes are like 'oh the netball team hey you're up for a good time aren't you' ... sort of thing, you know, also the social side ... having competitions on how many blokes you can pull or stuff like that (Nicki: Netball).

It is clear that the male perceptions noted here reflect deep-seated fears of being ignored when women develop friendships, as demonstrated by the netballers. There is support for this perception of the female athlete as a sexualised object in research relating to the marginalisation of women's sport and the trivialisation of their performances by media reporters (Duncan and Hasbrook 1988; Griffin 1992; Kane and Greendorfer 1994; Lenskyj 1998; Wright and Clarke 1999). This does, however, relate mainly to those women in sports deemed as appropriate to female participation whereas women in traditional male activities suffer from a similar sexualisation but one which focuses on their potential lesbianism.

Justifying participation

Having to justify participation in an activity considered to be inappropriate by others can also bring an insight into how and why definitions of femininity are constructed. Men and women can be regarded as having different perceptions as to why someone would choose to play rugby, for example:

... men tend to be a bit more ... suspicious because you've entered into that male territory ... and want you to prove that you know what you're talking about, you know ... they say stupid things that piss me right off like 'do you do tackling?' ... 'do you play for 40 minutes each way?' ... women are thinking what's your real reason, what's your real motivation, do you play rugby because you want to be one ... of the rugby girl entourage? (Sue: Rugby).

Other players felt that there were constant questions as to why they would want to choose such an activity, when really it was very simple. Sue was vehement in her annoyance:

I think this is a really important thing, people assume that you're making a massive statement about your life because you play rugby, that you're trying to prove something ... and the only reason I play rugby is because ... I enjoy

it, I like the game, I like getting dirty, I like the aggression. I'm an aggressive person on the pitch but not off ... I like the girls, I like the people and that's why I play rugby. I don't play rugby to make a statement about my life, don't play rugby to make a statement about the fact that I can play a man's sport so there! ... don't play rugby because I can say I'm not homophobic and I can get in the shower with a bunch of lesbians ... I don't do it for any other reasons than that I enjoy the game and I like the people who play (Sue: Rugby).

Having to face such prejudice, together with the constant examination of motives, makes it unsurprising that some women prefer not to discuss their sporting activities within certain gatherings. One cricketer, Denise, commented on how her international status could be used as a way to diffuse the assumptions placed on her participation:

... sometimes I don't always bring it into the conversation ... because it sort of still gets frowned upon ... just like football and rugby, like a masculine sport and it seems bizarre that women actually play it ... but I think because I've done quite well in the sport people accept me more ... but I think if ... I just played like recreationally or something I'd get, you know ... well masculine ... and 'oh you play women's cricket – you must be a lesbian' (Denise: Cricket).

Similar findings have come from work investigating the experiences of female wrestlers (Sisjord 1997). When meeting new people, participation in wrestling was hidden by both the wrestler and her family, focusing conversation instead on other activities such as horse riding that were considered more appropriate. It has been suggested by attributions research (e.g. Jones and Davis 1965; Lau and Russell 1980; Weiner 1985) that individuals tend to look for reasons or causes for unexpected events more than for expected events. It would seem that people question why women play rugby much more so than they question why men play rugby and, subsequently, female rugby players/cricketers more so than female netballers. No one is surprised that men play rugby or cricket or that women play netball. The fact that these women are constantly expected to justify their participation shows that people believe it to be an unexpected activity which, in turn, reflects stereotype formation and maintenance. For Denise, being an international player justified her participation when talking to men. However, when talking to other sportswomen her self-presentation may well focus on her team-mates and enjoyment of cricket rather than on 'proving' her ability. Demonstrating an undeniable level of expertise or fitness within a sporting activity deemed appropriate for men has been one avenue through which women have gained acceptance, albeit a reluctant acceptance (Halbert 1997). In contrast, none of the respondents in this study could recall a male athlete ever having to prove himself to the same extent as women do within a training session.

Justifying the presence of lesbians

These sportswomen also sought to clarify why the lesbian stereotype was so rife. Cath, a cricketer, spent a great deal of time trying to intellectualise why there was a large number of gay women in her sport in an attempt to reconcile it for herself:

... women who play the major men's sports [rugby, cricket, football] ... are seen as being women who want to prove something, who are out to be tougher than everybody else ... there are a lot of gay women who take a lot of pride or enjoyment in being physically fit, are ... almost more in control of their body ... not as a, I don't know a signal for sex in that sense ... but more a kind of just of feeling it being fit, or powerful, or being able to do something that I would argue a lot of straight women aren't able to do ... a pride in ... yourself and also ... you know, being gay, therefore, you're on the fringes of society, therefore, you form a team (Cath: Cricket).

There is some evidence to suggest that lesbian women differ from heterosexual women in relation to body image (Striegel-Moore *et al.* 1990). Striegel-Moore *et al.* provide an explanation of this in that lesbians do not have to appeal to the heterosexual ideal of attractiveness. Gay women may be rejecting traditional notions of acceptable physical appearance in addition to the rejection of traditional sexual relationships. In studies comparing lesbian and heterosexual women lesbians were found to be significantly heavier than heterosexual women and preferred larger physiques. This was combined with a greater satisfaction of their bodies and less concern about their physical appearance (Brand *et al.* 1992; Herzog *et al.* 1992; Siever 1994). For women in heterosexual and men in homosexual encounters the display and maintenance of a certain image is valued in terms of a sexual signal (Silberstein *et al.* 1988; Brand *et al.* 1992). There is no reason to suggest that the pursuit of a mate for lesbian women would not be associated with physical attraction any less so because of their sexual orientation; it may simply be in a different way than that which appeals to heterosexual men.

Changing the lesbian image

In considering the prevalence of the lesbian stereotype within women's sport there appears to be a clear directive concerning a change of image. One factor involved may well be as a result of government funding for these sports and the subsequent movement towards a more professional and marketable image. There is certainly an undercurrent, however, of moving towards what Griffin (1992) describes as the heterosexualisation of women's sport. Femininity serves as a code word for heterosexuality especially within the domain of sport. She states that:

... the underlying fear is not that a female athlete or coach will appear too plain or out of style, the real fear is that she will look like a dyke or, even worse, is one. This intense blend of homophobic and sexist standards of feminine attractiveness remind women in sport that to be acceptable, we must monitor our behaviour and appearance at all times.

(Griffin 1992: 254)

In rugby there was an appreciation of how the physical qualities required of a female rugby player were changing due to the increase in standards throughout the world. Women had to be far fitter, stronger and more athletic than in previous years. A number of the women remarked that the image of the 'lardy' prop that trundled from one point on the pitch to the next was long gone. For the cricketers there was also a real sense that the image was being changed, directed by a need to rid the game of the lesbian ticket:

... well I think there's like sort of lesbianism around and ... you know sort of butch and sort of bigger women. Short hair, that sort of image but I think now as well ... we're [younger women] coming through, that's sort of filtering out because of the fitness side and you don't get so much the bigger, larger women now. I think maybe to play sport you have to be, you know, hard, bigger and, you know, physically fit. I don't know why you have to be gay ... I have an image of just really any female sport [being gay]. I mean netball I wouldn't think because it's sort of feminine ... like you wear a skirt (Danny: Cricket).

What is evident from such comments is the process of 'victim blaming' that occurs within some sports, suggesting that it is the women themselves that are hurting their sports because of the image they present (Halbert 1997). Danny's comment is also interesting because, in her definition of what it is to be feminine, she uses the symbol of the skirt as a way to identify netballers as more feminine than cricketers. The irony here is that, until very recently, female cricketers have always worn skirts (teams were able to choose to wear skirts or trousers from the 2000–1 season). Clearly this symbol of femininity is not transferred to women who play cricket but it clearly demonstrates how some female cricketers perceive the lesbian label.

The need to change the image of female cricketers is reflected in the wider discussion of how sport is promoted and who is considered to be a marketable product. Kolnes (1995) points to the development of sexualised sportswear and how a woman's sexuality can be openly displayed. She highlights the case of Florence Griffith-Joyner as the ultimate exponent of sexual presentation. Duncan's (1990) analysis of Griffith-Joyner's media coverage in the 1988 Seoul Olympics describes how her clothes, make-up and sexual attractiveness were discussed at every opportunity rather than highlighting her athletic abilities. A similar presentation was used with Australian pole-vaulter, Tatiana Grigorieva, and her sexualised image used to promote the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney (see Robinson 2002).

Sponsorship in elite sport promotes the use of sexualised images and in doing so directs the athlete to appear in such a way that emphasises this aspect of their performance (Kolnes 1995). Women both confirm and accept that they have to display their heterosexual attractiveness or fail to secure sponsorship to compete. Halbert (1997) explicitly noted this dilemma for the female boxers in her work and identified how those women who appear more 'feminine' (i.e. heterosexually attractive) are more likely to receive backing from promoters. Both Halbert and Kolnes also note how women can become complicit in this form of sexism. For example, one boxer in Halbert's research referred to the need to rid the sport of those women who appear like men or feel they can compete with the men in favour of more traditionally accepted displays of femininity. Halbert refers to this as 'internalised belief' of so-called 'appropriate' behaviour.

Taking this into consideration it is clear that women in many sports deemed inappropriate, either on the basis of physicality or social acceptability, are fully aware of the stereotypes in place. This fully supports Goffman's (1963) notion of the hierarchy of body idioms that individuals embrace and use to judge themselves and others. The women within these sports recognise those physical characteristics that are valued above others and use these to determine 'appropriate' sporting appearance. Griffin (1992) suggests that by becoming active in the process of trying to change the image of some women's sports, women are taking an active role in the continuation of such stereotypes. She argues 'the energy expended in making lesbians invisible and projecting a happy heterosexual image keeps women in sport fighting among ourselves rather than confronting the heterosexism and sexism that our responses unintentionally serve' (Griffin 1992: 260–1).

Lesbianism as a positive identity?

Not all women found the presence of lesbians to be such a negative experience. For some the assumption that there might be gay women within a sport team provided a way into a social scene that suited them; a social environment where it was safe to be 'out' and which provided a friendship network based on similar life styles was highly sought by some women:

I think there's a lot of people as well who come into it because it is predominantly gay, the social life is really important and I also think the extension of that is that if they are gay they find an identity there because it's a scene (Sue: Rugby).

For many women, having a recognised or known assumption about the presence of gay women in sport can result in a positive experience through membership. Having a safe environment in which to express their sexuality was very empowering for these women. Many discussed the ways in which the team provided opportunities for acceptance and recognition as a gay woman within sport. Lenskyj (1994) highlights the potential for positive experience through her

investigation of the Notso Amazon Softball League in Toronto. Here the women-only recreational league provided an avenue for lesbian and lesbian-friendly women to gather together and share their love of sport. This ultimately provided an avenue for social support, friendship development and partner finding.

However, for some rugby women the open display of their sexuality was seen as damaging to the game, as in cricket, and used as a source of resentment and suspicion within the higher ranks of female sport. There was a real sense of having to explain and justify in some way why there was such a large number of gay women within certain sports. Griffin (1992) discusses the so-called predatory lesbians who seek out the naive and vulnerable as an argument put forward by the heterosexual majority to prevent young women from participating in sporting activities. This assumption was clearly identified in 1994 when Denise Annetts had been dropped from the Australian women's cricket team. She alleged that her sacking was due to her heterosexual preference and marital status (Burroughs *et al.* 1995). Although never proven, the speculation provided an avenue for rumours to abound concerning the sexual preference of all the women within the cricket team. Incidents such as these not only serve to question the sexuality of any athlete in a traditionally male-dominated sport, but also suggest that the presence of lesbian athletes is wrong and damaging.

It is clear from the rugby and cricket women in this study that the majority who watch and participate in those sports perceive the assumption of homosexuality negatively. For cricketers, in particular, there is an acceptance of the need to change the image in order to promote the sport to younger women and rid the game of the older more 'butch' woman. The demarcation of the lesbian stereotype is demonstrated clearly when discussing the perceptions of netballers as lesbian. For the women interviewed there was a recognition of the presence of the stereotype of them as gay because they were 'all women together', as distinct from that focused on the rugby players and cricketers. Here the perception of lesbianism within netball had a more positive association for male observers because it appealed to men's own heterosexual ideals of sexual fantasy. Nicola notes how the men she talked to were fascinated by the prospect of there being gay women within netball because it fitted a heterosexual fantasy of the 'lipstick lesbian' who would perform for their pleasure:

... from men one of the things they probably think, they're hoping that you're either going to be gay, whether there's a lot of gays or whatever lesbians would be in that sport because it's an all female sport

Kate: Even in netball?

... because it's a female sport, they think straight away they think 'oh right' ... but they ... I think they like to imagine, you know 'cos it's one of their fantasies (Nicola: Netball).

It would appear that the presence of gay women in netball is more acceptable than in rugby and cricket if netball women are regarded as attractive in a heterosexual

framework. This would mean that they were subsequently open, therefore, for sexual appreciation and objectification. We find further explanation of this phenomenon in the work of Veri (1999) who notes how the male heterosexual gaze is uninterrupted when athletes participate in sports traditionally reserved for women (e.g. figure skating, gymnastics and netball). Here the female athlete is still able to be objectified as a sexual object because she has not removed herself from what Veri calls 'compulsory heterovisuality'. This supports the notion that when women do participate in activities which are more masculine (e.g. rugby, cricket or football) the gaze, which holds her as sex object and not athlete, is disrupted.

Limiting perceptions of femininity

In considering the limiting perceptions of femininity, Halbert describes the marketing situation in women's boxing whereby appearing more feminine results in more fights. Here there is only one definition of femininity as meaning 'not manlike' which prevents any other possible expression of femininity. Being regarded as feminine by male observers and promoters produces a clash with what Halbert calls 'heterosexist logic'. This asserts that women who participate in the masculine sport of boxing must themselves not be feminine (Halbert 1997). This correlates strongly with the dynamics of women's rugby when women who appeal to male heterosexual ideals of attractiveness elicit surprise by those watching and all the more so if they are talented. What is clear, however, is that these remarks do not reflect the experiences of women who play these sports. As found with female bodybuilders (Marsh and Jackson 1986), perceptions of their own femininity are no less so because of their sports participation. Clearly the women who are actively involved in these sports are able to develop multidimensional constructs of femininity and ones which do not rely on restrictive codes of acceptable heterosexual identities.

Women's ideals of sportswomen

It should be recognised that women within sport also contribute to the exclusion of women who do not fit *their* ideal of what it is to be a sportswoman. One cricketer recalls how shameful it would be to be bowled out by someone she called a 'dolly bowler'. The bowler in question was tall, slim, had long blond hair and was not considered to be a serious competitor solely because of her physical appearance:

... you may have the worse bowler in the world bowling at you but they might just come up with one corker of a ball and it'll get you out and ... a lot of that as well is pride because you think 'oh God I've just been out by a dolly bowler', you know and the shame of it (Delia: Cricket).

It is clear that, for this particular cricketer, there is as much fear exhibited by her need to avoid defeat by a 'dolly bowler' as there is for a man to avoid defeat by a 'girl'. For Delia, an exit at the hand of this bowler can only be evaluated through a mocking of her appearance rather than as an acceptance of her superior playing skills.

Expectations of physical appearance permeate all levels of the sports presented here and by all competitors. However, there is an evident tension between maintaining an image which is appropriate for the sport and seeking an image that appeals to potential participants. Whilst there is recognition of the heterosexist definitions of female sport participants as lesbian there also appears to be an exclusion by the participants themselves of women who do not fit that image. For women within the sport there is a rejection of those they consider to be too feminine: the 'dolly bowlers', the 'mud wrestlers' and the 'Foxee' boxers. This is based not only on the presence of these women as supposed ridiculers of their sport but also on what the female participants consider to be appropriate physical appearance. What is evident is that for these sportswomen there is a conflict between rejecting traditional ideals of acceptable behaviour, demonstrated by their choice of sport, but also in accepting women into their sport who choose to conform to ideals of heterosexual attractiveness.

There is an expectation for the 'real' sportswomen to reject traditional ideals of what a woman should look like by simply imposing one set of rules for another. The irony would appear to be that it is at times the women within the sport itself who prevent inclusiveness. Thus women who participate in sport have complex views of what femininity means to them and what it should mean to others. This situation suggests that there may well be two sets of body idioms or shared vocabularies, which are used to judge the presentation of the self (Goffman 1963). On the one hand there is an agreed set of society idioms that are adopted and used to judge others and ourselves. On the other hand there may well be specific sport-based idioms that direct the judgements of sportswomen to either accept or reject a presented physical appearance.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on how sexuality comes to bear such an influence on the enjoyment and participation of women in sport. The underlying link of women's physical activity to lesbianism has been identified revealing that women in sport are regarded as potential lesbians regardless of their activity being seen as gender-appropriate or not. Moreover, the chapter has demonstrated how the development of positive and negative lesbian stereotypes is formulated through the perception of male observers with netballers being described as lesbian and promoting a male fantasy which appealed to heterosexual ideals of female attractiveness. For rugby players and cricketers, however, the assumption of lesbianism was strongly related to the image of women in those sports as 'butch' and muscular and, therefore, not attractive to heterosexual men. This led to many women feeling that they had to

justify their participation in these two sports and search for an approval through sporting excellence.

It is clear that the ways in which socially constructed ideals of femininity are formed permeate all levels of society. Even when resisting social standards of acceptable physical behaviour, by playing cricket and rugby, the women within these sports still find themselves judging others by constructed notions of physical attractiveness with the irony that it is often sportswomen themselves who create alternative body idioms to judge members of their own teams. It is also clear that certain social processes prescribe what those bodies should look like. In particular, it is often the marketing and promotion of sports that have determined which bodies are viewed as successful and financially viable. Although, as Goffman (1963) argues, individuals usually have the ability to control and monitor their bodily performances in order to interact with other people, the meanings attributed to that performance are not determined by the individual. Meanings are the result of negotiated constructions and reconstructions by individuals as they interact with other people. If one sport performance is valued over another, such as 'feminine' over 'masculine', women may come to be categorised as failed members of society or sport society by others. This may result in an internalisation of that label and incorporation of it into a 'spoiled' self-identity (Goffman 1968). In these ways, in and through sport, dominant and subordinate body stories and identities are created and maintained (Sparkes 1997).

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