

SOMETHING'S BUBBLING UNDER THE SURFACE:
Organized Sports & Masculinities in a Changing World

An Honors Thesis for the Department of Sociology

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*We all like to say that we seek to “empower” children,
but our efforts occur within a system of public
education that is structured to do otherwise.*

—Eric Rofes

introduction
HIGH SCHOOL GYM CLASS

It was freshman year of high school, and there were two things I couldn't come to terms with: one, that I was older than most of my friends but by far the least "developed," whatever that means; and two, that I was attracted to boys.

The first concern was ever-present. It was a constant reminder of some sort of physiological shortcoming in my DNA. In ninth grade, I had swooping hair that flowed across my scalp like a thick helmet. I hadn't really grown much, either, while the boys around me were growing exponentially, shedding their middle school chubbiness and growing beards. Pictures from 2009 will tell you: I was not.

Crossing my arms over my chest to conceal my corporeal insecurities became my default way of standing. I felt most comfortable wearing a backpack, clipping the straps across my chest and stomach to hide myself from the eyes of my high school peers. I felt safest when, in the high school production of *Beauty and the Beast*, I played the role of a cheese grater—the clunky metallic costume hid my bodily insecurities in ways that gave me and others a way of laughing *with* me, and not necessarily at me. My best friend, on the other hand, played Gaston, the highly masculine antagonist who woos women with his chest of hair and physical prowess. He was younger than I was, and yet I was in the back, dancing in a cheese grater costume, singing with the altos because the tenor part was too low.

I spent most of my freshman year watching as my male-bodied friends skyrocketed in height and grew hair out of their faces and armpits at rates way beyond what I could comprehend: *Why was I so jealous?* The most dreaded part of my day was in the locker room, when I would hide in a corner and change my clothes as fast as I could. I was in and out. I did not stop to converse with the other boys. I heard them talking about sports—outdoing each other with who

knew more about the latest stats, the latest game, the latest star player. I heard them discussing the previous night's game. I heard them calling other boys faggots, joking about how one boy was staring at another boy changing. I tried not to be the brunt of that joke, so I hid away.

The second concern is inextricably linked to the first concern, and that was the creeping, all-consuming fear that I was gay. I went to a fairly large public high school—a high school that once cleared out the drama club's prop room to make space for a half-time room for the football team. This concern was real.

*

For whatever reason (or, as this thesis will suggest, for very specific, historical reasons), it seemed like gym class was the time of day I was most susceptible to homophobic bullying. One day, within my first month of high school, my gym class was playing kickball and I was standing by home base, waiting to kick. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed three students—one boy and two girls—talking to each other and snickering in my general direction. The boy, a senior, finally broke from conversation with the girls and turned to me with a gaze that said: *What I'm about to say is going to hurt your feelings, and I can't wait to say it.*

“Hey, are you gay?” he asked. The girls were also listening intently.

“No,” I said, with all the force I could muster from my flustered, completely defensive (yet defenseless) body.

“Oh. Good,” he replied. The three of them laughed. I kicked the ball and ran for first base, my face bright red, my body retreating into its defensive, arms-crossed position.

In another instance, several months later, we were playing floor hockey in the gymnasium.

Luckily enough, I was placed on a team with my friends and we had a good time that day. We

goofed off, passing the puck, joking about how bad we were. It was, I have to admit, a *fond* memory of gym class.

After the game, we were putting our hockey sticks back into the equipment box. As I was in line to put my stick back, I saw one boy—a boy I had known since elementary school—looking at me, a mean, twisted grin on his face. I hadn't spoken to him in a while, probably not since middle school or maybe even the end of elementary school.

And, like a slow-motion punch in the gut, I watched as he leaned closer into his friend and said, so I could hear: “We didn't even get to hit the faggot.”

*

I tell these stories not to ignite pity in the reader, but to suggest why I remain highly critical when developmental and sociological research suggests that sport is “opening up” its gates, so to speak: that it is becoming more accepting, welcoming, *encouraging*, even, of queer people. Remaining critical does not mean turning a blind eye to genuine improvements made to the institution of sport, nor does it mean ignoring theoretical and empirical contributions that challenge the notion that sport, as an institution, is rife with inequities, hierarchies, and violence. For me, remaining critical means tuning in to institutional changes, while constantly turning my gaze towards insidious and hegemonic mechanisms of power that reproduce inequities, even amongst ostensible improvements. I implore my readers to think deeper, too.

I tell these stories also to position myself very clearly within this research, quite like Eric Rofes (2005, 1), who, in his groundbreaking book on radical queer pedagogies in schools, boldly proclaims: “This book is about me.” In a similar vein, and, in fact, directly motivated by Rofes' veracity, this thesis is about me. It is about the 14-year-old White, middle-class gay boy in his high school gym class who dreaded changing with other boys in the locker room, but was too

afraid to speak up. It is about the boy who was called a faggot on multiple occasions in physical education class—a state-mandated graduation requirement, not an elective. It is about the boy who fed back into a homophobic system because he just wanted to feel accepted by his peers. It is about the boy who learned very quickly that to be “straight-acting” was the quickest route to safety and acceptance, but how “straight-acting” had, and still has, all sorts of raced, classed, and gendered meanings attached to it.

With my personal experiences, along with the voice afforded to me by the multiple axes of power upon which I sit, I dig deeper into the world of sport and masculinities, uncovering institutional injustices and paying close attention to improvements (although complicating these improvements along the way). This thesis is about pushing our ideas of sport as a positive context for youth much, *much* further. This thesis is about continuing the work of many sociologists who have fearlessly blazed a path to critique an institution that is tirelessly protected by capitalist and populist investment. This thesis, hopefully, will help pass off the microphone to those who often go unheard.

This thesis is me, finally coming to terms with high school gym class.

chapter one
WHAT'S MIKE RICE SO ANGRY ABOUT?
Situating Masculinities within Athletic Contexts

In 2012, Mike Rice was the head coach of the Rutgers men's basketball team.

In just his second year, Rice was an established presence at Rutgers. Heading into his third year at the Division I school, Rice was guaranteed a salary of \$700,000 by the university and the athletic department. While this salary is actually quite lower than the average yearly salary of a college basketball coach—which, as it stands, is in the ballpark of an astonishing \$1.4 million¹—it is nonetheless an appreciable amount considering Rutgers' winning but otherwise lackluster record under Rice's leadership. At least in terms of the financial investment they were willing to make in him, it is reasonable to conclude that the athletic department at Rutgers saw Rice as a positive thing for the men's basketball team. As it stood in 2012, Mike Rice had it made.

Then, in 2013—just two years into his promised and promising career at Rutgers—hours of video footage were released of Rice's behavior in games and in practices.² The videos showed Rice to be a violent man, both physically and verbally, to his athletes. In one video, Rice is seen angrily throwing basketballs at players who had disappointed him.³ In some instances, Rice holds the basketball over his head and heaves the basketball down at the players' stomachs. In one moment, Rice launches a basketball at a player's head when he is not paying attention—all the while, Rice is yelling, scolding the players for their weak plays and poor basketball skills.

In another video, Rice berates a player, calling him "Pookie Bear" for inadequately blocking another player during a drill. In that same video, Rice demonstrates his highly

¹ "NCAA Salaries," *USA Today* <http://sports.usatoday.com/ncaa/salaries/mens-basketball/coach/>

² "The Coach Who Exploded," *NY Times*, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/magazine/the-coach-who-exploded.html>

³ "Mike Rice Closeout Drill - raw footage," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMgAcj-emjY>

authoritarian leadership by yelling at one player, whom he has told to fall down on the court, face-up. When the player on the ground starts to get back up, Rice yells: “Stop. Sit your ass down. I didn’t say you could get up.”

In another, Rice yells at a member of the team: “You fucking fairy. You’re a fucking faggot.”⁴ Crouched down with his hands on his knees, Rice hurls these homophobic insults with calculated vitriol. The words are violent and loud, and echo around the basketball court with a disturbing resonance. Nobody around Rice steps in to stop him; in fact, many just simply stand and watch. According to Eric Murdock, former director of player development at Rutgers, Rice frequently hurled misogynistic slurs at his players.⁵ Indeed, it seems Rice’s abusiveness was fairly well-documented and understood even before the videos were released—even by the Rutgers administration, the same administration that guaranteed him a \$700,000 salary. For Rice, then, these violent practices seemed less like outbursts and more like an everyday routine.

Once aired on ESPN’s highly publicized “Thirty for Thirty” segment, the sports world was once again embroiled in a national debate about the nature of the institution—its seeming inextricability from the promotion of damaging masculinity, from violence, abuse, homophobia, misogyny, racism and, what is more often the case, the interlocking relationship of these multiple vectors of power. Once the scandal made national news, Rice was swiftly suspended and fined, and then eventually fired from Rutgers (but not without some strategic resistance from the Rutgers administration).

What is important to remember about this “scandal,” however extreme it might seem, is that these coaches exist. I did not make Mike Rice up for the purpose of this thesis. These coaches are not simply viral sensations, propping up national debate about masculinity and

⁴ “Rutgers’ Mike Rice - degrading his Rutgers basketball players,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkiRrUoVK9A>

⁵ “Mike Rice Bullying Players at Practice,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mtf6eWtGWh0>

homophobia in sport. From a sociological perspective, it is crucial to understand Rice's abuse not as Rice's own pathological, individual manifestation of violence, but as intimately connected to systemic *power*, both as the head of a DI men's basketball team and as a social actor within the larger institution of sport, a common site for the reproduction of inequities (see Messner 2007). Indeed, the attitudes and practices that Rice propagates stem from places, and it is important to investigate where those places are, what they are made of, and how they come to be.

*

Mark Wise,⁶ a middle-aged White man from the Northeast, and Hannah Fischer, a young White woman in her early-30s—both former DI athletes—shared uncannily similar stories with me in interviews. Mark and Hannah both work for the same sport non-profit that teaches about “positive sport culture” to youth, high school and college athletes and coaches. Mark talked extensively about his self-taught love for sport: without much outward support from his parents, Mark made his way through neighborhood street hockey games, various high school sports, and finally ended up as a DI athlete at an elite university in the Northeast. Hannah, on the other hand, was a self-diagnosed “quitter” as a child, and had to be dragged to school try-outs by her father, amidst crying and protest. As experienced athletes and coaches who work in non-profit sport education, they both talked at length about the institution of sport, where it can go right, and where it has gone wrong. Although their experiences are separated very clearly along various lines of gender, age, and location, they shared with me strikingly similar narratives of coaches that co-opt abusive practices. When I asked Mark to tell me about someone from his experience

⁶ This is a pseudonym, like all other names, places, and organizations in this thesis that are not drawn from popular media sources. To further protect the anonymity of these participants, I have changed some other non-essential identifying information, like the specific sport in which they participated (although, in some cases, this was unavoidable) or where they're from. All other details, including the quotes used, are drawn faithfully and verbatim from our interviews together.

who represents a *negative* aspect of sport culture, he did not hesitate to talk about his coach at the DI school he attended:

[H]e was petty and spiteful and he was incredibly denigrating. He—you really got the sense that he didn't like us. And, uh, in fairness to him, he might've done, it may have been in a joking way, but we had a specific instance where we lost to [a rival university]. We were driving back on the ... turnpike. He made the bus driver pull over, he got off the bus, threw up on the side of the road, got back on the bus and said: "See? I told you, [you] guys make me sick." And he would call us pussies and he just, he really, you know, throwing stuff and denigrating, and... [trails off].

Hannah, although about twenty years Mark's junior, shared a similar experience:

We have a kid and her high school coach was *the* worst. Like, she just goes into the gym and he is nonstop screaming, like ripping the kids apart, telling them they suck. Like, the kid I was there to watch [and recruit for a DI scholarship], [the coach] is like, "I don't even know why the fucking [university] coach is here to watch you." Like, "you suck!" Like, it was brutal.

These complicated and upsetting experiences exhibit multiple layers of the violent, often gendered, power that accompanies participation in organized sport. These coaches—who span different levels of sport participation—are not simply hurling empty, meaningless words at their players. In Hannah's story, we witness the lack of genuine buy-in that often exists for women athletes: if they are not exceptional, then they are often seen as simply playing for fun, for friends, for something to do on the side. They are not, as we witness in this story, as worthy of athletic scholarship—of the type of fiscal support that men are given for the same sports, at the same levels.⁷ The young woman in Hannah's story (who ended up receiving the DI scholarship and playing for a successful Ivy League team) was told by her male coach that she "sucks," that she is not worth the investment that an elite university expressed interest in making.

⁷ Women's Sports Foundation, 2011, <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/en/home/research/articles-and-reports/equity-issues/pay-inequity>

Although it is a different scenario separated by several decades, similar abusive flows of power can be exhibited in Mark's story of his abusive coach. In Mark's story, the use of "pussy" to insult his players is not some arbitrary, depoliticized insult. On the contrary, "pussy" is used very deliberately to feminize—and thus to dehumanize, to make lesser—his team. Through the word, the players are taught that to be anything but strong, emotionless, athletic, winning, *masculine* players is to *not* be a man. And to not be a man, for some reason, makes their coach "sick" with grief and disgust.

Indeed, Mark's coach equates that which is feminine with inadequacy, incompetence, and inability. It is a word evocative of the deeply rooted gender inequalities that organized sport, as I will explain below, was initially meant to protect and sustain. Codified, formal, organized sport, after all, developed as a direct response to the widespread societal fear that processes of industrialization and modernization were feminizing society (Anderson 2009; Dunning 1999). Organized sport was a way for boys to reconnect with their "primal" masculine selves—to answer complicated questions about what it meant to be a man, to re-carve the rigid binary lines of a gender system that was becoming too murky, too contested.

While it is perhaps easy to de-historicize and de-politicize, then, insults like "pussy" or "faggot," which now seem so commonplace in the dominant lexicon of insults, this participant's wrenching story reminds us all too clearly where these words come from, the weight they carry, and the effect they have on the people against whom they are used. Indeed, Mark told me he was so repulsed by his college coach that he did not return to the university until his own son, decades later, bought him tickets to a game for Christmas.

In many ways, Mark's and Hannah's stories are reminiscent of the 2013 Mike Rice incident. In all examples, physical and verbal violence is central. Both DI university coaches

threw things (basketballs, equipment, etc.) at their players—humiliated them with physical abuse and an authoritarian method of coaching. All coaches, including the high school coach, used abusive language, often mired in misogynistic and/or homophobic sentiment, to relay their disappointment and anger. Mark’s college coach called his team “pussies” when they lost; the high school coach in Hannah’s story made his athlete feel unworthy; Rice hurled a number of insults at his players, including “faggot” and “fairy” and, most infamously, “Pookie Bear.”

These brief snapshots into the sport world paint a picture of organized sport as variously violent, denigrating, misogynistic, homophobic, and unsafe. While sport has been studied by many as a positive context for youth (see Holt 2008), these experiences suggest the need for a deeper glance into the institution—its history, its proclivity for violence, and even its abundant opportunities for growth and change. It is not sufficient, it seems, to promote sport as a positive developmental context for youth without conducting a thorough and critical interrogation of the institution. As Jay Coakley (2011, 307) asserts in a quote that has become the very foundation of this thesis:

[...] sport-related decisions and policies remain shaped primarily by unquestioned beliefs grounded in wishful thinking, the idealized testimonials of current and former athletes, and the hunches of sport scientists seeking research opportunities and job placements for their students ... As these beliefs, testimonials, and endorsements are woven into dominant narratives, most people see little need for critical research and theory that could inform policy formulation, program design, and personal decisions about sports in everyday life.

I stand firmly behind Coakley’s insightful (and charged) comments, and will return to this more in Chapter 4, as I make some theoretical and empirical conclusions about the continuing importance of critically understanding masculinities within sporting contexts.

AN OCCASIONAL DEATH IS FINE: A (Brief) History of Masculinity and Sport

“By the 1890s, strenuous exercise and team sports had come to be seen as crucial to the development of powerful manhood. College football had become a national craze; and commentators like Theodore Roosevelt argued that football’s ability to foster virility was worth even an occasional death on the playing field” (Bederman 1995, 15).

So far, I have begun tracing a history of masculinity and sport as it relates to events that take place today. While the primary concern of this thesis is not with historicizing masculinities, it would be shortsighted not to briefly review the complicated history of masculinity in the United States (and United Kingdom), and how, as an institution, sport has contributed to dominant understandings of what it means to be a man in this contemporary moment. Outlining this history will more firmly position this thesis within an understanding of masculinity as an ongoing *ideological* process, and will help in my critique of many theorists’ desire to understand masculinity as solely a transhistorical, fixed character archetype. In this section, I draw upon poststructuralist historian Gail Bederman’s historical text *Manliness & Civilization*, as well as several other sociologists’ (Dunning 1999; Kimmel 2008; Messner 1988, 2007a; Anderson 2009) critical accounts of the history of masculinity and organized sport. Although this thesis is not a poststructuralist endeavor, I see great merit in glancing at discourse and subjectivities as driving forces behind material existence. As such, I use Bederman’s historical accounts thoughtfully as guiding scaffolding for my ultimately institutionally-driven argument.

What it means to be a “man”—to be “manly” or “masculine”—is not a fixed, transhistorical essence, but a contextual, historical, and ideological understanding variously taken up by, attached to, and imposed upon certain bodies (Bederman 1995, 5). According to Bederman (1995, 7), manhood or masculinity is a “cultural process whereby concrete individuals are constituted as members of a preexisting social category—as men.” In this view, masculinity

is not an unchanging archetype, but one that is deeply constructed and dependent on the sorts of people, institutions, and ideas that structure “gender” as a classification. Looking at masculinity as an ideological and historical project, too, helps us understand human agency and how people, over time, have exposed the socially constructed contradictions within the gender system, all the while still confined within the logic of that system (Bederman 1995, 10). This is all to say that, as an ideological construction, the gender system is at once rigid and all-consuming, but contestable—a terribly complicated, normative system, prone to crisis and complicated reformulation. Ultimately, then, masculinity and manhood is a systemic project—a cultural process that is constantly challenged, changed, and reproduced by various actors and institutions over time. Indeed, masculinity is both a manifestation of a rigid, material power structure and, as a cultural process, deeply socially constructed and contextual (Bederman 1995; Connell 2005).

With this understanding, we can begin to trace, as Bederman does, “masculinity” both semantically and institutionally. The term “masculinity” has gained popularity in the United States’ lexicon, but has certainly not always been the case. In the early nineteenth century, the term “manliness” was central to the White middle-class consciousness. In this conception of manhood, men were successfully “manly” when they had tremendous self-control—over their own social character, over their family, over their money and financial assets. To be manly in this “Victorian” (White) sense was to have the strong will and calculated control to be power. It was to retain smooth emotion, to maintain fiscal and social control, but without outward aggression or violence (Bederman 1995). This particular manhood was bolstered and guided by Whiteness as a purportedly neutral way of enacting manhood—indeed, Whiteness is absolutely central to the development of dominant masculinities in the Western world.

As the nineteenth century progressed, however, processes of industrialization and modernization took hold in the United Kingdom and the United States. This had grave economic, political, and social consequences for the way “manliness”—a term once preoccupied with calculated control and restraint—was conceptualized within an ever-expanding capitalist system. As the economic market expanded, it was no longer attainable to have such control over one’s job, personal and financial autonomy and various other assets (Bederman 1995). Indeed, the ability to have this sort of control was rapidly diminishing as industrialization made labor more starkly divided, as modes of manufacturing became dispersed but more efficient, and as leisure time was more common to people in urban dwellings. With all of these changes (and many more), the term “manliness,” as it was once comfortably entrenched in White middle-class understandings of what it meant to be a man, was fundamentally challenged.

The White middle-class—and especially men—saw these societal changes to be a direct challenge to their comfort and way of life, both from within and from without. As Anderson (2009) suggests, processes of industrialization led to the widespread panic that society was becoming “feminized”—that boys were spending too much time with their mothers or in leisure, away from hard labor, and were, in a more ideological sense, losing control of what it meant to be a man. Middle-class White men were also facing social pressure from an influx of cheap immigrant labor, the rising social standing and visibility of the American working-class, and the inception of the middle-class women’s movement (Bederman 1995, 13-14). From multiple coalescing angles, male domination—especially (and crucially) as it intersected with Whiteness and middle-class wealth and prestige—was thrown into a fundamental crisis.

These changes can be traced semantically. As Bederman (1995) notes, the noun “masculinity,” which is now much more commonly used today than “manliness,” arose out of

these dynamic economic and social changes in the rapidly industrializing world. Until the 1890s, when “manliness” was undermined by a host of societal and cultural changes, “masculine” was used solely to denote difference from femininity (Bederman 1995, 18). Already, then, the terms “masculinity” and “masculine” were used to denote something as diametrically opposed to femininity—a meaning that now has direct linkages to the type of systemic gender order structured by masculinities. This newly popularized adjective “masculine”—and the subsequent formation of the noun “masculinity”—developed in response to the need to *synthesize* older conceptions of manhood with evolving understandings (Bederman 1995). Thus, “masculinity” is an amalgamation of various characteristics, good and bad, of what it means to be a man. This definition is not static (and should not be), and has been used in various productive and contradictory ways since its popularization in 1890s, but is nonetheless the lexiconic contribution of an era wherein manhood seemed to be particularly in “crisis.”

Although it took several generations for “masculinity” to overtake “manliness” entirely as a popular term, institutional and structural changes were already underway to secure these evolving understandings. Indeed, out of these internal and external pressures, White middle-class men, needing to continue economic and ideological supremacy over other groups, sought to *institutionally* (re)define manhood. At this time, organizations like the Boy Scouts of America and the YMCA sprung up with the purpose of giving an outlet for (White) boys to maintain and practice their manhood (Bederman 1995; Anderson 2009). In addition, images of the male body as strong and muscular became popularized like never before—“muscle” sports, like boxing, became a national craze—and epithets like “sissy” and “pussy-foot” arose in the lexicon (Bederman 1995, 17). Homosexuality, too, became medically pathologized around this time, both adding to the fear of feminization *and* fueling the “heterosexual agenda,” as it were, to

strengthen their resistance and domination (Anderson 2009). Taken together, these changes are all directly tied to the crisis in gendered, racial, and classed understandings of manhood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the systemic reverberations of which are still resound today.

Most pertinent for this thesis, though, is to understand how and why organized sport came about during this time period and how the answers to these questions still have profound relevance within the highly publicized and popular institution today. I have already, in part, begun to answer these questions. For the same reasons organizations like the Boy Scouts and the Freemasons were arising during this period, organized sport was designed for men and boys to *protect* a manhood which was culturally perceived to be slipping away from them (Messner 2007a; Messner 1988; Anderson 2009). As Messner (2007a, 75) puts it, “the creation of modern sport is one of ... men’s institutional ‘responses’ to the crisis in class, racial, and gender relations ...” Indeed, it was created as an institution for middle-class White men to not only push back against the feminization of society, but also against encroaching immigrant and minority groups. It was, in a sense, to protect a very class-specific White manhood—a bastion of structural supremacy, disguised as leisure.

This is perhaps best seen in the preoccupation with formal, civilized sport associations and the codification of sporting rules (Edwards 2006; Dunning 1999). As Dunning (1999) suggests in his sociological account of the history of football (soccer), *Sport Matters*, “civilizing processes” of modern Western societies gave way to more rationalized and “parliamentarized” state-formations, especially in England, where much of the first codified rules for ball sports, such as soccer and rugby (which would later be developed into American football), were derived (Dunning 1999). In this view, “civilization” is directly linked to the need to control, to have calculated authority. Modern, codified sport, then, *is* an outgrowth of discourses of

“civilization”—a “manly” control of violence that is inextricably linked to complicated understandings of White manhood (Edwards 2006, 53).

In sum, in an era marked by murky understandings of what it meant to be a man—in an era where even the *words* used to describe men were changing, falling apart, and synthesizing—organized sport was one of the primary mechanisms with which to regain systematic control. It was a response to a crisis in manhood, which is disguised as a monolithic term but in fact has very specific raced (White), gendered (male-bodied, male-presenting), sexual (heterosexual), bodied (able, strong, fit), and classed (middle-class) meanings. It is *always* a reductive oversight to suggest that sports are for “men” as a singular category, even today. The history of organized sport is a dynamic one—one that is in equal parts traceable by male domination as it is racial domination as it is other vectors of social being. It is an incoherent painting if even one color is missing from the canvas, because masculinity is such a relentlessly complicated masterwork. Masculinity is such an essential ideological framework, then, because of its structural manifestations and interlocking powered meanings—because it is taken up and variously understood by *everyone* in the United States (indeed, nobody is exempt) and because it has such real, structural repercussions for those who do not “fit” properly within its machinery.

UNCOVERING MIKE RICE’S ANGER: Thesis Outline

Is Mike Rice an exceptional case, or is he a social actor enmeshed in an institution that conditioned him to behave exceptionally? To even feign the ability to answer this question is to undermine the complexity of masculinities as an organizing structure, and is to submit to problematically binaristic ways of approaching systemic power. In the following pages, then, I do not make an attempt to conclusively answer this question; rather, I take the lid off of Rice’s outbursts, take a thorough peek inside that vigorous container, and attempt to come out with

clearer understandings. In other words, I will “expose” sport (and other institutions historically tied to normative understandings of masculinity, like schools and fraternities) sociologically by presenting the original work of many sociologists who helped shape these fields. I will also present my own empirical work as scaffolding for some of the theoretical conclusions I have begun to draw after spending over a year in exciting contemplation.

In Chapter 1, I presented several provocative tableaux that justify the necessity of this thesis. I have also briefly traced the history of masculinities and sport in the Western world, with a particular focus on the United States and the United Kingdom, where most of the theoretical and empirical research into masculinities has occurred. As I have shown, the word “masculinity” itself is fraught with semantic and institutional complexities, powered racial and sexual meanings, and contradictory understandings. I have also situated my understanding of masculinities in a more critical sociological tradition—one that borrows from the logic of poststructuralists like Gail Bederman (1995), but that also understands and emphasizes the power-laden *materiality* of constructed categories.

In Chapter 2, I will begin to delve deeper into certain theoretical traditions of masculinity. In specific, I will tease out two very distinct sociological theories—R.W. Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity and Eric Anderson’s inclusive masculinity theory—which developed in a fascinatingly chronological way. This chapter is meant to catch the reader up on decades of dynamic conversation within the sociology of masculinities (and even more specifically within the sociology of sport masculinities). I will begin the chapter discussing hegemonic masculinity and the powered social terrain it presupposes in order to present and ultimately lodge a critique of Anderson’s inclusive masculinity theory, which is the main focus of the chapter. I will end the chapter arguing that the concept of hegemony is still very much relevant and will proffer hybrid

masculinities—a brand new theoretical development in the sociology of masculinities—as a theoretical tool that blends both a critical perspective with the sound acknowledgment that manhood has changed and even “opened up” in ways unimagined by hegemonic masculinity theory when it was formulated in 1987.

In Chapter 3, I will further this analytic argument by looking at empirical data I collected of workers at a national non-profit educates high school athletes and coaches about what they call positive sport culture. Specifically, I will tease out their understandings of masculinity as it may or may not still be pertinent within the institution of sport. Centering their own experiences and expertise as my data will allow me to gain a better understanding of how real people doing real educational work with youth athletes understand these issues. These data will show that this topic, although dynamic, is still pertinent for youth athletes and still has merit within our own critical understandings of the institution of sport, what it values, and what it excludes. Further, it will add to the still-developing conversation about hybrid masculinities theory and will suggest its applicability within contexts of sport education.

In Chapter 4, I will make some brief conclusions about the data I have presented, including some informed remarks about the possibility of a critical curriculum for high school athletes. Considering the complexity of bringing sexuality education into the classroom, I will argue that, while presenting these topics to a high school audience might be fraught with “practical” complications, it is still ultimately necessary if we are to engage in thoughtful conversations about the institution of sport at large.

chapter two
BOYS WHO WEAR PINK JERSEYS:
Hegemonic, Inclusive, and/or Hybrid Masculinities?

Kymora Johnson was a 10-year-old girl who just wanted to play basketball.⁸ She was skilled and highly motivated to succeed. Playing on the Charlottesville Cavaliers, a boys' basketball team in a youth league in Charlottesville, South Carolina, Kymora broke down rigid gender barriers common in youth sport (Messner 2000) and gained the respect of her male peers through her athleticism and commitment to the game. According to her fellow male-bodied teammates and her coaches, Kymora deserved a spot on that team just as much as anybody else.

In August 2015, however, Kymora and her team were disqualified from an annual youth basketball tournament. According to the officials at the tournament, the Charlottesville Cavaliers were ineligible based on new rules mandating that athletes must play on a team entirely with their "own gender." Boys must play with boys; girls must play with girls. Kymora's team was disqualified because it was deemed inappropriate—in fact, *explicitly against the rules* of the institution—for a girl to be playing with the boys in a youth basketball tournament, despite any consideration of Kymora's ability or of her own gender identity or expression. For the sake of this youth basketball tournament, it seemed: rules are rules, boys are boys, and girls are girls.

Following the disqualification, 10-year-old Kymora was thrust into a national debate about gender, sport, and co-ed play. Those who supported Kymora cited her commitment to the sport and to her team. Kymora herself said: "I think it's crazy because, if you're good enough, you should be able to play." In a Facebook post, the Charlottesville Cavaliers defended Kymora's eligibility, arguing: "We have been 100% upfront about her gender (forms, birth certificate, DMV ID card, etc.)" and using hashtags such as "#KymoraPlaysLikeAGIRL" and

⁸ "A basketball tournament disqualifies a team because one player is a girl. In 2015," *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/a-basketball-tournament-disqualifies-a-team-because-one-player-is-a-girl-in-2015/2015/08/04/1b29eeaa-3af6-11e5-b3ac-8a79bc44e5e2_story.html

“EqualityForKymora.” On the other hand, those who supported the officials’ decision to *reject* Kymora’s team from the tournament largely supported the gender-based discrimination of the rules. Indeed, sport is a context wherein gender segregation, although socially constructed, seems “natural” and even developmentally appropriate (Messner 2000). The basketball tournament’s rules should not be viewed as aberrant, in this view, but rather a reflection of deeply rooted ideals about the relationship between gender, sexual expression, youth, and sport.

After the team was barred from the tournament, the Cavaliers showed up in pink uniforms to demonstrate their support for Kymora and her place on the team. The youth team’s symbolic act of defiance and support for Kymora is one that suggests, among others, two things: (1) by wearing pink, a highly feminized color, we support the presence of a girl on our team and (2) by wearing pink, we are not afraid to showcase our support of femininity—we are not afraid of, in a sense, being coded as *not* masculine. The image of a predominantly male-bodied basketball team standing in a line in support of Kymora is certainly a powerful one: one that seems to reject the historical insistence for men to be masculine (by rejecting the feminine) and, instead, suggests that sport has become a terrain in which orthodox gendered and sexualized lines have been blurred. As Adi Adams (2011, 592) suggests in his study of a university soccer team in the US, one player’s pink cleats—a small but mighty symbolic act of fluid sexuality—demonstrates “the shifting generational difference in masculinity making. In similar ways, what can we make of this team of boys, standing in a row, all wearing pink? What meaning can we glean from this symbolic act? Were these boys afraid of being labeled effeminate or gay, or has masculinity changed so much that this question become altogether irrelevant?”

In various ways, Kymora’s story provides a firm basis from which to delve deeper into the ways gender and sexuality operate within institutional contexts, but especially, for purposes

here, organized sport. It speaks to the complicated ways in which gender is policed by institutions, and how sex and gender are often conflated, constituting a problematic male / female binary: “you must play with your own gender.” It also demonstrates the agency of social actors to resist the institutionality of body policing—to, in this story, resist the hierarchization of gendered and sexualized expressions that is so heavily theorized in the tradition of hegemonic masculinities (Connell 2005). Indeed, Kymora’s story is, to some, an act of resistance, but, perhaps to others, a demonstration of how identities are institutionally policed and strictly defined, of how “acceptance” is predicated solely on the willingness of men, and how institutions like these can simultaneously reaffirm powered gender categories while purportedly becoming more inclusive of them. To some, it is a showcase of changing masculinities; to others, it is a hegemonic reproduction of power in more insidious ways than ever. Given its complexity, it is the perfect segue into discussing the changing theoretical terrain of masculinities and, as I will argue later, the persisting hegemonic, yet hybridized (Demetriou 2001; Bridges and Pascoe 2014) mechanisms within an ever-changing cultural moment.

In this chapter, I will introduce three major theoretical contributions to the sociology of masculinities (and to the sociology of sport masculinities more specifically). First, I will introduce, explain, and (briefly) empirically delineate R.W. Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, the eminent tool for the sociological understanding of masculinities since its inception in 1987. In this chapter I describe hegemonic masculinity just to the extent that I can thoroughly and rigorously explicate Eric Anderson’s (2009) inclusive masculinity theory, a recent contribution and direct response to Connell’s prevailing concept. The majority of this

chapter will be spent on Anderson's inclusive masculinity theory—describing it, discussing its empirical contributions, and ultimately critiquing its uncritical, power-evasive, and even power-reproducing logic. Ultimately, I will argue that, in a social terrain distanced almost 30 years from the introduction of hegemonic masculinity, we need a theory or body of work that both retains hegemonic masculinity's critical attunement to mechanisms of institutional power and simultaneously addresses decades of societal change. The theory that has begun to do this in thoughtful, critical ways is hybrid masculinity theory (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Demetriou 2001), a burgeoning field in the sociological study of masculinities.

I. UNDERSTANDING CONNELL'S HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

In 1987, Australian sociologist R.W. Connell first introduced the theory of hegemonic masculinity to the academic world (Connell 2005). Witnessing the general dearth of nuanced, non-binary, non-reductive frameworks from which to understand the “gender order”—and particularly the hierarchy of men and masculinities that exists within that rigid yet dynamic order—Connell crafted this theory in her formative book *Gender & Power* (1987) and later more comprehensively in *Masculinities* (1995; 2005 2nd edition). In doing so, Connell set out to understand how, in the prevailing (Western) gender system, male identities assert and maintain their dominance above other forms of gender identities and expressions. More than twenty years later, Connell's theory is still being used as a lens through which to explain various interlocking forces of subordination and oppression within the gender order, like male supremacy, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and racism. In this section, I will delineate the origin of hegemonic masculinity, what it means, and how it has been used and reformulated in empirical and theoretical sociological work in the past twenty years.

a. *From Prison to Gender: Gramsci's "Hegemony" & Hegemonic Masculinity*

Hegemonic masculinity draws from Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* (Connell 1987). Gramsci, who was jailed for founding and leading the Italian Communist Party during Mussolini's fascist regime in the 1920s, was an important Marxist and critical theorist. Gramsci's work dealt with power and class conflict, especially given the sociohistorical context in which he was theorizing. Once imprisoned, Gramsci wondered why there was no significant class upheaval or uprising given such an oppressive regime. He wondered what lulled subordinated people, by and large, into "consenting" to their own oppression; rather than resistance, why was there was a widespread (yet, by no means uniform) adherence to quite subordinating and oppressive conditions?

Out of these musings came the influential concept of hegemony, which, put simply, explains the ideological subordination of those who are oppressed and why, on the whole, no major social upheavals occur, despite oppressive conditions (Gramsci 1971). Hegemony is a useful theoretical tool for understanding oft-invisible reproductions of systemic power. A key feature of hegemony—especially for this thesis, which critically engages with institutional changes to the face of organized sport today—is that it is *constantly* in a state of crisis, as normative power is incessantly challenged by those subjected to it. And yet, hegemony works in such insidious ways as to incorporate those challenges—those counterhegemonic critiques—into its own logic. The dangerous mechanism of hegemony is its astonishing ability shift itself to appear brand new—more inclusive, or perhaps legally or institutionally reformed—but to reroute its internal workings that propagate systemic oppression in new, yet familiar, ways.

This broad explanation of hegemony in crisis can be applied specifically to hegemonic masculinity, which I will delineate further in the following subsection. Hegemonic masculinity, as an organizing structure of society, is fundamentally a framework to explain the complexities

of male domination, as it exists within historical and localized contexts. As a project of the “gender order” (Connell 2005), it is both widely consented to in the United States and constantly in crisis, especially in the present with the increasing visibility of and increasing tolerance of non-“normative” expressions of gender and sexuality. And yet, as I will explain, because of its crisis-induced ability to reformulate, hegemonic masculinity has been able to incorporate its own critiques and reproduce its dominance today in ever-insidious ways.

b. Hegemonic Masculinity: Defining the Concept

In any given context, there is a plurality of masculinities on display (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). These masculinities come in various forms, but only one is hegemonic, and the hegemonic expression “presumes the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 846). In other words, there is a hierarchy, materially or ideologically, formed by competing masculinities at any given time and in any given context, and this hierarchy always positions an ascendant form of masculinity above the rest (Connell 1987, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

The subordinated subject within the hierarchy, then, is the *feminized subject*. Indeed, this hierarchy is predicated both on the subordination of women and of other male identities that are seen as feminine or inferior to the hegemonic form—particularly gay masculinities or non-White masculinities (Connell 2005). Furthermore, in devaluing feminized identities and gender expressions, the hierarchy formed by competing masculinities supports a securely *heterosexual* version of masculinity. As Connell (1987, 186) argues, heterosexuality is the most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity in the Western world, echoing Adrienne Rich (1980), who asserted that heterosexuality is an oppressive institution within patriarchy toward which we all strive—intentionally or not. While this idea has since been complicated given the

rise in visibility of queer movements and queer acceptability (Anderson 2009; Bridges 2014), queerphobia and heterosexism are arguably reproduced in more subtle, and perhaps more dangerous, forms today (Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014).

Indeed, given the insidious nature of power reproduction, Connell (1987, 184) argues that hegemonic masculinity is not achieved by force, but by the ascendancy of the hegemonic form. This is permitted, by and large, by the *consent* of those within a patriarchal society. This is not to say that everyone idly consents to hegemonic masculinity, or even uniformly experiences its damage. To suggest this would be an oversight and a misreading of Connell's (1987) nuanced theory. Rather, hegemonic masculinity is simply a culturally idealized form (Donaldson 1993), whatever that might look like—one that is, like Gramsci's hegemony, dependent upon time, place and geography, easily contested and always in crisis, and yet still ideologically ascendant among other forms of gender identities within that same context (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 831). Indeed, while Arnold Schwarzenegger's gubernatorial campaign has been seen as an exemplar of tough yet compassionate hegemonic masculinity, Messner (2007a) demonstrates that this was achieved only through constant ideological negotiation and, of course, partisan pushback. As such, "hegemonic" is not to suggest wholly consented or uncontested, but rather a sort-of *allowed* form of supremacy, often predicated on multiple axes of raced, gendered, classed, and/or abled power.

At the same time, though, it would be incorrect to conceptualize hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type (Connell 2005, 76; Bederman 1995). Pointing out Arnold Schwarzenegger as an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity, then, presents a problem of its own: as something that (can be) individually embodied yet flows institutionally, ascribing it to one body runs the risk of uncomplicatedly universalizing it. Instead, as I mentioned, it is a

contextually dependent, contestable gender expression that is *localized*. Thus, the hegemonic form of masculinity in a corporate office on Wall Street need not be (and, in fact, is not) the same as the hegemonic form of masculinity on a high school football team in the rural South. While these two masculinities might share some salient features—dominance, aggression, etc.—they will certainly not look the same. As such, there exists no *global* typology for hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This presents problems, of course, for empirical usages, but also charges social researchers to be ever-considerate of the contexts they study, understanding that institutional and individual power are variously hegemonic, ascendant, contested, undermined, and difficult to define.

Finally, hegemonic masculinity is not simply a feature of the “gender order,” but a raced and classed manifestation of systemic power. Hegemonic masculinity is necessarily an *intersectional* tool for glancing critically at the systemic and racialized operation of masculinities (Ferguson 2001; Cooper 2009; Rios 2011; Ward 2015). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the development of “masculinity” in the nineteenth and twentieth century was as much a project of White racial dominance as it was a project of male dominance (Bederman 1995). Ann Arnett Ferguson (2001), in her formative book *Bad Boys*, elucidates the idea of a raced and classed masculinity: one in which Black boys’ masculinities are seen as hypersexualized and dangerous, as “unsalvageable”—through behavior that is quite overlooked in other (read: White) boys. Ferguson’s (2001) work is so valuable not only because it shows how heteromascularity is constructed among boys in high schools, but also how institutions also impose heterosexuality upon boys’ bodies, and especially on the bodies of Black boys, who are disproportionately punished through the “adultification” and criminalization of their behaviors.

In sum, hegemonic masculinity is a critical sociological concept that explains a cultural and institutional ascendancy of a form of masculinity/masculinities that men and boys (and women) organize themselves around, but can disrupt, challenge, and reproduce in various ways. It is gendered, raced, classed, bodied, and ideological. It is purposefully murky and difficult to see because of its ascendancy and embeddedness within structures and systems of power. It is crisis-prone, as Gramsci's original concept of cultural hegemony is, and can formulate—incorporating its own critiques to strengthen normative boundaries and reproduce systemic power. It is, as I will describe in the following subsection, a theoretical tool to explain how institutions structure people into matrices and hierarchies of power—ideological, material, or otherwise.

c. Hegemonic Masculinity as a Tool of Institutional Empirical Analysis

Throughout its thirty years of eminence, hegemonic masculinity has received its fair share of criticisms (see Bartholomaeus 2012; Hearn 2004; Demetriou 2001; Donaldson 1993). Criticisms of hegemonic masculinity vary in quality and accuracy, but it is certainly not a perfect, all-encompassing concept. Some warn that, through the act of pointing it out and defining it, theorists may reify (or “thingify”) hegemonic masculinity—that “men’s behavior is reified in the concept of masculinity that then, in a circular argument, becomes the explanation (and the excuse) for the behavior” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 840). Others argue that, as a character archetype, it does not apply evenly to children as it does adults (Bartholomaeus 2012). Still, others take issue with its murky understanding of *what* hegemonic masculinity looks like. As Hearn (2004, 58) asks,

Is it a cultural ideal, cultural images, even fantasy? Is it summed up in the stuff of heroes? Is it toughness, aggressiveness, violence? Or is it corporate respectability? Is it simply

heterosexist homophobia? Is it the rather general persistence of patriarchal gender arrangements?

When thinking of hegemonic masculinity as a character archetype or the ascendance of a particularized gender expression, Hearn's and others' criticisms hold tremendous weight. It is, after all, an impossible task to define the essence of something that is historically and contextually contingent. This is why I borrow from Bederman's (1995) poststructuralist imagining of masculinity to suggest that hegemonic masculinity, as a powered and fluctuating ideology, works much better as a tool of institutional analysis. That is, we must think of hegemonic masculinity not as the enactment of individual character archetypes, but, rather, as any sort-of gendered mechanism that supports and reproduces (typically White), heterosexual male power *institutionally*, which may take many forms (individual interaction, school structure, resource allocation, policy implementation, curriculum, etc.)

In other words, in my operationalization of hegemonic masculinity, I explain and understand how dominant power flows systemically, and am less concerned with pinning down a particular bodily expression or character archetype, although explaining these may certainly be relevant to an institutional understanding. As Connell (2005, 35) herself says, "The construction of masculinity in sport ... illustrates the importance of the institutional setting ... Only a tiny minority reach the top as professional athletes; yet the production of masculinity throughout the sports world is marked by the hierarchical, competitive structure of the institution." This idea will become much clearer in this section, where I will analyze important empirical work that has used hegemonic masculinity as a tool of institutional analysis.⁹

⁹ To comprehensively explain and review all empirical usages of hegemonic masculinity is simultaneously not within the purview of this thesis *and* would take the work of an entire thesis on its own. As such, this review simply scrapes the surface and is meant to set the stage for my eventual discussion and critique of inclusive masculinity theory.

From its inception in 1987, hegemonic masculinity has been used to elucidate the systemic and ideological mechanisms of power within various institutional locales, from American politics (Messner 2007b) to public schools (Ferguson 2001; Pascoe 2007) to fraternities (Kimmel 2008) to sport teams (Messner 2007a, 2002). It has been used variously to explain, among many other complicated thematic conclusions, (1) the preoccupation with male heterosexuality, heterosexism, and heteronormativity within these institutions (Pascoe 2007; Messner 2007a; Warikoo 2011), (2) the denigration of women, femininity and/or queerness (Messner 1988; Kimmel 2008), and (3) the sexual policing of non-White bodies (Ferguson 2001; Pascoe 2007; Rios 2011). It is, taken together, a tool that can be used to explain the continued systemic authority of White heterosexual patriarchy and, as discussed earlier, also a way to explain the fragile, contradictory, and crisis-prone nature of this power. In this brief review of hegemonic masculinity, I will discuss the empirical usages of the concept insofar as it sets the scene for inclusive masculinity theory, which Eric Anderson describes as a theoretical response to hegemonic masculinity's cultural and institutional irrelevance.

Much research has suggested that, from schools to organized sport, masculinity is constructed and policed through the institutionalization of heterosexuality (Pascoe 2007; Ferguson 2001; Messner 2007a; Warikoo 2011; Kimmel 2008). Looking more broadly and ethnographically at the gendered function of schools, Pascoe (2007, 26) suggests,

[T]he school ... [is] an organizer of sexual practices, identities, and meanings ... The ordering of sexuality from elementary school through high school is inseparable from the institutional ordering of gendered identities. The heterosexualizing process organized by education institutions cannot be separated from, and in fact is central to, the development of masculine identities.

It is through this institutional structuring—Kimmel (2008) similarly calls school a “boot camp” where boys learn to become men—that hegemonic masculinity, as an entity that upholds

heterosexism and denigrates queerness, is reproduced. Indeed, Pascoe (2012; 2007) found that these “heterosexualizing” processes exist in abundance, and are often invisibly structured within everyday functions—from the pedagogy of its faculty, to the highly gendered dress code, to annual school traditions (like the popular crowning of “Mr. Cougar”). Even further, she argues that heterosexuality is contingent upon social interaction, and that the “specter of the fag”—the fear that a boy might be considered gay—fuels this relentless policing. Through her important ethnographic research, Pascoe (2007) demonstrates the function of hegemonic masculinity to prop up institutional values through social interaction, and how those interactions feed back into the institution.

Within sport more specifically, many social researchers have drawn similar conclusions (see Stasi and Evans 2013; Caudwell 2011; Grindstaff and West 2011; Richardson 2010; Dempster 2009; Clark and Paechter 2007; Messner 2007a, 2002; Clayton and Humberstone 2006; Swain 2006, 2000; Skelton 1997). Many of these studies affirm Kimmel’s (2008, 50) idea that the cardinal rule of manhood is to constantly prove that you are not gay. Dempster (2009) found that sport participation was a way of constructing male heterosexual attractiveness among university-aged men in the UK, while Swain (2000, 107), in his study of playground football, found that athletic prowess was a way to affirm heterosexual masculinity—indeed, a way to prove that you were a “real” boy. Caudwell (2011) studied football fandom and the types of homophobic (and racist) rhetoric that fans rely on during games. She describes the common chant: “Does your boyfriend, does your boyfriend, does your boyfriend know you’re here?” which is often accompanied by fans turning around and sticking out their butts at the opponents. This type of display combines visual and sonic expressions of homophobia to mock the queer body and, more generally, queer sex.

However, homophobia is not always so forcefully or even willingly enacted. In Richardson's (2010) study of a working-class English town, she found that boys are *compelled* to enact, through various activities including sport, a heterosexual identity, even if those actions make them feel uncomfortable or are undesired. Richardson's (2010) research affirms the power of hegemonic heterosexuality to operate within peer networks in school, and the ubiquitous presence of compulsory heterosexuality, especially within working-class areas, where the body is valorized as a way of embodying masculinity.

Interestingly, Grindstaff and West (2011) demonstrate in their research into gender and racial dynamics in cheerleading that, although tenuous, the very *structure* of sport—despite changes and despite the surface heterogeneity of various actors within the institution—is predicated on hegemonic masculinity. Grindstaff and West (2011) argue that larger forces outside of individual actors continue to dictate the powered structure of sport. This is why the “gay cheerleader syndrome” even exists, despite societal progression and a more “accepting” culture for gay athletes. As such, it follows that the very institution of sport is historically structured to propagate heterosexist rhetoric.

Hegemonic masculinity has also been used to explain the strict institutional gender divide—male vs. female—that is common to institutions, from school to sport, and the denigration of women and girls that often results (Renold 2001; Ferguson 2001; Kimmel 2008; Messner 2007a; Pascoe 2007) Much of this research upholds the powered ideologies that undergird Ferguson (2001, 173)'s assessment of the gender binary: “Boys and girls understand the meaning of being male and being female in the field of power; the binary opposition of male/female is always one that expresses a norm, maleness, and its constitutive outside, femaleness.” Renold (2001) demonstrates how this ideological binary in schools serves to

reproduce highly powered norms in the classroom, and symbolically re-positions girls' achievements into failures. Further, Pascoe (2007) shows how heterosexualizing processes within school essentially normalizes sexually assaultive practices as a "boys will be boys" situation—a situation exacerbated by teachers' passivity and even rhetorical participation in these practices—and Ferguson (2010, 173) demonstrates how anti-femininity within schools is abundant, often enmeshed within the pedagogies of teachers, who uncritically lean upon a gender order of female subordination.

Within sport, Clark and Paechter's (2007) multi-site study of 10-to-11 year old football players in England demonstrates how boys actively construct athletic masculinities that prohibit girls from participating in playground games. They conclude that "the integration of girls in football is ... viewed as a kind of limited benefits situation by boys, whereby any gains by girls are perceived as an infringement on male 'rights' to the game" (Clark and Paechter 2007, 274). Similarly, in Messner's (2000) study of a youth soccer league, he found that, not only are boys and girls automatically and structurally separated, creating "highly charged gendered interactions between the groups," but that this separation feeds back into the subordination of women and girls within sport and beyond. Indeed, in creating the institutional prerequisite for the girls' team—i.e., "Barbie Girls"—and the boys' team—i.e., "Sea Monsters"—not only are boys and girls separated along a problematic binary, but they are being fed information about what girls should be and what boys should be, and that this conception is not equal.

Additionally, hegemonic masculinity, while tied to gender and sexuality, is inextricable from race and racism (Ferguson 2001; Pascoe 2007; Messner 2007a; Cooper 2009; Rios 2011; Han 2015). Through observing everyday interactions of boys within a public high school, Pascoe (2007; 2012) observes how the "fag epithet" is not used uniformly and is, in fact, *not* attached to

Black bodies as it is to White bodies. This might have something to do with the historical and violent hypersexualization and criminalization of Black male bodies, a racialized facet of Black heteromascularity similarly demonstrated clearly in Ferguson's (2001) work and many others (Rios 2011; Han 2015). Ferguson's (2001) work is so valuable not only because it shows how heteromascularity is constructed among boys in high schools, but how institutions also impose heterosexuality upon boys' bodies, and especially on the bodies of Black boys, who are disproportionately punished through the "adultification" and criminalization of their behaviors.

Within the institution of sport, Messner (2007a) shows how Black bodies are exploited as physical and economic capital. He notes that "social institutions ... serve to systematically channel disproportionately large numbers of black men into football, basketball, boxing, and baseball, where they are subsequently 'stacked' into low-prestige and high-risk positions, exploited for their skills and, finally, when their bodies are used up, excreted from organized athletics" (Messner 2007a, 58). In his scathing indictment on the habitual (mis)use and exploitation of Black bodies within sport, Messner (2007a) demonstrates how hegemonic masculinity is used as ideological undergirding for the continuing dominance of White masculinities—a dominance that is predicated on the subordination of athletic bodies of Color. In this conception of hegemonic masculinity, we can see how male bodies support a broad system of gender supremacy, but how this reductionist conceptualization hinders an understanding of how, among men, bodies are institutionally racialized and treated according to powered scripts and inequitable conditions.

Taken together, these studies—and many more, to be sure—demonstrate the institutional imperative of hegemonic masculinity to both materially and ideologically structure men/boys and women/girls into hierarchies predicated on inequitable power. As I have shown, by and large,

hegemonic masculinity leaves little to no benefit for queer people, trans* people, or gender non-conforming people, and more often than not polices the bodies of people of Color, queer or not, in ways that restricts access, manipulates their physical capital, and leverages unfair punishment onto them. The institutional power presupposed by hegemonic masculinity is one that paints a very grim picture of institutions like schools and organized sport, but it is nonetheless a way of seeing the world as both physically and ideologically structured to benefit White heterosexual patriarchy. *This* is the sort of terrain from which hegemonic masculinity was formulated and was used to explain, and it is the terrain that Eric Anderson (2009), in his development of inclusive masculinity theory, was no longer able to see.

II. DOING AWAY WITH HIERARCHY?: INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY THEORY

So far, this thesis has discussed Connell's hegemonic masculinity, which is the prevailing and eminent framework for understanding masculinities in a sociological sense—as part of a structural, gendered, sexualized, racialized, abled, and/or classed order. This framework—hegemonic masculinity—proffers a lens through which we can understand the ever-changing, crisis-prone gender order as a systemic project of male domination over women and other subordinated masculinities. I have also presented much eminent research in masculinities that displays the hierarchical structure that Connell first theorized more than twenty years ago. From schoolyards to mass media, many social theorists have demonstrated the hierarchical insistence upon a dominant vision of male heterosexual masculinity.

However, I briefly alluded to the critiques, gaps, and holes in hegemonic masculinity as a prevailing concept. These included many internal contradictions, like the unintended reification of gender categories and the problematic act of defining what a hegemonic masculinity might *look* like. These critiques have solid theoretical and empirical bases but none have offered as

substantial a critique of hegemonic masculinity—indeed, a field-changing critique—as Eric Anderson’s *inclusive masculinity*, a sociological theory that explains what happens to the social matrix of masculinities in a period of “declining cultural homophobia” (Anderson 2009, 96). Since Anderson (2009) introduced inclusive masculinity theory into the sociological canon of masculinities studies, it has been taken up by many sociologists and used not only *instead* of hegemonic masculinity but also to *critique* it. Born out of this fascinating theoretical development is an ostensible split between two generative sociological theories: *Is this setting*, many sociologists of sport are now compelled to ask, *marked by hegemonic or inclusive masculinities?*

Before I attempt to answer this compelling theoretical question, I will begin by teasing out Anderson’s (2009) theory of inclusive masculinity. First, I will describe its theoretical and empirical origins, how it is used to explain a cultural moment of declining homophobia, and how other sociologists have since taken it up empirically. I will subsequently engage in a critique of the theory, attending to several major thematic trends found within inclusive masculinity literature. The ultimate aim in this chapter is to place Connell’s hegemonic masculinity and Anderson’s inclusive masculinity in critical conversation with each other in order to more deeply understand how masculinities have (or have not) evolved in this globalizing world.

a. Inclusive masculinity theory: Making sense of a “data-driven theory”

As Anderson (2009, 91) says in his eminent book *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*, inclusive masculinity theory “emerged from my data, and not the opposite way around ... I found hegemony theory incapable of explaining my data.” As an inductive theory—one that was born out of research and not presupposed by the theorist—inclusive masculinity emerged out of Anderson’s own research in contexts wherein hegemonic

masculinities seemed not to fit. Anderson himself began his career in the sociology of sport as someone who used Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, in his 2002 study of openly gay athletes on heterosexual teams, Anderson found that gay athletes are accepted insofar as they cohere to the heterosexual fantasy of the male athlete. In other words, the "gay athlete," although an identity that exists within Anderson's (2002) in-depth interviews, is not one that can be constructed within the institutionally heterosexual confines of the sport world. Anderson's study ultimately demonstrates the moral and social imperative on "winning" in the sport world—which, perhaps, has more to do with successfully embodying heterosexuality rather than scoring the most points.

However, as Anderson continued his research into the mid-2000s and into this decade, he found Connell's concept less and less applicable to his qualitative research. This led to the development and formulation of a new way of thinking about masculinities within the sport world, in a cultural moment which Anderson (2009, 91) frequently and repeatedly suggests is one of "declining cultural homophobia." To this, I ask: *What* is "cultural homophobia," how does Anderson operationalize this term, and how does he use it to justify the formulation of inclusive masculinity theory? These are crucial questions to ask not only to better understand the formulation of inclusive masculinity theory, but also to ask: If one of *hegemonic* masculinity's main critiques was its attempt to define a global gender order, then how can Anderson define a global, cultural moment? Is it fair to do the same for which Connell was so readily critiqued?

As Anderson (2009, 7-8) suggests,

"homophobia" is the "fear of being homosexualized, as it incorporates three variables: 1) a mass awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation; 2) a cultural zeitgeist of disapproval of homosexuality, and the femininity that is associated with it; and 3) the need for men to publicly align their social identities with heterosexuality (compulsory heterosexuality) in order to avoid homosexual suspicion.

In short, “cultural homophobia” is a way of characterizing a historical moment within which homosexuality is misunderstood *en masse* and, in the process, feared, denigrated, and combated in the public consciousness. The social, political, economic, and legal violence of the Reagan administration as it coincided with (and exacerbated) the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s is a prime example of what Anderson suggests is a time of heightened cultural homophobia. Significant in this sort of time period is the (re)institution of heterosexual masculinity as the primary defense against being labeled homosexual and, thus, stigmatized and devalued. As Anderson (2009, 87) writes, “the sexual economy of the 1980s depended on the theory that the more muscular and young looking a man was, the less likely he was to have HIV/AIDS.” In this time, men’s bodies were sexualized such that those with AIDS were weak, sickly, effeminate, and *gay*. In this sense, to be gay was to be diseased—it was, in a dangerously literal sense, a sickness to be queer. And, upon this sickness rested the “right” way, politically and morally, of being man: heterosexual, masculine, and healthy. In periods of heightened cultural homophobia, then, *hegemonic masculinity* is the hierarchical and systemic resistance to queerness.

Anderson uses this picture—the death-ridden, violent, and highly publicized presidential front against homosexuality and queerness—as the foundation from which to suggest that the world, for the most part, is no longer like this. It is a persuasive distancing from the Reagan administration, from anti-gay policy, from the AIDS crisis, from a cultural moment wherein homosexuality is collectively punished. It is a way of calling forth, instead, the United States in the mid-2010s as a political and legal terrain of increasing visibility and liberal acceptance of homosexuality. It is a way of conceptualizing an athletic space that accepts, even tenuously, the discursive construction of the queer athlete. In a cultural moment in which Olympic athlete and trans* woman Caitlyn Jenner can receive the Arthur Ashe Courage Awards at the 2015 ESPY

Awards Show and Michael Sam, a Black football player, can be openly gay, how can hegemonic masculinity continue to operate? This is a moment, according to Anderson, where gender categories are eroding, sexualities are blurring, and the “codes of gay”—being aware of style, appearance, etc.—are increasingly incorporated into the heterosexual male tradition (Anderson 2009, 155).

Indeed, to Anderson (2009, 154), Connell’s hegemonic model of masculinities does not account for the fact that many men today can perform masculinities without deference to the hegemonic form or without being subordinated by the hegemonic form. Men can perform their non-hegemonic masculinities neither as a subordinated individual nor as an act of protest and, in a sense, can “flatten out” the stratified hierarchy presupposed in Connell’s theory. Put simply, inclusive masculinity theory suggests that, “as cultural homophobia decreases, masculinities are increasingly situated upon a horizontal, not a vertical position” (Anderson 2009, 155).

In the following bullet points, I sum up inclusive masculinity theory and the terrain imaged by it as comprehensively and non-reductively as possible:

- ***Masculinities are not stratified***: they are located horizontally--on a “horizon of masculinities” as Anderson suggests--and not vertically, as Connell originally theorized. Instead, “various masculinities archetypes [can co-exist] without social struggle ... and with no one group dominating” (Anderson 2009, 95).
- Inclusive masculinities in a given context are presupposed by the existence of ***decreasing cultural homophobia***. Far from the days of “gay cancer” and the violently perceived virus-ridden gay male body, orthodox expressions of masculinities are no longer a defense against the perception of homosexuality and/or queerness.
- In a cultural moment of decreased homophobia, orthodox masculinities may still exist but they lose their hegemonic dominance because of the critical mass that disavow it (Anderson 2009, 96). In a sense, ***orthodox masculinities*** still exist but ***do not dominate***. This is seen, Anderson (2009) argues, in the use of the “fag” epithet as a form of insult not directly intended as homophobic.
- ***Homophobia is no longer socially acceptable***. In this setting, despite a man’s individual homophobic predilection, homophobic discourse as a way of establishing heterosexual male dominance is socially ridiculed—indeed,

“esteemed attributes of men will no longer rely on control and domination of other men” (Anderson 2009, 97).

Taken together, the settings and cultural conditions that warrant the application of Anderson’s inclusive masculinity theory seem opposed to the conditions from which Connell’s hegemonic masculinity was formulated. Below, I will elucidate these contextual conditions by presenting empirical sociological (and some social psychological) work on inclusive masculinity theory and how it has been applied and explained in these settings.

III. CRITIQUING INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY THEORY

“Increasingly, men are less afraid to associate with behaviors that were once coded as gay. When men wear pink, express their love for their male friends, and freak their gay male friends on the dance floor it requires us to rethink the theories that we once used to understand men and masculinities: The stratification of masculinities and sexualities shifts in accord to changing levels of awareness of homosexuality and our attitudes toward it”

(Anderson 2011, 569).

In neglecting to engage the analysis of postfeminism, masculinity scholars fail to address how men are implicated in what many feminist scholars regard as the making of gender and sexual inequality in new and ever more insidious forms. This general disregard, taken alongside the emergence of work like Anderson’s, which actively compounds the logic of postfeminism, prompts me to ask: whither critical masculinity studies?

(O’Neill 2015, 115)

Empirical work on inclusive masculinity has only recently found popular ground, especially since the publication of Anderson’s book in 2009. Still, the theoretical underpinnings for Anderson’s officially formulated theory have been present in social research since the early 2000s, when Anderson and some of his colleagues suggested that space for gay athletes was becoming more and more of a possibility. In this section, I will trace the major thematic findings of empirical work on inclusive masculinity theory, especially as it relates to or opposes findings in the realm of hegemonic masculinities research. I will pay close attention to the ways in which,

in athletic settings that ostensibly “flatten out” the stratification of masculinities, the rules of the game have changed and heteromascularity as an organizing structure has been diminished.

As I delineate this work, however, I will put it in conversation with more critical perspectives and dialogue on changing masculinities and sexualities today. As I work through this growing body of literature, I will employ the work of other theorists—as well as my own informed insights—to interrogate the uncritical underpinnings and broad stroke assumptions drawn by inclusive masculinity theory. In doing so, I will engage with the many power-vacuous conclusions upon which I argue inclusive masculinity theory is predicated, and urge a deeper consideration of the types of ideological, hegemonic, and hybridized (Demetriou 2001) power hierarchies are still drawn today.

a. *“I think it’s cool to have gay guys around”: The end of a homohysterical cultural moment?*

“Sam, a quieter student, agrees, ‘You might find homophobia before [sixth form], but not here. It’s just not acceptable anymore.’ Thus, it seems that rather than homophobia being an integral part of masculinity ... boys at Standard High instead stigmatize homophobic behaviors”
(McCormack 2011, 91).

In previous decades of research, the institution of sport was almost unanimously seen as highly masculinized territory: homophobic, sexist, transphobic, and racist (Messner 1988, 2007a; Kimmel 2008). It was an institution policed by complicated vertical stratifications and matrices of masculinities, pitted against each other on a number of powered axes. One of the most salient of these social forces undergirding masculinities was, of course, homophobia—which was seen as so inextricably linked to masculinity that it *was*, in fact, synonymous with masculinity (Kimmel 2008). However, recent research has demonstrated an “opening” of the playing field, so to speak, for gay athletes (Kian et al. 2015; Cashmore and Cleland 2012; Anderson 2011a; 2011b). This research has propped up evidence for what Anderson (2009) suggests is a

widespread moment of declining homophobia and increasing acceptance for homosexuality in sport.

In an online survey administered to more than 3,500 fans of association football (soccer) in the United Kingdom, Cashmore and Cleland (2012) found an astonishing decline in homophobic sentiment for gay athletes. Most respondents suggested that if the gay athlete were a skilled athlete, then sexuality should not and does not matter. Cashmore and Cleland (2012) also found that nearly 50% of the respondents blame soccer clubs and agents for the culture of secrecy that sustains homophobia in sport, and *not* on the fans or athletes. As one participant suggests: “Managers and chairmen sign the best players they can for the team they have. It might tarnish their ‘image rights’ I suppose. They might appear in newspapers in a negative light” (Cashmore and Cleland 2012, 382). This participant, a Middlesbrough fan, distances himself from the politically stagnant and medieval-seeming clubs and agents to suggest that he, and other fans he knows, is no longer homophobic in such a way.

Kian, Anderson and Shipka (2015) similarly discover changing national trends in sport through their textual analysis of Black NBA player Jason Collins’ “coming out” media narrative. In their study of articles published in the five most circulated US newspapers and the five most trafficked USA-based sport websites, they found, by and large, that mainstream media framed Collins’ coming out as heroic, brave, and as a landmark event. From President Barack Obama to talk-show host Ellen DeGeneres, there was a broad national sentiment of support flowing out for Collins. Kian et al. (2015) demonstrate how those who opposed Collins’ coming out—like ESPN reporter Chris Broussard, who called Collins an unrepentant sinner—were heavily criticized by their colleagues. From this comprehensive textual analysis, it would seem that mainstream sports coverage has come to not only accept homosexuality but also frame it as heroic. Jason Collins,

then, in the purview of inclusive masculinity, is symbolic of a progressive moment wherein “gay” and “athlete” are no longer two diametrically opposed identities. Rather, Collins is symbolic of increasing acceptance of homosexuality in the sports world.

Other studies have suggested similar findings in more localized, ethnographic detail (Anderson 2002, 2005, 2008; 2011a, 2011b; McCormack 2011; Adams 2011). Comparing almost identical studies he conducted of White, middle-class gay university and high school athletes in 2002 and 2010, Anderson (2011a) discovered a “flattening out” of once-stratified masculinities in these athletic contexts. Whereas in 2002 to be a gay athlete was possible only in a “don’t ask, don’t tell” team climate (Anderson 2002), in 2010, Anderson found a different tune being sung: as one gay hockey player said, “Of course we talk about my sexuality. We talk about it all the time” (Anderson 2011a, 260). Indeed, headed into the 2010s, Anderson (2011a) found that homosexuality was no longer hushed and was actually talked about quite frequently, by both the gay athletes and their teammates.

These results are echoed in similar studies of traditionally masculinized, athletic spaces. In his ethnographic study of a Midwest American soccer team, Anderson (2011b) found that, while there are still orthodox masculinities maintained on this team, overall the types of masculinities enacted are removed from hegemonic models and are no longer opposed to feminized attributes. As Anderson (2011b, 741-42) argues, “Men on this team feel safe to express inclusive notions of masculinity within their team’s social networks ... remind[ing] us that identities are always in flux ... that leading gender theories sometimes need re-examining.” He comes to this conclusion by observing the way this team discusses homosexuality as a non- issue, and through their emotional and physical tactility with one another. Through observing this team, Anderson (2011b) once again confirms that we no longer live in a culture of

heightened homophobia—that this moment is marked by fluidity of sexuality, of non-competing masculinities, and of openness and inclusivity.

Adams (2011) corroborates Anderson's findings in his ethnographic study of a soccer team at a large Northeast liberal arts college. Adams (2011) finds that this soccer team is comprised of well-styled, well-groomed, gay-friendly athletes who bond emotionally, watch movies together (like *I Love You, Man*, a romantic comedy about a male friendship), and rest their arms and heads on each other's shoulders during long car rides. He finds a team wherein heterosexual men "bond over emotions and brotherhood, not homophobia" and suggests that "inclusive attitudes and behaviors are increasingly becoming an acceptable part of the contemporary college athletes' performance of masculinity" (Adams 2011, 592). Adams (2011) uses one player's pink cleats as a symbol for the de-hierarchization of masculinities in team sports.

Inclusive masculinity theory has been applied in other settings, too, demonstrating Anderson's (2009) argument that widespread cultural homophobia is on the decline in many once-masculinized and highly homophobic spaces (Anderson 2008; McCormack 2011). For instance, McCormack (2011) discovered an astonishing lack of homophobia or homophobic discourse in an English sixth form school—and, in fact, an active crusade against homophobia, as seen in the quote that began this section. McCormack (2011) suggests instead that boys were ranked according to a hierarchy of a popularity hierarchy predicated in the boys' adherence to four main categories: charisma, authenticity, emotional support, and social fluidity.

Similar to McCormack's (2011) study, Anderson (2008) found the unacceptability of homophobic behavior to be true in his study of The Troubadours, a popular and athletic university fraternity. The American fraternity has, of course, been seen as an exclusionary,

violent, and highly masculinized and homophobic space (Wright 1996). In his study, however, Anderson (2008) discovered that the fraternity, which once had a gay president, institutionally chastises homophobic behavior and quickly polices boys who demonstrate homophobic characteristics. Instead, the Troubadours present themselves as an open fraternity—one that discusses homosexuality, includes its gay members, and bars homophobic behavior from its organizational culture. As one of Anderson’s (2008, 610) participants explains: “I used to hate gays, but now I think that’s stupid. Brian was a senior my first year here, and I had a lot of discussion[s] with him. Now I think it’s cool having gay guys around.”

Taken together, these studies speak to a larger narrative of “acceptance” of homosexuality in spaces, like sport, that have been traditionally violent and exclusive to non- heterosexual identities. Perhaps the most striking example of this is to compare Anderson’s 2002 study of gay athletes to his 2011 follow-up: almost ten years later, gay athletes are talked about and accepted as just “one of the guys.” And yet, much critical work on queer acceptance and visibility complicates this notion of *assimilation*—indeed, being just “one of the guys” and being admired for it—as an indicator of radical societal transformation. That is, what Anderson, his colleagues, and many other researchers take as evidence for declining cultural homophobia, I argue that heterosexual “acceptance” of gays is a liberal, assimilative project that craftily conceals powered hierarchies. So, while gay athletes and gay fraternity brothers might feel more included by their straight teammates than ever before—and I would certainly never argue that this is a bad thing—this inclusion is *always* dependent on the attitudes and behaviors of heterosexual teammates and institutions (“I think it’s cool to have gay guys around”). This is a powered feature of a historically homophobic institution that does nothing to bolster a radical understanding of (non-heteronormative) queerness, and leaves dominant institutions intact.

Much critical work has been written on the power-evasive flaws of mainstream liberalism for queer people, and especially queer people of Color (Vaught 2014; Kimport 2014; Sycamore 2012). Some of these critiques have focused on the highly publicized gay rights movement of the 2000s and 2010s, and especially on the highly visible and ever-contentious movement for marriage equality in the United States (Kimport 2014; Sycamore 2012). Many criticize the movement for its fundamentally assimilationist goals. In Kimport's (2014) book on same-sex weddings in San Francisco, she suggests that many same-sex couples, while wanting to interrogate heterosexual privilege through marriage, ultimately desire to achieve goals of legal and social recognition, marriage benefits, and "equality." Similarly, Sycamore (2012) suggests that the mainstream movement for gay rights focuses not only on White heteronormative conceptions of matrimony, family, and values, but on a very narrow image of acceptable queerness that makes invisible marginalized queer people and/or non-gender conforming people.

In her indictment of mainstream queer recognition, Sycamore (2012) helps us understand some fundamental flaws in Anderson's (2009) assimilationist-minded theory of inclusive masculinity. First, the acceptance of gay athletes is *always* predicated on the willingness of straight athletes to "do" the accepting. In other words, it is only if a gay athlete bears an acceptable image of "gay"—likely, not *too* "gay," likely built and athletic, conforming to normative images of the masculine, male-bodied athlete—that a gay athlete finds acceptance on the predominantly heterosexual team. In all of Anderson's empirical work outlined above, there is a heavy emphasis on accepting and inclusive environments. I am certainly not arguing that this is a bad thing (it is, no doubt, better than a once outwardly violent and unsafe space for gay athletes), but it *is* a problem that acceptance is tenuous and contingent upon the attitudes of heterosexual men. This is, in a more subtle way, still a relationship predicated on power and

assimilation. It is still hegemonic in that it has incorporated acceptance into its routine but, in the process, has redrawn boundaries between straight and gay.

Second, if gay inclusion into these spaces is predicated on heterosexual acceptance, then Anderson's inclusive masculinity theory fails to engage with this act as an ideological hierarchy structured, in part, by a kinder, more generous form of heteronormativity. In other words, I argue that the mere gesture of needing to be accepted by heterosexual institutions is not only embroiled in assimilationist moves, but also presumes its own more insidious hierarchy, with heteronormativity sitting comfortably on top. Thus, while Anderson believes gay acceptance and heterosexual liberalism are signs of declining cultural homophobia—and while this certainly might be true in uncritical terms—I argue, on the other hand, that the *need* for gay acceptance structures a hierarchy that reinscribes heterosexual power and reproduces a more subtle form of queer subordination.

Finally, this new optimistic perspective runs the risk of painting the institution of sport as a progressive, inclusive institution that chastises the “bullies” (as individuals), protects the victims (as individuals), and tacitly frees itself of any past wrongdoings. This narrative appears in Kian et al.'s (2015) article, in which Jason Collins is lauded as a singular bastion of hope and optimism for queer athletes, while conservative commentators, like Chris Broussard, are pathologized and condemned for homophobic attitudes. There are fundamental problems with implicitly stripping the institution of sport and team sport cultures of their responsibility to dismantle anti-queerness as it is historically attached to the evolution of organized sports. As Vaught (2014, 163) similarly warns in her critical review of anti-bullying legislation in Massachusetts, legislation that propagates structural liberalism dodges an understanding of *systemic* power, and how that power is “linked to discursive and material practices that are drawn

from and reinforced by larger institutions and systems that constitute dominant society, including schools.” Although in a quite different setting, analyzing differently located peoples and institutions, very similar logic can be applied to the individualized heroic narratives that arose from Jason Collins’ coming out story. Indeed, in condemning individual perpetrators of homophobia, like Chris Broussard, and in proliferating a tolerant, liberal, pro-queer narrative predicated on the “singular” Jason Collins—“This is a momentous occasion for the United States” (Kian et al. 2015, 625)—sports journalists risk evading the power-laden systems, practices, and discourses that have shaped the very institutions on which they report.

b. “Gay doesn’t mean gay anymore”: The de-politicization of homophobia

Another major finding in empirical work on inclusive masculinity theory is that homophobia and homophobic remarks are no longer socially acceptable (Anderson 2009). Remarks like “that’s so gay” and “dude, you’re a fag” (Pascoe 2007) that loft homophobic language to insult and police heterosexual identities are, in these spaces, punished. Instead, as many of the participants in these studies show, remarks like “that’s so gay” are barred insofar as they carry a specifically homophobic connotation (Anderson 2011a; Anderson 2008). In other words, in many of these settings, homophobic remarks were still *present* but were only accepted if they were not explicitly homophobic or were not perceived as such.

Far from the “don’t ask, don’t tell” culture revealed in previous research on gay identities and sport teams (Anderson 2002), many social researchers now demonstrate how homophobia is institutionally barred in the sporting realm (Anderson 2011a; Anderson 2011b; Anderson 2008; Kian et al. 2015). As one participant told Anderson (2011a) in his follow-up study of gay athletes, “Gay doesn’t mean gay anymore. And fag doesn’t mean fag. You can’t say that because

someone says ‘that’s so gay’ or ‘he’s a fag’ that they are homophobic” (Anderson 2011a, 259). In this instance, Anderson (2011a) demonstrates how these once-violent epithets have been detached from their previous understandings. In this sense, to say “that’s so gay” now is simply to call something stupid; to call someone a fag is simply to call him inept or idiotic. However, to call someone a fag and “mean it” is unacceptable.

In a similar study of an American soccer team in the Midwest, Anderson (2011b) describes many examples of straight male players displaying their acceptance of homosexuality and the potential of gay teammates. In one instance, Tim, a heterosexual player on the team, describes his journey towards acceptance of homosexuality, particularly in reference to the *act* of queer sex. He said:

I just didn’t like the idea of gay sex. I think that led me to not like gays. But hey, as one of the gay guys in my halls said to me: ‘I don’t like the idea of vaginal sex but I don’t hate you for it.’ I learned to disassociate an act that I think is gross, to those who engage in it. So no, I don’t really have a problem with it today (Anderson 2011b, 741-42).

In this instance, Tim quickly learns that to be homophobic in instances explicitly about homosexuality (and gay sex in particular) is wrong. Instead, he learns to just *not think* about homosexuality as a sexual act and instead think of his gay friends as, in a sense, “the same as you and me.” In these terms, to think homosexual sex is “gross” is fine so long as you accept a gay person as a friend, as a teammate, as a roommate, etc. This is another incident in which homophobia is explicitly depoliticized and detached from the bodies of those upon which it has been historically imposed.

The depoliticization and subsequent re-conceptualization of homophobia operates in other spaces as well. In his study of a university fraternity—a site that historically lauds White, athletic, heterosexual masculinities—Anderson (2008) found, as already mentioned, that the brothers institutionally barred any sort of overtly homophobic language or behavior. Indeed, in a

fraternity that once had a gay president, homophobia simply was not a way of life for these popular, progressive brothers. When traditionally homophobic slurs, like “fag,” were used, they were not meant to be homophobic but anti-feminine, and “that’s so gay” was used as a “general nonspecific expression of dissatisfaction” (Anderson 2008, 610). One brother in the study, Garret, suggests that “fag” could be directed at a gay brother but only if everyone understood it to be a joke and only if the heterosexual brother knew he was subject to an “anti-heterosexual” comeback, like “whatever-breeder.” In this instance, Anderson (2008) implies that our once-homophobic culture has come so far that it is acceptable to call a gay person a “fag” so long as everyone knows it is simply in jest. Once again, Anderson (2008) suggests homophobic epithets have been depoliticized and detached from their original meaning—that they are free to use, that straight boys can take them up so long as it is not explicitly homophobic.

These findings and analyses are important because homophobic language is such a significant way variously located boys, men, and masculinities have been historically and institutionally policed (Bridges and Pascoe 2016; Pascoe 2007; Ferguson 2001). Instead of critiquing the persisting use of these homophobic epithets, however, Anderson and other scholars have instead modified them according to their participants’ stated meanings—that is, that they are no longer homophobic, no longer carry the historical weight of systemic homophobia.

However, I argue that the analysis of these athletes’ responses creates a situation wherein heteromascularity is reinstated as the *norm* and (normative) queerness is uncritically and problematically subsumed into the current system. In dehistoricizing gay epithets and in *uncritically* analyzing the many powered meanings behind cultures of heterosexual affection, inclusive masculinity theory does not attend to the tremendous privilege of dominant groups to make, construct, manipulate, and control sexual meanings. Instead of probing deeper at his

participants' continued use of homophobic remarks, Anderson (2008, 2011a, 2011ba) simply takes their word for it—even using it as evidence for declining homophobia. This is fraught with credulous understandings of what these remarks have meant and continue to mean for queer-identifying people—especially those devoid of the institutional benefits of Whiteness and cis-genderedness—and instead falls into the dangerous trap of ideological power evasion. In doing so, Anderson also obscures the tremendous privilege of heterosexual (predominantly White) men to leverage these power-laden epithets and then re-create their meanings as to avoid being labeled homophobic or hateful. Ultimately, I argue that the de-historicization of these words, which effectively suggests that homophobia is “over,” reinscribes (White) heterosexuality as the normal, the powerful, and the preferred manifestation of sexual identity.

Bridges and Pascoe (2016) help clarify this. They suggest that, despite how men and boys might re-frame “fag discourse,” these insults carry gendered and sexual meanings and are “best understood as discursive strategies that discipline gender practices and identities” (Bridges and Pascoe 2016, 416). In other words, while they might not uniformly attack *gay* men for being gay, they do attack *men*—as a broader category—ensuring they are upholding an appropriately masculine persona. These epithets are a way of policing men and “appropriate” bodily manifestations of manhood. So, if a man were *gay and* masculine, he does not necessarily deserve the insult. Instead, “being subject to homophobic harassment has as much to do with failing at masculine tasks of competence ... as it does with sexual identity” (Bridges and Pascoe 2016, 416). In this sense, regardless of whether or not these words have explicitly homophobic connotations, they are nevertheless used to police boys into normative categories of gender—they strengthen the strict categorization of heterosexuality and maleness, and subsequently denigrate queerness.

Furthermore, Anderson's work suggests that, instead of avoiding and repelling homosocial contact, straight men are no longer afraid to show intimacy for each other (Anderson 2011b). While this is certainly not a bad thing, the problem is that Anderson takes this to mean that straight boys are now more open to the possibility of gay teammates, fraternity brothers, and friends. Put simply, Anderson equates heterosexual homosociality with collapsing hierarchies of masculinities and with the diminishing relevance of homophobia in US sporting culture (and US culture in general).

Other sociologists, however, would likely argue that interpreting this as such is not so simple. Bridges and Pascoe (2016) argue that sexual intimacy between straight men does not necessarily mean that queerphobia is absent and, instead, that straight men's support for gay rights often includes requisite rhetorical distancing that, in essence, suggests: "I'm not gay, but I support them." Moreover, Jane Ward (2015) argues that White heterosexual men who engage in sexual intercourse with each other have the ability to control the *meaning* of that contact, rendering it, in fact, sexually meaningless and reinscribing White heteromasculine power in the process. This right is not secured to queer men, men of Color, or queer men of Color, whose sexual subjectivities are managed by those who control the discourse around sexual contact (Ward 2015). Indeed, Whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality work in tandem to control sexual and gendered meanings. So, while it is certainly not a bad thing that straight men are becoming more intimate with each other and their gay teammates, to use it as evidence for collapsing hierarchies and queer inclusion is to obscure the continuing power of straight (predominantly White) men to police the various meanings of homosociality.

Elucidating even further these tacitly power-reproducing goals of assimilation, Sycamore (2012, 21), suggests, "the ultimate irony of gay liberation is that it has made it possible for

straight people to create more fluid gender, sexual, and social identities, while mainstream gay people salivate over state-sanctioned Tiffany wedding bands and participatory patriarchy.” This scathing quote shows two ugly sides of the same coin: first, that assimilationist approaches to gay rights has made the queer community proscribe to heteronormative images of marriage and family configurations; second, that, on the flipside, this visible movement has allowed heterosexual people to feel more comfortable exploring their own identities. Ultimately, then, not only do queer athletes and members of predominantly-heterosexual institutions always have heterosexual people to *thank* for their kindness and generosity (as I argued in the previous subsection), but it also gives heterosexual people the ability to “explore” in ways queer people might not have the privilege to do. While Anderson might analyze this greater opportunity for visible prosocial contact among straight men as a sign for the flattening of once-hierarchical masculinities, then, Ward (2015) and Sycamore (2012) would likely suggest that this is a sign of the ability of heterosexual men to access and define intimacy among them and not necessarily a symptom of declining cultural homophobia.

c. *“He’s just Tim”*: Comparing homophobia to racism

In work on inclusive masculinity theory, social theorists sometimes draw comparisons between homophobia and racism (Anderson 2011a; Anderson 2008; Cashmore and Cleland 2012). These studies argue that both homophobic and racist attitudes are institutionally unacceptable nowadays. Likening the “new” civil rights movement (mainstream gay acceptance and visibility) to the racial civil rights movements of the mid-to-late-1900s certainly provokes a poignant response, especially within the logic of the United States, the “land of the free.” There are significant concerns with propagating dangerous post-racial logic (Cho 2009) with these hollow analytical arguments, however—concerns that I will delineate in this section.

In his foundational 2011 follow-up study of 26 openly gay high school and university athletes, Anderson (2011a) discovered a more open and gay friendly team sport culture. As previously mentioned, overt homophobia was barred by the culture of these teams and multiple masculinities, according to Anderson, existed without contention or hierarchy. To explain this astonishing lack of homophobia (a finding which is oppositional to decades of theoretical and empirical research on high school and university athletes), participants compared acts of homophobia to acts of racism. As one of Anderson's (2011a, 258) participants said: "It just doesn't make sense to be homophobic today, everybody has gay friends. You might as well be racist if you're going to homophobic."

Anderson (2008) presents similar lines of logic in other studies, like in his study of a university fraternity, which has historically has been a site of institutional racism and racial segregation (Ross 1999 in Anderson 2008). On the contrary, however, Anderson (2008) discovered a setting of astonishing racial parity—one in which all brothers were friends, "cliques" of boys were consistent with the racial demographics of the larger fraternity, and no man of Color in the fraternity felt out of place. In fact, Alex, a Black brother, went so far as to say: "I don't feel black here. Although I'm clearly black, I don't feel like people are looking at me that way. In fact, I don't really see color at all here. It's like Tim. He is just Tim. He is not Asian Tim, or white Tim. He's just Tim" (Anderson 2008, 11). In this instance, we see how inclusive masculinity theory is used to explain a cultural moment where lines of race and/or sexuality have been made invisible and, frankly inappropriate to call out. This is seen not only in the ways men of Color, like Alex, conceptualize themselves, but also in the way the brothers see race institutionally at the fraternity. Lynn, an Asian brother, succinctly concludes: "I don't think race is an issue here. I'd say we're as diverse as it gets for this campus" (Anderson 2008, 11).

In these two studies, Anderson (2011a; 2008) views this new frontier of “gay-friendly” and “non-racist” participants as indicative of a world where various masculinities can exist without hierarchy. In both studies Anderson draws both implicit and explicit comparisons between racism and homophobia to suggest that not only are both on the decline, but that their declining status signifies a tempering of institutional racial and sexual power dynamics once theorized in masculine settings like sport teams and fraternities (Connell 2005; Messner 1988). While Anderson has not suggested the *end* of homophobia and/or racism, he has used inclusive masculinity theory to suggest that once-powered institutional dynamics have significantly flattened out, leaving more room for peaceful coexistence.

On a broader level, Cashmore and Cleland’s (2012) study of football (soccer) fans in the United Kingdom proffers similar sentiments using data from 3,500 survey responses. In this study, Cashmore and Cleland (2012) suggest that cultural homophobia within the sporting arena is greatly on the decline, and that football clubs and agencies are to blame for any continued currents of homophobia within the institution. Cashmore and Cleland (2012) largely find that football fans in the UK will support a player if that player is “good”—regardless of sexual identity or orientation, echoing the newfound trend of hollowing out of sexual categories discussed earlier. In fact, 93% of this 3,500-person sample believe that homophobia has no place within association football in the UK. These are undeniably significant findings.

To drive home their point of greater institutional inclusivity, Cashmore and Cleland (2012) compare this statistically significant evidence of decreasing homophobia to the racial gains made in the UK sport world in the mid to late 1900s. One participant encapsulates this argument particularly well:

It is exactly the same as the problems in the 1970s and 1980s with racism. You get good black or gay players in your side the piss taking stops simple as. Ask Les Ferdinand or

Andy Cole what a so-called 'hotbed of racism' the north east is. Les is called 'Sir' in Newcastle and he was only with us briefly. The same would happen with gay players (Cashmore and Cleland 2012, 380).

This participant's allusion to Les Ferdinand, a Black footballer and one of the most highly regarded players of all-time, suggests that the presence of skilled (but historically marginalized) players can only improve the institutional conditions of sport. Les Ferdinand's presence as not only a talented but "respectable" footballer—"Les is called 'Sir' in Newcastle"—suggests that these dominant institutions can change so long as good, reputable representations are present. In this way, the "racism" to which both the authors *and* the participants refer is relegated to the past. Ultimately, Cashmore and Cleland (2012) use their findings of decreasing attitudes of racism and homophobia within football fandom to challenge the tenets of hegemonic masculinity and to suggest that the value-laden masculine hierarchies of days' past have begun collapsing. What exists now, operating from this logic, is a horizontal space wherein multiple masculinities can exist without power differential, racial or otherwise.

While I do not wish to disband the genuine brotherhood and purportedly anti-racist attitudes men in this study proffer, there are significant problems with translating these attitudes into larger statements about crumbling systemic racial hierarchies. Just as O'Neill's (2015) major misgiving with inclusive masculinity theory is that it reproduces the logic of post-feminism, I take this idea further to argue that some of the empirical findings in work on inclusive masculinity theory reproduces the logic of post-racialism by drawing several comparisons of the gay rights movement to past racial civil rights movements. While these comparisons might seem easy or obvious to draw, they enter into dangerous post-racial territory, wherein racism is "over"—a thing of the past (Cho 2009). Indeed, doing so obscures the continuing legacy of institutional racism in the United States and United Kingdom (Gillborn 2005), the two countries

where most of Anderson's and his colleagues' research takes place—and uses the problematic logic of visibility, acceptability, and assimilation that I discussed above.¹⁰

I argue that the tendency for inclusive masculinity theory to view race and racism uncritically limits not only limits acceptable racial discourse and the effectiveness of racial justice movements (Cho 2009, 1,646), but also constructs an incomprehensible loop of explaining the decline of homophobia using empty, problematic post-racial ideology. Put as a question: How can one posture the end of something using a logic that presumes the end of something that is actually still present? Put in a less convoluted way: Using logic that racism is “over” when it is certainly *not* “over” does nothing to support the claim that homophobia is over. Indeed, the comparison is empty and, even more troubling, skirts the continuing institutional and systemic presence of racism today.

IV. A FIELD DIVIDED: THE (UNCERTAIN) FUTURE OF MASCULINITIES

I return now, as I began this chapter, to 10-year-old Kymora Johnson, standing amongst her male teammates. In an act of defiance, they all don pink basketball jerseys to protest the gender-biased rules of the youth basketball tournament in Charlottesville, South Carolina. The boys stand, some with their hands crossed in front of them, some with their hands crossed behind them. Kymora stands with her arms crossed at her shoulders, undoubtedly with the most assured stance among the team. She is positioned in the middle of the line—her face means business.

I return to this story because it speaks to the utter complexity of studying masculinities and gender in sport (or in any institution) in an era of increasing visibility for those once

¹⁰ It may appear like I am drawing similar comparisons by using Cho's post-racialism to apply to homophobia. However, I hope the reader understands that I am using them in systematically conscious ways—ways that are attuned to powered similarities in both racism and homophobia (Whiteness, for one)—and part of my critique is that Anderson does *not* do this.

institutionally and socially barred from sport participation. Indeed, as a sociological concept, hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily work neatly in Kymora's situation. For one, Kymora is centered in the narrative of this story and, although her story is characterized by exclusion, strict gender norms, and institutional body policing, it is one of ultimate triumph, one that speaks to the ferocity and increasing visibility of women and girls in traditionally masculine settings.

And yet, inclusive masculinity theory does not fit, either. The youth organization, for one, excludes Kymora based on her gender, creating a scenario in which it is inappropriate for ten-year-old children, regardless of identity, to play basketball together. Kymora and her parents must prove, through "official" documentation, that her gender matches her sex organs and that they have been "upfront" about it all along, as if Kymora were some gigantic secret to the officials of this tournament. Furthermore, Kymora's inclusion within the team is predicated on the acceptance of her male counterparts. Indeed, it is only when Kymora's coaches and teammates say, "Kymora is good, she can be on our team," that the inclusion can continue to happen. Thus, although Kymora's story speaks to the increasing acceptance of women and girls in sport, it also brings attention to how that acceptance is always contingent upon men. It seems, then, that there is a consistent and insidious hierarchy still in place within this youth sport institution—a hierarchy which has been rendered invisible by our own powered discourses of "equality for all" and the symbolic weight of pink jerseys and "girl power."

What then, are we to make of the conflicting and contradictory sociological theories I have discussed thus far in this chapter? First, it is clear that I do not endorse the empirical or theoretical terrain on which inclusive masculinity theory sits. While this theory has found its supporters, both from sociologists and from popular media alike, its tendency to rely on progressive changes in sport (and other traditionally masculine spaces) and its failure to

interrogate continuing flows of institutional power leaves me doubting its applicability. Similarly, its problematic division of “homophobia” and “homophobia” is confusing (de Boise 2015) and does not speak to the ways in which homophobia and queerphobia operate tacitly and without overt gay-bashing, like during the Reagan Administration and the height of the AIDS crisis. Further, its quasi-hegemonic distancing act from years of critical work renders the theory unable to engage with ideologies of post-feminism (O’Neill 2015) and post-racialism in highly problematic ways. Considering the ways in which hegemonic power operates insidiously, inclusive masculinity theory does not explore its empirical findings deeply or thoughtfully enough to find my support.

The unquestioned use of hegemonic masculinity presents theoretical and empirical issues as well. Besides essentially reproducing academic hegemony by being “the” theory for several decades, hegemonic masculinity is conflicted in its (purposeful) refusal to define masculinities—suggesting, instead, that it is both institutional and individual, constantly in flux and perpetually contested. This is unwieldy, as many theorists have pointed out, and presents problems for empirical usage. Additionally, it provides a dearth of accessible vocabulary for simultaneous improvements within institutions whilst inequities are reproduced. Bridges (2014) points out that Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) are unable to fully address how hybrid masculinities might be more than just a variation to hegemonic forms. As such, while I fully support hegemonic masculinity in its careful and critical use, as a sociologist dedicated to examining the flow of power within institutions, I often wonder how to address the good along with the bad, the changes along with the continuities. No doubt there is change that is not simply a reproduction of power. Is there room for this within hegemonic masculinity? Perhaps there is, but it may take some crucial reforming beyond the scope of Connell and Messerschmidt’s 2005 reformulation.

Perhaps the answer to these contradictions, then, lies within the burgeoning theory of hybrid masculinities—a theory still very much in its nascence, but imperative in what it says about modern masculinities. Hybrid masculinities, which I will explore in my next chapter, relies both on a changing discursive conception of manhood but insidious (and hegemonic) reproductions of power. In my next chapter, I will contribute to an important academic conversation by using original empirical data I have collected to discuss the developing importance of hybrid masculinities as a critical sociological tool.

chapter three

“THE OLD BOYS’ NETWORK IS A CLICHÉ”:
Emphasizing change, obscuring continuities

Maybe [football] is the last big, public bastion of masculinity, in a way. Right? ... I think we’ve become more sophisticated than a lot of the bash-up sports thing. But maybe football’s the last hold-out. (Steve Warner, participant)

Powerful systems of inequality, like sexism and homophobia, are flexible and capable of adapting to new historical circumstances. Thus, sometimes, what might initially look like social change is actually continuity (Bridges and Pascoe 2016, 420).

It was the 1980s, and Audrey Thompson was a high school athlete who wasn’t asking for much. “We barely had buses to go to swimming practices,” she told me. “We didn’t have our own pool and so we were, like, setting up our own carpools.” Audrey, who had grown up playing on boys’ teams because of the dearth of girls’ teams in her town in the 1970s, was tired of a lack of recognition. Witnessing injustices in her school, she took the men’s football team to task: “causing trouble,” as she called it—singlehandedly calling them out for the uneven financial and social support they received compared to the women. And, instead of getting those buses her swimming team needed, Audrey was told, frequently and sometimes threateningly, to stop trying. In one instance, the high school football coach asked Audrey—a “pretty girl,” as he called her—to go organize the school dance instead of continuing to make a “big stink” about the football team. This was thirty or so years ago, on the cusp of Title IX.

Laura Newsome, an avid multisport athlete and coach, also grew up as Title IX was introduced and enacted. Like Audrey, Laura played primarily on boys’ teams as a young child, while seeking greater institutional recognition for women and girls in her town—a small, upper-middle class town in the Northeast, United States. And, like Audrey, Laura told me of difficulties she faced back in the 70s and 80s, of pushback to gaining recognition, of trying to make a space—a meaningful, equitable space—for women and girls to participate in athletics. Indeed,

Laura and Audrey, both White, middle-class women who grew up in the Northeast during the 70s and 80s, shared strikingly similar experiences with me, which speaks to the embeddedness of these gendered norms and regulations within the structure of organized sport.

Laura, however, told me that things have changed significantly. Today, women and girls are receiving more recognition, and, according to Laura, the cultural conception of masculinity is changing, becoming more expansive, allowing a wider array gender expression for all athletes. Laura's experiences in the present day suggest that the hardships Audrey, her colleague, faced in high school, while still certainly hurtful, might be subsiding in frequency—they are, perhaps, a thing of the past. At first glance, Laura's opinions reflect the narrative expressed in Eric Anderson's (2009) research on inclusive masculinities—that times have changed, structural inequalities have subsided, and both men and women are able to enjoy a greater range of personal, aesthetic, and sexual choices.

However, as we spoke, Laura shared experiences that reflect strikingly similar *underlying* struggles that Audrey expressed in her memories of high school. As a sports administrator today, Laura shared her fiscal expertise on Title IX and budget allocation (she spent much time studying this while pursuing her Master's Degree, in fact), pushing against the common notion that an equitable redistribution of funding is a zero-sum game for men and men's sports. As she contemplated her experience as the budget-handler, she told me about several encounters with male resistance to her leadership—resistance fraught with anxieties, it seemed, about the dethroning of men from leadership in the athletic department. In her own words:

Recently—sadly, in my situation—I was having to reallocate some resources to make things more equitable and that always creates a lot of, um, passion? Shall we say? When it comes to allocating resources. And it is not like: “Oh yeah, of course that's the right thing! The girls' teams should have what we have.” It is like: “Are you crazy?” ... It can be really ugly, and that's, I think, the sad side of it, instead of seeing what the benefits

can be for both programs when there is equity ... I think I often underestimate—the power of that still today, it catches me by surprise sometimes.

In this quote, Laura speaks to the main idea undergirding this chapter and, ultimately, this thesis: power is more often than not unnoticeable—*especially* to those in power—and it is not until we open ourselves to critical interrogation of that power that we can work to reveal, address, and ultimately dismantle it.

Laura's experiences shed light on the dangers of the dominant, liberal, "we're all equal" discourse that now prevails in the United States (Guinier 2004) and beyond (Brickell 2001). Indeed, it is only when she reflects deeply—"it catches me by surprise"—that she can call attention to persisting institutional inequities, even ones that seem, to those of us uninvolved in Laura's day-to-day life, so obvious, so unmistakably present. It is difficult to bear witness to power that was built to be invisible. So, how can we make it visible?

In this chapter, I will be empirically analyzing power inequities within sport as they existed, continue to exist, or have, in some cases, seemingly *ceased* to exist, for the various participants in this study—all of whom share a genuine life-long commitment to youth sport and demonstrate this commitment through teaching educational workshops at high schools and youth sport programs. Ultimately, I will argue that speaking purely in terms of Connell's "hegemonic masculinity" or Anderson's "inclusive masculinity" is incoherent for these data. Instead, I will engage in a discussion of these participants' experiences using Demetriou's (2001) and Bridges and Pascoe's (2014) "hybrid masculinities" as a guiding theoretical framework—a framework I conceptualize not as a *departure* from hegemonic masculinity, but as a contextualized form of it, one that more explicitly acknowledges and incorporates the "non-hegemonic" language and practices of this contemporary moment. I use hybrid masculinities as a way of explaining how common rhetoric(s) of progress—"It's gotten so much better!"—distance these participants from

“hegemonic masculinity” as Connell (2005) explained it, but how this distancing often has the effect of ignoring, diminishing, or precluding a critical discussion of continuing mechanisms of intersectional power within the institution of sport.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CHANGE, CONTINUITY, OR BOTH?

This thesis has presented some fundamental theoretical and empirical concerns within masculinities scholarship, particularly within the realm of sports. To its credit, though, the field has attempted to adapt its work to ever-fluctuating conceptions of manhood and masculinities, especially within the twenty-first century, which has presented dynamic challenges to orthodox ways of enacting masculinities. One of these theoretical adaptations, a burgeoning theoretical contribution dubbed “hybrid masculinities” (Demetriou 2001; Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014), has attempted to fill in the substantive gap between hegemonic masculinity—a framework of power that is unable to fully account for this contemporary moment—and inclusive masculinity, which is attentive to change yet uncritical (and often problematic, as I argued above) in its language and intent. Hybrid masculinities argues that both hegemonic masculinity and inclusive masculinity, in parts can be correct: that the options for gender expression *have* multiplied, but that this often has the effect of obscuring continuing gendered and racialized power hierarchies under the guise of “progress” (Bridges 2014).

The theory of hybrid masculinities has its roots in Demetriou’s (2001) critique of Connell’s (1995) hegemonic masculinity. Specifically, Demetriou (2001) engaged with the problematic binary divide between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities originally proposed by Connell. Complicating this reductionist binary, Demetriou (2001) argued that the complex, powered structures supported by hegemonic masculinity are much more nuanced and,

in fact, do not rely on an either/or divide. As such, Demetriou (2001, 348) argued for a conceptualization of non-hegemonic masculinities as a

hybrid bloc that unites various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy ... It is its constant hybridization, its constant appropriation of diverse elements from various masculinities that makes the hegemonic bloc capable of reconfiguring itself and adapting to the specificities of new historical conjunctures.

That is, Connell's (2005) original formulation of hegemonic masculinity failed to see how the "hegemonic bloc" did not simply push away from the "non-hegemonic bloc," but skillfully appropriated elements of the latter group to reconstitute its power. Demetriou (2001), citing Sarvan (1998), uses evidence from several popular films, including *Cruising* starring Al Pacino, in which a heterosexual cop (Pacino) learns to appropriate elements of gay culture, like S/M culture, and incorporate them into his heterosexual life. These incorporations, however, serve to reproduce patriarchal power within his heterosexual life. For example, Pacino's character starts using elements he learned from gay S/M culture to dominate his girlfriend, thereby reproducing patriarchal power and dominance (Sarvan 1998 in Demetriou 2001).

Recently, several scholars have revisited and revitalized Demetriou's (2001) critique, in what has become a quite exciting debate within the sociology of masculinities. In a comprehensive piece which expands on Demetriou's (2001) work, Bridges and Pascoe (2014) together proffer three main tenets of hybrid masculinity: (1) discursive distancing from hegemonic masculinity, (2) strategic borrowing or marginalized masculinities, and (3) the subsequent fortification of sexual boundaries between themselves and marginalized groups. These three tenets hold in various contemporary studies on masculinities (Messner 2007b; Arxer 2011; Bridges 2010; Bridges 2014). For example, Messner (2007b) argues that, in his gubernatorial campaign, Arnold Schwarzenegger relied on a type of hybrid masculinity by

asserting his hegemonic muscularity whilst incorporating requisite signs of emotion and softness (non-hegemonic attributes). In another study, straight men at a “Walk a Mile in Her Shoes” march—a march to combat violence against women—wear heels and dress in drag to support feminist movements, but their appropriation of gay aesthetic culture is seen as a joke to them: “It reminded me of why men *don’t* walk in heels,” one participant said (Bridges 2010, 18). In this quote, this man, while borrowing from gay culture to prove his devotion to feminist movements, makes a point of reinforcing his straightness by largely mocking gay culture.

Bridges (2014) argues in his study of three differently situated groups of predominantly White, heterosexual men that these men draw upon (gay) sexual aesthetics to distance themselves from negative, hegemonic forms of masculinity. He discusses how these groups of men engage in tastes, behaviors, and ideologies often associated with gay men, but only insofar as these aesthetics were trivial to their authentic identities. Bridges (2014, 79) argues, “by casually framing being gay only as fun and exciting, this practice [of strategically borrowing gay aesthetics] allows these men to ignore the persistence of extreme sexual inequality that actual gay men face every day.” Ultimately, what might look like White straight men “opening up” to new and less constricted forms of masculinities under the banner of cultural progress, might actually just be the appropriation—or “strategic borrowing”—of gay aesthetics to insidiously reconstitute persisting systems of heteromale power and dominance.

In his study of social interactions in a college bar, Arxer (2011) similarly found that men distanced themselves from traditional forms of hegemonic masculine power by relying on alternative masculinities, which then ultimately reproduced gendered power and privilege. In one instance, a couple friends of a gay man, Jeff, told him he is the “optimal” spokesperson for school bullying because he is gay. Embarrassed, Jeff retorted that just because he is gay does not

make him the best person to talk about bullying. Indeed, Jeff's peers, in their refusal to be spokespeople about school bullying reinforced their power and possible complicity in systems of gay bullying rife within schools, all the while ostensibly supporting gay voices. In this instance, these heterosexual men, while superficially supportive of their gay friend and for the anti-bullying cause, reproduce their heterosexual dominance through their refusal to act (Arxer 2011).

Together, these studies do critical work in examining masculinities in ever-changing landscapes. That is, given decades of social and institutional changes since Connell's original formulation of hegemonic masculinity, many men now wish to distance themselves from negative stereotypes of "traditional" or orthodox masculinities. However, the studies above collectively demonstrate how this discursive distancing often insidiously reproduces heteromasculine dominance through the uncritical appropriation of sexual aesthetics and ideological support. Largely, these studies demonstrate how ideologies and practices are malleable, and shape themselves to fit within the given time and context. As Bridges and Pascoe (2016, 420) argue,

As feminist critiques of normative masculinities have made their way into the mainstream, performances, discourses, ideologies, and practices that have historically upheld gender and sexual inequality have been put into the spotlight and publicly challenged. *Labeling* privilege, however, is not tantamount to *dismantling* privilege ... Powerful systems of inequality, like sexism and homophobia, are flexible and capable of adapting to new historical circumstances. Thus, sometimes, what might initially look like social *change* is actually *continuity*.

While this quote touches upon the importance of studying hybrid masculinities in an ever-changing world, there are limits or gaps within empirical research on hybrid masculinities that are worth exploring. Given its nascent position within the sociology of masculinities, I hope to deepen and complicate hybrid masculinities using my own data. While most work on hybrid masculinities tends to discuss masculinities solely in terms of (White) men's bodies, sexual

aesthetic choices, and strategic borrowing, there is the need to think about how these might reproduce ideologically, institutionally, and/or rhetorically. That is, not necessarily in terms of masculine embodiment or aesthetic choices, but actually in the way we perceive (or do not perceive) masculinities to operate in our lives--individually, ideologically, and/or institutionally.

Specifically, I use “hybrid masculinity” as a way to explain how rhetoric distancing and discourses of “progress” do not preclude our ability to speak about masculinities, as I will show, but do significantly dampen our ability to talk about continuing systems of gender, sexual, and racial power and inequality. Ultimately, I will propose “institutionalized hybrid masculinities” as a new theory or concept to explain how sport, as an institution, is conceptualized and discussed, especially in the context of education.

METHODS

For this study, I interviewed six educators, two men and four women, who work for an education non-profit, Creating Athletes for Tomorrow (CrAFT). These educators present workshops to athletes, coaches, and parents about how to foster and maintain a “positive sport culture,” which means various things for the various participants. All six participants are located in and around major cities all along the East Coast of the United States. They range in age, from late 20s to late 50s. Five of the participants are White, and one is Black. All six have extensive experience with sports, both with playing and coaching. All six played collegiately, and some went on to professional, and even international and Olympic, endeavors.

I used convenience sampling to locate these participants. Specifically, I gained access to these six participants through my work as an undergraduate research assistant on a larger, longitudinal study evaluating the non-profit at which the participants work. An Executive at the non-profit approved of my topic idea and permitted my contact with participants, but does not

know who I ended up interviewing and necessarily had no involvement in the interview process beyond lending their permission. One interviewee, a trusted and well-admired educator at CrAFT, took on the role of primary informant and helped facilitate connections to other participants in the area around me.

The interviews I conducted were roughly one to two hours long. All interviews were conducted in person. During interviews, I asked my participants about their experiences with athletics throughout their lives—from pick-up street hockey games to competing for Olympic medals. I spent a good amount of time acquainting myself with their childhood, high school, collegiate, and professional experiences in sport so that I could ground my analyses thoughtfully within their own understandings of them. Importantly for purposes here, I asked them to share their thoughts about or experiences with continued inequities within sport—particularly related to masculinity, sexism, homophobia, racism, and other forms of inequalities that were relevant to our conversations or their experiences. Cautious of leading them into a response, I asked in such a way that allowed them to speak to inequities or, on the flip side, to contend (as some did) that US culture has changed in such a way that inequities have substantially subsided. Answers varied in perspective, of course, but were nonetheless all fascinating and rife with insights that can only come from a life-long dedication to sport and education.

What is essential to remember about this chapter and these participants, particularly within a critical tradition, is that they are all implicated within structures and systems—just as I am—that shape their subjectivities, predilections, and opinions. As such, if this chapter is at all incisive, it is *not* directed toward these participants as individuals—in fact, they are incredible, conscientious, passionate workers at this non-profit, and I quite admire them all. The point is, rather, to complicate their viewpoints in *relation* to structures of power that I have discussed in

the preceding pages of this thesis. This is a crucial shift of perspective that allows systems of power to be the subject of critique, and not necessarily those implicated within them.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Half of the interviews I transcribed myself, and the other half I sent off to a reputable transcription service. In the case of the latter, I re-listened to the audio files whilst reading along with the transcript, ensuring that the service transcribed accurately and thoughtfully. Through this process of transcribing, listening, and re-listening, I gained what I deemed to be a thorough and appropriate immersion within my data. To analyze the interviews, I used Dedoose, a qualitative coding service. On Dedoose, I used a method of open coding to look for patterns and repeated themes, topics and categories (Corbin and Strauss 1990). These codes were interpretative and allowed me to generate conclusions from the most significant and recurring themes within my data. The findings are discussed below.

FINDINGS

I. A Common Understanding of Masculinity

Messner (2007a, 59) notes, “Concrete examinations of sports ... reveal complex and multilayered systems of inequality: racial, class, gender, sexual preference, and age dynamics are all salient features of the athletic context.” Indeed, Messner (1988) argues that, despite the dynamic, ever-changing, constantly-in-crisis gender order, organized sport, historically and contemporarily is a “male” structure. In these essential definitions, Messner (2007a; 1988) importantly situates, as I do in the following section, an understanding of “masculinity” as an *organizing* feature of institutions—one that structures systems of inequality in complicated, intersectional ways. It is an organizing concept that allows us to see how the dynamic “gender order” is, indeed, a project of male domination, but how men do not share equally in this project (Connell 2005; Messner 2007a). Thus, all people are implicated—unevenly, complicatedly, and

with differing profits and losses—within systems and institutions of (masculine) power. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to sport as being constructed and upheld by “structures of masculinity”—although this might seem abstract, I simply mean that organized sport was historically developed by men for the (re)making of hegemonic masculinity in a rapidly industrializing world (Bederman 1995; Messner 1988). As such, despite substantial improvements, feminist gains, and general social and legal change, I nevertheless conceptualize the structural scaffolding of organized sport to be indelibly entangled within deeply masculinized practices and institutions.

In this section, I demonstrate the relevance of masculinity as an organizing structure to athletics. All six participants indicated, through their *own* stories, that they have had significant experiences with the upsetting, often violent repercussions of an organization structured by masculinity and propagated by social actors who are implicated within it (Connell 2005). I argue that this is important for two main reasons: first, it speaks to the relevance *and* prevalence of the systemic inequalities that stem from hegemonic masculinity as an organizing feature of athletics. Indeed, these participants tell stories that span time, place, location, sport type, sport level, gender, race, and age, and yet touch upon inequalities in similar ways. Second, it means that, although these participants might not speak or think about it in academic, theoretical, or structural terms, they nonetheless generally share an awareness and common understanding of what “masculinity” is, how it influences their lives, and how it impacts the institution of sports. For example, both Mark and Steve, two male participants, connected the epithet “pussy” to a question I had about masculinity in sports, demonstrating not only a common understanding of the concept “masculinity,” but also of generally what it entails. This is essential, especially when

considering their ability or lack of ability to discuss these issues in educational workshops, as I will discuss in Chapter 4.

i. Arch rivals & abusive coaches: Masculinities as embodied

Almost all of these participants told me emotional, sometimes quite stirring stories about (predominantly male-bodied) coaches, fathers, or other athletic influences in their lives. In various ways, these stories speak to how violence and abuse are acceptable currencies within the logic of competition and winning, and how masculinities are commonly (and perhaps a little problematically) seen as individually embodied. Nevertheless, taken together, the experiences of these participants speak to organized sports as a masculinized context conducive to embodied reproductions of gender and sexual inequalities (Messner 2007a). They also show, as I will argue, the insidious systems of *structural* power that individual embodiments support.

Many participants discussed coaches—almost exclusively male—who have used highly abusive tactics to lead their teams. As I discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Mark Wise, a middle-aged White man, coach, and father of two athletic boys, spoke quite poignantly about his experiences with his DI university coach. His coach, who was eventually fired, called his team “pussies” and, in Mark’s words, was abusive, denigrating, spiteful, and petty whenever their team lost. In one instance, the coach had the bus driver pull to the side of the road so that he could throw up—all because his athletes made him “sick.” He was such an exceptionally disliked and abusive man that, when he violently tossed his crutch in the middle of a game, nobody went to pick it up for him. Mark remembers watching him hop and flail to retrieve it.

Steve Warner, also a middle-aged White man, multisport coach, and father of two athletic boys, shared similar experiences. Throughout our nearly two-hour long interview, Steve shared story after story that involved men—parents, coaches, athletes—who enacted a type of

masculinity that was rather abusive, and sometimes leaned explicitly on homophobic or misogynistic language. His relative of a similar age, for example, calls Steven a “half-a-fag” for teaching kids about positive sport culture—one of many homophobic sentiments that came up in these interviews. In another example, Steve’s longtime athletic inspiration and friend, a world-class athlete in his sport, was “son of a bitch,” in Steve’s words—he was an unfriendly, abusive, introverted, alcoholic man. Despite admiring him, Steve suggested he was not the type of person anybody would like to hang out with, but he was popular because of his success. This man’s fame and popularity, despite being such an abusive, unlikable man, speaks to the entitlement that “winning” accrues for men; indeed, accepting these behaviors because of fame or talent, as many do, reinforces the acceptability of these practices broadly, and aids in the construction and perpetuation of masculine hierarchies.

Steve did not stop at these two examples, however. Talking about the “masculine types” in his town’s various youth sport leagues, an upper-middle-class town in the Northeast, Steve says:

[Masculinity, for some men] really touches some primal, beat-em-up instinct. And I think my observation in youth sports has been that the more—the stronger personalities, which...share those characteristics of masculinity: man up, you know, beat their ass. Those guys tend to be the more vocal volunteers ... My arch rival in town, he’s a big mouth ... There’s no logical reason when you look at what he does to kids—he was *this* close to being banned for a year from coaching hockey in [this state] because of his manipulation of the rules!

Steven clearly perceives masculinity to be embodied within abusive practice, attitudes, and behaviors. Although he risks skirting the socially constructed nature of masculinity by problematically and incorrectly linking masculinity to the biological realm (“primal,” “instinct”), Steven nevertheless showcases how men in his town—including his “arch rival,” whom he brings up in conversation frequently—embody and enact a highly abusive “win at all costs”

strategy of coaching children. Indeed, the coaches Steven describes bend the rules to win, are loud and abusive, and regularly use put-downs like “man up,” one of the many charged epithets used to police boys back into the normative boundaries of manhood (Pascoe 2007; Kimmel 2008).

Although perhaps unwittingly, Steve also demonstrates how masculinities operate within structures, and often garner institutional protection. As he told me, these personalities are littered about youth programs around where he lives, threatening to “humiliate” kids through exclusionary tactics. Additionally, Steve’s abusive “arch rival” was nearly banned from coaching hockey in their state, but ultimately was not. This symbolic *inaction* on the state hockey league’s part signals the general acceptability of these abusive behaviors—that, perhaps, they are chastised and unwelcome by the “enlightened” few, like Steve, but that they are not met with serious, organization-level discipline. They are, as we witness in this story, structurally supported and institutionally acceptable.

In fact, sometimes these abusive behaviors become even more accepted the more a coach demonstrates his ability to succeed. Hannah Fischer, a young White woman in her early 30s, suggests abusive behaviors are actually *protected* by these institutions the more wins and the more fame they garner. Hannah—whose own athletic father “dragged” her to basketball try-outs fearing that she would be a quitter her entire life—told me a story about witnessing a well-known and incredibly notorious high school basketball coach. She told me:

We have a kid [on the college team I coach], and her high school coach ... was *the* worst. Like, I have sat in so many high school gyms over the last five years and—like, she just goes into the gym and he is like, nonstop screaming, like, ripping the kids apart, telling them they suck. Like, the kid I was there to watch, [the coach] was like: “I don’t even know why the fucking [university] coach is here to watch you ... you suck.”

I discussed this quote in Chapter 1 as well, arguing that it speaks generally to the perception of women athletes as less serious and less worthy of athletic scholarships. When I told Hannah I thought this story was unbelievable—perhaps subtly implying: “*Why hasn’t this coach gotten fired yet?*”—she explained to me that he is well known, has been around for years, and that his team almost always makes it into the state championships. Hannah’s clarification demonstrates the sort of institutional protection there is, even for highly abusive and notorious coaches like these, for winning records. The logic proliferates a “win at all costs” mentality—a common mindset that, as Hannah demonstrates, protects abusive, misogynistic coaches from being fired. Taken together, these experiences demonstrate not only abusive practices as individually embodied and enacted, but actually permitted through the structure of sport as a hierarchical, glory-centric institution of masculinity.

ii. “Oh, you soccer pussies”: Masculinity as structurally embedded & protected

While much of these participants’ language around masculinities was confined to analyses of individual bodies, in some cases, they did demonstrate an ability to see masculinity as a manifestation of structural power. Steve, who played soccer in high school several decades ago, discussed the ongoing feud the soccer players had with the football team—a heated and seemingly inevitable conflict often characterized by a combination of homophobic and misogynistic sentiment. He said:

The football guys, they were always: “Oh, you soccer pussies.” You know? That was in the locker room when we were in there after practice. That was the line: “You guys are just a bunch of soccer pussies.” And the comeback from the coach ... I’ll never forget, he said: “The average actual playing time in a football game is like ... under 4 minutes or something, you know? The actual time they’re playing the game. And here we are, playing 60 minutes of soccer. You know? So, you make the call: who’s the—you know—athletically, who’s more significant?”

In this quote, Steven paints a complex portrait wherein high school boys pit themselves against the other boys in competitive displays of athletic prowess, ability, endurance, and, ultimately, manhood. The football team calls the boys on the soccer team “pussies”—interestingly, another participant told me soccer has “culture of softness”—suggesting that these boys greatly devalue what they perceive as feminine.

What is especially interesting, though, is how the soccer *coach* resists the football team’s assaultive language in Steven’s story. Instead of censuring the football boys for their abuse of the soccer team, he instead recirculates the same harmful logic back onto the football team, and proudly situates it within the soccer boys’ minds. According to the coach’s reasoning, since the soccer boys spend more time demonstrating athletic prowess and endurance on the soccer field, the football boys must be the actual “pussies.” Indeed, the soccer coach encourages his athletes to value a certain form of athletic ability, and to subsequently defend their own masculinity using the capital they accrue through their trained endurance. The football players, who might appear physically stronger and bigger, only play for four minutes a game and are therefore “pussies” or, in Steven’s covered language, “athletically insignificant.” This demonstrates the hierarchical organization of boys within systems of athletics and schooling (Pascoe 2007), and how this hierarchization centers around boys needing to “prove” that they are not pussies or faggots, and rather, that they are, in fact, strong, athletic, heterosexual men. Furthermore, the fact that, years later, Steve stands by this story and casually rehashes its sexist and homophobic logic demonstrates the embeddedness of ideologies that promulgate and maintain hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, it is co-constructed and reproduced among boys and men, and, as seen through the soccer coach and Steve’s passionate re-telling, cross-generational.

Mark similarly speaks to the embeddedness of these masculine ideologies, particularly in discussing how sports are entangled within profit-driven capitalism. Indeed, he speaks critically to the type of hierarchical entitlement that male athletes—and especially college football players—receive. Mark’s language around masculinity becomes the most sharply turned when he relates it to sexual assault and the money-protected insularity of institutions like sport, college, and the military. Mark says:

Look at all the domestic violences [in sports]! ... Nothing’s ever happened when they’re sober! So, in that regard, masculinity ... The reality is, you look at the two places that have the highest incidence of sexual assault and hazing, are the military and colleges. Both are insular. Both are, most importantly, self-policing with no stomach for solving it ... And you throw money into it. Did you see the recent *New York Times* article ... about the percentage rate of athletes getting off from crimes versus the regular student body? It’s way higher. ... You’re not really gonna have the stomach to go after [your star player, a perpetrator of sexual violence] when you’re playing for a national championship. The school gets millions and you, yourself, get a one million dollar bonus!

Despite propagating the dangerous myth that sexual violence, and particularly domestic violence, only happens when either the victim or perpetrator is inebriated, Mark speaks at length about the types of *institutional* advantages afforded to male-bodied athletes. Using names and examples he did not want me to include in writing, Mark details the power-laden intersection between capitalist investment and the propagation (and acceptability) of (sexual) violence within sports, especially when perpetrated by those who accrue the most money and visibility for these institutions. Furthermore, Mark indirectly speaks to hierarchies *among boys* structured by hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) when he notes that, while all (heterosexual, athletically talented) men might garner unfair entitlements, it is the star players—the ones to whom the most masculine capital is attached—who are most protected by the insular, self-policing university athletics system.

This entitlement and institutional protection, though, does not just occur on the university level. Kayla Parker, a Black woman in her 30s and a former DII basketball player, works with low-income athletes in the community where she was born and raised. In a low-income neighborhood where “star players” are not accruing money or fame like in Mark’s example, Kayla nonetheless speaks to the sheer social entitlement that boys who can throw a football or dribble a basketball receive:

I’ve seen male athletes ... mess up in the classroom, get suspended, and, you know, for whatever reason the administration, the coaches, are trying to figure out ways of fixing the problem, right? Putting a band-aid over the problem as opposed to addressing it, right? ... This [boy] blows up in the classroom ... and everybody witnesses it, but he’s on the basketball court the following day, right? ... With our male athletes, you know, if you’re the star, you’re the star.

Kayla’s experiences point to social structures within high school sports that garner institutional benefits for star players. Through Kayla’s story, it is clear what athletes, coaches, and even the administration of schools value about boys: that they are athletic, strong, successful, and able to amass wins for the community.

The institutional protection of boys is particularly shocking when compared to how high school girls are treated. As Kayla says, “It’s this level of accountability that we force our female student athletes to live up to that, in some ways, shape or form, is not that way for men.”

Ultimately, Kayla carves out a complex image of gendered and sexual hierarchies within high school, wherein “boys”—as an admittedly essentialized group—are protected and given more entitlements than girls, but only the “star player” boys receive the most entitlements. So, while, as broad gendered categories, “boys” might share in the fruits of domination over “girls,” within the boys’ teams there are hierarchies predicated on talent, ability, and success. In unmistakable ways, these are exactly the types of value-laden hierarchies that Connell (1995) theorized with the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

iii. Passing through the boys' hallway: Women's experiences with sexism & exclusion

All four women in this study shared significant experiences dealing with sexism, misogyny, and institutional exclusion from sports. Taken together, these women's experiences suggest a terrain in which hegemonic masculinity, as an ideology that structures and undergirds sport at every level (Messner 2007a), systematically devalues and/or excludes women in complicated, intersectional ways. Indeed, especially when glancing at these women's experiences, it becomes much easier to see the *multiple* axes of gendered, sexual, and racial power which collude to buttress organized sport as a powered institution.

All of these participants discussed how women's and girls' sports are viewed as a less serious or important investment for schools, youth leagues, and coaches. Kayla told me about her experiences in several youth sport leagues, witnessing the differences in the way we regard girls' sports to the way we regard boys' sports:

The way ... we prepare our male athletes versus our female athletes, like, you know: "Go out there and fun have girls." Like, I hear that so many times in huddles. Versus, you know, being in an all-male dominated huddle and they're like, "Listen, go out there, we're going to kill them!" Right?

Kayla's experiences highlight the lack of institutional investment placed on girls' sports and on girl athletes, who are perceived to be playing for fun and friendship, and not "serious" competition, like the boys. Hannah Fischer, a White woman in her late 20s, pointed out these double standards, as well. In our interview, she actually hesitated to say that friendship was a major reason she loved playing sports, aware of the common perception that women are seen as less serious competitors. Besides consistently witnessing coaches who had less buy-in for women athletes, she also launched a sharp critique of the ways that many exceptional women athletes, like tennis champion Maria Sharapova, are sexualized in mainstream media—seen as

objects, rather than for the tremendous athletes they are. When I asked Hannah what we could do about that, she told me about her own experiences with resistance:

When I was in college, [I] did this protest literature piece about how people identify athletes. And if you searched, like, female athletes, how ... the greatest female athletes in the world ... all of their pictures on Google ... are super sexualized. And like, if you search the best male athletes at the time, all of their pictures were like—they are so jacked and like [*sarcastically*] “serious” athletes, you know what I mean? ... [I] did this piece, and it was basically one of my teammates and I wore like, wicked baggy clothes ... and went to all these playgrounds and did all these ball-handling tricks and we ... had this reading in the background as the tricks were going on, it looks like two guys, and at the end, our other teammate finishes the reading and we take off our hoods...

Hannah’s protest literature project—which still resonates with her as one of the most memorable collegiate experiences she had—demonstrates her own perceptions of the athletic world as a terrain in which women, and particularly White women, are highly visible, yet used as sexual objects. Indeed, much research on “the” female athlete provides theoretical and empirical scaffolding for Hannah’s own perceptions: White women, like Maria Sharapova and Jenny Finch, are often valued more for their pristine bodies and fashion than they are for the contributions they make athletically (Messner, Duncan, and Willms 2006; Bishop 2003; Messner 1988), whereas successful Black women, like tennis star Serena Williams, has had her talents diminished by a combination of sexist and racist body-policing taunts.¹¹

On a more personal level, some women, especially Laura and Audrey, discussed their experiences with outright exclusion from participating in sports, from the youth league all the way to the Olympics. Although, of all the women participants, Laura discussed her entrance into sports as rather easy and problem-free, she nonetheless alluded to many incidents where exclusionary tactics occurred, sometimes unbeknownst to her. One particularly upsetting

¹¹ “When We Attack Serena Williams’ Body, It’s Really About Her Blackness,” *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/serena-williams-policing-of-black-bodies_us_55a3bef4e4b0a47ac15ccc00

experience occurred when she was in middle school—an experience she says she barely remembers, but sticks out very clearly in her father’s memory. One day, the town council in her upper middle-class community held a meeting to discuss the creation of a girls’ soccer team,

...and one of the old school, old timer[s] ... he was ... the gym teacher at the high school and he coached a bunch of sports, too, and my dad, he took me to it ... And this guy, sort of older, yeah, he was probably middle aged at that time ... got up and said, “That’s just crazy, we can’t do this.” ... [And my dad] tried to usher me out because [the coach] was very adamant and so passionate and that’s one of the things that was hard for me to understand, as why there were men who were so against it and you could see that *emotion* come out around it.

Laura frequently grappled with this “emotional” aspect of the sexism and misogyny she has witnessed throughout her athletic career. She discusses her multiple experiences with pushback to her leadership and participation in sport, and almost always makes sense of it as a personal, emotional manifestation of an individual’s man’s sexist behavior. I will discuss this more below, but it is interesting to note the discord between what is, in Laura’s story, a very *structural* manifestation of girls’ exclusion from sport—a town meeting in which the exclusion of girls is the very topic—and the tendency to talk about masculinity as the pathologized “emotion” of the individual. It seems that, in this cultural moment wherein liberalism and individualism prevails (Guinier 2004), Laura finds it difficult see manifestations of systemic power as anything but the emotional, the pathological, the individual. Nevertheless, Laura points to a common attitudinal trend in the 70s and 80s regarding women’s sport, an attitude that reverberates today: the recognition of women’s sports will take the eminence, glory, and *budget* away from men’s sports.

Audrey similarly discusses her exclusion from participating equitably within sports at her high school. In the beginning of this chapter, I discussed Audrey’s experiences fighting for funding in her high school. Her experiences were rife with unmistakably sexist pushback from the men and boys in her school. Earlier I discussed the football coach’s highly misogynistic and

inappropriate comments, but Audrey received pushback from her peers, as well. She shared a particularly upsetting story about walking down the hallways of her high school and being taunted by the football players:

Jeez, that probably stuck with me forever. I was a rebel, and I wasn't going to just go down quietly ... We went face-to-face, yeah. It was a struggle. Walking through those—to get to the track office you had to cross, you had to walk through the football hall and it was brutal ... We got taunted.

In many ways, the very blueprint of Audrey's high school building is symbolic of these women's fight for inclusion in sports: in order to gain entry into their own space, they were forced to cross through, disrupt, and/or negotiate with men. For Audrey, this meant passing by the taunting football players and the inappropriate football coach to get to where she needed to go.

For Kayla, who started playing basketball at a very young age on the street with her four brothers, negotiating her space within sports meant dealing with incessant bullying from her brothers, parents, and peers at school. As a first-generation American citizen, she explained that there were unique cultural expectations placed onto her given the conservative culture that pervades in her parents' home country. Indeed, Kayla was meant to stay at home, take care of her brothers, and do house chores with her mother. She told me how her experiences as an athlete were not validated by her parents until trophies started lining the mantle—trophies that, by Kayla's friends and family, were assumed to have belonged to her brothers. For Kayla, then, simple recognition only occurred when she had a material relic to show for it, a surefire symbol of the *extra* work women and girls, and especially Black women and girls, need to do to achieve equity.

Although Kayla was exceptionally good at basketball, she described sports as her introduction to bullying: it was where she learned that girls were lesser, and that, in order to succeed, she had to be not just “one of the boys,” but *better* than the boys (but to be better than

the boys was fraught, as well). There were many days when Kayla's brothers told her to get away from them, wanting her to, in her words, "stay in the house and chew bubble gum and watch Barbie on TV." Playing street basketball was where she learned that female-presenting athletic bodies were subject to tremendous peer policing, and that to deviate from normal (White, skinny, heterosexy) "girl" body types was to be subject to ridicule:

I was always picked on 'cause in fifth grade I was too tall for the cutest guy in the class, right? I was, you know, too tall to hang out with the cute cheerleaders, right? And I didn't really look like everybody else, right? 'Cause I was, you know, somewhat broad in the shoulders, very tall ...

As a tall, athletically-built Black girl, Kayla had to triply navigate structures of masculinity that promulgate normative images of what men, women, girls, and boys should be. Indeed, Kayla's experience in athletics is essential to understanding the complicated and *intersecting* forces of power that dictate the structure of sport (Messner 2007a; Tryce and Brooks 2010). It is not enough, and is problematically reductive, to say that the institution of sport devalues that which is feminine and bolsters that which is masculine. For instance, Tryce and Brooks (2010) note that even Title IX, which is hailed as a major civil rights win for women athletes, does not adequately address intersectional differences among women. Instead, it centers the experiences of White women and does not "address the intersectional barriers to athletics posed by race ... and class, including how persistent public education inequalities affect and interrelate with sports" (Tryce and Brooks 2010, 250). In the above excerpt from our interview, Kayla demonstrates gendered, sexualized, and racialized intersections of power that work to co-construct a nearly unnavigable terrain for athletic Black women. She was policed by the boys in her class, who saw her as too tall (read: unfeminine) to be attractive. Additionally, her broad shoulders and large stature prohibited her from joining the cheerleading squad, too, a sport that often propagates expressions

of “natural” White female “spirit”—and thus, a terrain to which people of Color are perceived as less naturally suited (Grindstaff and West 2010).

Kayla is acutely aware of this, too, and it was important for her to mention it to me in our interview. She says,

I like to share a lot of my experience because I feel like it’s very important to understand that, you know, I’m a young Black woman ... first generation American, you know, parents hadn’t been educated beyond high school, first to go away to college ... I was growing up in an urban environment, sort of all the different disparities you can name...

Although Kayla prevailed, she describes her success as an “against all odds” scenario—balancing standards placed upon her by her parents, peers, and by society, navigating being a student at a predominantly White university, and coming from a low-income community where opportunities for upward mobility were few and far between, where police cars lined up “just in case” something happened at the youth basketball league (a situation that surely does not occur in predominantly White spaces). Basketball was Kayla’s key to success, but also, as she told me, a major site of ridicule, taunting, and exclusion—rooted in Kayla’s unique gendered, racialized, and classed position within structures of school and sport.

Taken together, these women’s experiences are essential to my argument about past and persisting inequalities and inequities within the institution of sport. Audrey and Laura, two middle-aged White women, demonstrate the institutional difficulties they faced gaining entry into sports—even just in community leagues or on high school teams. Hannah, as a younger woman and recent college graduate, points out the double standards often placed upon men and women in sports, and her ability to articulate and resist this through her resistance project. Kayla, as a young Black woman from a low-income neighborhood, showcases the several layers of individual and institutional raced, classed, and gendered roadblocks she faced within athletics, despite her exceptional ability.

II. Emphasizing change, obscuring continuities: Rhetorics of progress

Despite having a demonstrated knowledge of how masculinity relates to their lives and their work, these participants—to varying degrees and in complicated ways—often minimized their experiences using what I call “rhetoric of progress,” or suggesting that things have changed significantly and institutional improvements have eradicated many once-present powered hierarchies and inequalities. That is, although these participants demonstrated their experiences *with* and ability to talk *about* masculinity and its attendant structural manifestations of power, they often ultimately minimized these experiences through various rhetorical strategies.

In this section, I will demonstrate how this pervasive rhetoric, which is by no means confined to these six participants, either minimizes a participant’s analysis of inequalities/inequities or precludes them from witnessing power critically within their own experiences. Indeed, these participants’ complicated use of what I call “rhetoric of progress”—which is arguably linked to prevailing neoliberal ideologies in the US, especially vis-à-vis their work at an education-driven non-profit—obscures continuing mechanisms and flows of systemic power structured by hegemonic masculinity, and instead often relegates power to the pathologized individual. Although these rhetorical strategies were numerous, I will focus on the three I found to be most salient: (1) relegating blame to the “old days”, (2) emphasizing change and improvement today, and (3) equalizing boys and girls, men and women.

i. Relegating blame to the “old days”

Participants frequently drew upon rhetoric of the “old days” to minimize or obscure continuing structures of masculine power in place. Specifically, participants often pointed or alluded to “old days”—or to the past in general—so that they could highlight what they

perceived to be institutional improvements today. In doing so, however, I argue that these participants run the risk of tacitly concealing continuing systems of inequality.

“It goes back to an old system”

I asked both of Mark and Steve why coaches like Mike Rice use the word “faggot”: Is it to amp the team up? Is it to tear them down? Both participants responded in strikingly similar ways. Mark admits that the culture of sport is one that embraces homophobic violence, but not because the social actors enmeshed within it today enjoy it. They are, in a sense, forced into the culture. This is true in many ways, but the question still remained: *why* do coaches, like Mike Rice and Mark’s college coach, use words and practices like these? Mark said: “I think it’s the way they did it. And the coaching competency thing I put [in my workshop]? You should take a look at that.” Steve had an answer very similar to Mark’s, although it was more drawn out:

I think part of that whole masculine, you know, it’s—it goes back to the military model that, along with the old model of school, you know? It’s outmoded now. We’ve grown beyond that. ... I said to [Marcy] who is our Athletic Director, when we sat down, she said ... “Kids are the same as they were when we were kids.” ... I said: “You know, they’re just not” ... She said, “Oh, yeah they are.” [I said], “Yeah, there’s some things that kids will be kids, but on the other hand, nobody ever yells at them.” ... It’s a different world!

Together, Mark and Steve lean upon rhetoric of the “old days” to argue that this type of masculinity—Mike Rice screaming “faggot” and hurling basketball at his players—is a product of old times, and that Rice (and other coaches like Rice) are just anomalous reverberations of obsolete systems of capitalist production, violence, and power. Interestingly, I attended Mark’s workshop before I interviewed him, and he actually mentioned Mike Rice saying “faggot” to high school athletes. Yet, Mark understands Mike Rice’s use of violent, often homophobic language to be merely a lack of competence on Rice’s part, and not tied to continuing structures of masculine power within sport that propagate these sorts of practices. In effect, Mark separates

Mike Rice's behavior from the history of institutionalized homophobia and organized sport both relegates and pathologizes homophobic violence to the individual and suggests masculinity, at least as a manifestation of systemic power, was something manufactured in the very distant past ("It's how they *did* it").

Steve leans upon a similar logic. Multiple times throughout our interview, Steve lodged a fairly critical indictment on schools (as seen above)—in fact, likening school buildings to factories and the students within them to manufactured commodities. Steve, like Mark, nevertheless relegates this charged understanding of schooling to the past, suggesting it “goes back to an old system” that is “outmoded now.” That is, while he ascribes the violent behaviors of Mike Rice and youth coaches in his town to a type of masculinity embedded in capitalist modes of production and schooling, he suggests that these processes are obsolete—that things have changed, kids have more freedom now and suffer less punishment within systems of schooling. While this claim is embedded in the limitedness of his racial and class viewpoint and is certainly not true for all students, especially low-income Black and Brown students (Vaught 2011; Ferguson 2001), Steve demonstrates how liberal rhetoric(s) of progress can obscure *continuing* systems of masculine power and instead pathologize or chastise the individual. In this case, Steve suggests that the attitudes and behaviors of Mike Rice and other abusive men might once have been tied to systemic modes of violent, capitalist, masculine production, but now, under the prevailing logic of today, they are just aberrant, pathological “assholes.”

The effects of this rhetoric on concealing continued structural power is salient in Steve's life. Steve spends a good deal of time discussing his two sons' “humiliation” within the sport leagues in his town at the hands of often abusive, dishonest, glory-obsessed parents and coaches. Multiple times his sons were excluded from youth drafts or the A-teams in his town.

Because [my son and his friend] were slower developers, they stuck them back in the instructional division or whatever it was. So, my son, particularly, was taller—so, how much did you humiliate this kid ... It's horribly humiliating for a kid when, you know, he's at the bus stop and he has a kid say ... “I'm a first year player and I made the A-Team and you're still on the C-team.”

This seemingly ritual and unquestioned practice of making “drafts” for kids—of excluding certain kids and placing them on the B-team, on the C-team—is, in itself, evocative of the hierarchical mechanisms on which hegemonic masculinities are mapped (Connell 2005). It is a very literal manifestation of organizing boys—second, third, and fourth graders, no less—based on their athletic prowess and ability; it is a ranking system based on a deeply entrenched value system we have about boys’ (heterosexual) bodies and their “proper” athletic development. And yet, Steve’s engagement with rhetoric of progress—especially as this rhetoric relegates the history of masculinity and sports to the past—obscures an analysis of structural power and instead assigns blame to individual parents. Indeed, when I asked Steve to explain how these exclusionary drafts work and why, as the quote above demonstrates, kids then bully each other about who is placed in what division, he said: “Oh, I think it’s from the parents. It’s insensitive parents.”

“The past” as constricting; “the present” as liberating

Laura engages in similar rhetoric, suggesting that there are more options for boys nowadays to enact their own, healthy expression of self compared to the past:

I think it is changing a lot. I think that there is not sort of one expression of masculinity, so to speak. I think sports has traditionally sort of like, male athletes traditionally ... sort of had this idea of what masculinity looks like and I think that’s changing a lot. I think it is becoming a lot more expansive and a lot more things are sort of acceptable.

For Laura, quite like Mark and Steve, “the past” was mired in “traditional” (read: constrictive, normative) understandings of manhood: men were expected to be *this*, *this*, and *this*, and it had

tremendous social and psychological repercussion for them. However, “the present” is characterized by the joys of individualist opportunity: the opportunity to enact masculinities that stray from traditionally White hegemonic archetypes, and the individual power to choose one’s own “authentic” self-expression. This sentiment is fair and Laura is certainly not the only to lean upon this logic; indeed, these claims are substantiated by Anderson’s (2009) and his colleagues’ (see McCormack 2011; Adams 2011) prolific work on inclusive masculinity. However, a more critical perspective might force us to consider *who* receives more leniency in deciding what masculinities they can enact, what these “new” masculinities might insidiously reproduce (Bridges 2014), and how this rhetoric of progress might actually obscure continuing constrictions placed upon expressions of, for example, non-assimilative queer and gender non-conforming people. As Bridges (2014) notes, White heterosexual men have more options and can “borrow” from gay aesthetics, which appears as surface-level progress and change, but has the effect of subtly reconstituting White heterosexuality as normal and reproducing gender and sexual inequalities. As such, these rhetoric(s) of progress, while celebratory of institutional and generational improvements, might do more to mask continuing systems of power, privilege, and inequality.

ii. Emphasizing change

In the previous section, I discussed how participants often drew upon “the old days” to bolster prevailing rhetoric of progress. Laura, for example, argued that men and boys used to be constricted by “traditional” archetypes of masculinity—in doing so, she painted “the past” as violent and constricting yet largely over. Instead, she argued that men and boys (as well as women and girls) have more options afforded to them and are freer to enact a wider array of identities. In this section, I dig deeper into these (very common) sentiments, arguing that there is

an overwhelming sense among these participants that times have changed and people are more “in tune” with injustices historically associated with the institution of sport. Ultimately, I argue in this section that many things conceptualized as “change” may actually be interpreted as continuing (but differently masked) forms of inequality, and that the “rhetoric of progress” renders these continuities difficult to see.

“We’ve become more sophisticated”

Steve admits to the historical link between masculinity and organized sport, but disavows its prevalence today. As I mentioned above, Steve grew up in a time when schools treated kids like commodities and boys were to be made strictly into men. Now, however, Steve sees football as the final remnant of these destructive systems, arguing that this sort of masculine violence has not only diminished, but that we have actively pushed it away:

Maybe [football] is the last big, public bastion of masculinity, in a way. Right? Because, you know, going back twenty, thirty years, boxing was still a big thing and other than the latest, that thing a few months ago which I didn’t even watch, you know? I have no interest in boxing and most of the world doesn’t. We’ve kind of outgrown that. You know? I think we’ve become more sophisticated than a lot of bash-up sports thing. But maybe football’s the last hold-out.

Steve uses the diminishing relevance of boxing to argue that a more enlightened US society has pushed away sports we consider to be gratuitously violent and unsophisticated—the ones that “really touch some primal, beat-em-up instinct.” However, the boxing match Steve references—the fight between Floyd Mayweather, Jr and Manny Pacquiao, also dubbed “The Fight of the Century”—raked in the most revenue of any boxing match of all-time.¹² Indeed, estimates indicate that the fight accrued more than \$400 million in pay-per-view revenue, among a variety of other sources of income. It seems that, regardless of how they might be culturally perceived

¹² “Showtime’s Stephen Espinoza: Mayweather deal a resounding success,” <http://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/boxing/showtime-s-stephen-espinoza-000634474.html>

by individual men like Steve, sports like boxing and football still accrue tremendous amounts of capitalist investment and viewership today. Thus, the “rhetoric of progress,” which also strings through the way Mark, Hannah, Audrey, and Laura speak negatively about football, might do more to allow structures of violence and masculinity (as seen in sports like boxing and football) to continue operating, rather than to resist them.

Mark, who is tremendously critical of sports as a capitalist, insular institution that propagates entitlement and sexual violence similarly suggests that people are “losing patience” with violence in the NFL—that they are catching on to injustices and finally working to stop them:

I think there is a shift. At least [these conversations] are out there at all. I think, in some fashion, people are beginning to lose patience with it. I think that’s a lot better than we used to be. Still a long ways to go ... Sports is just a mirror of society ... Perfect example: Ray Rice! Ray Rice. If the public hadn’t had the outcry, Ray Rice would’ve only been suspended two games. So, we could look at that as a positive.

Mark is correct to suggest that public outcry played a hand in Ray Rice’s harsher punishment for beating his wife to the floor in an elevator. Still, as Mark notes, it speaks to continuing systems of violence within the NFL that it takes threats of sponsorship-pulling and significant viewership decline to do anything about the multiple sexual violence cases of the past few years. Indeed, the Baltimore Ravens stood by Rice’s place on the team, and it was not until video evidence was released to the public that the team or the NFL took swift, decisive action.¹³ If “sports is just a mirror of society,” as Mark and other participants said (nearly verbatim), then both are reflecting back into each other cultures that institutionally protect perpetrators of violence until sponsorship or viewership is threatened. Thus, while *some* things might be improving for *some* people on the surface level, there are significant reverberations of the types of violence and domination that

¹³ “A Complete Timeline of the Ray Rice assault case,” <http://www.sbnation.com/nfl/2014/5/23/5744964/ray-rice-arrest-assault-statement-apology-ravens>

organized sport was originally meant to protect (Bederman 1995), and these reverberations, I argue, actually benefit from common rhetorics of progress and change.

There are direct consequences to concealing continuing systems of inequality with rhetoric of progress. As a high school Athletic Director, Laura is often unable to see sexism, even when it is operating right before her. She says,

It is very tricky because in this day and age it is not popular to put [sexism] right upfront like it was, you know, 30 years ago or whatever, when people could say, “This is crazy, girls shouldn’t play sports!” You can’t say that now because it is not PC at all. So it could bubble under the surface and you might not recognize that that’s what’s going on.

Indeed, Laura, who in this quote inspired the title of this larger project, exposes the danger in leaning too faithfully upon dominant rhetorics of progress, and unearths the insidious nature of power (in this case, sexism) in her experience as an Athletic Director. Laura still faces sexism in her job, and yet it looks different than the type of sexism that is “easy” to point out. Instead, today, sexism exists as subtle pushbacks to Laura’s equitable reallocation of funding—as a quiet yet emotional manifestation of male resistance to parity. Ultimately, because there is a shared perception that US society has become more “sophisticated” or more people are “catching on” to institutional injustices, continuing inequalities, like the ones Laura faces but sometimes hardly notices, are left unscathed.

“The old boys’ network is a cliché”

Several participants derided the notion of an “old boys’ club” or “old boys’ network” in order to distance themselves from the past and suggest that things today have improved. Hannah told me about a workshop she gave to coaches, in which she received some disrespectful pushback from some older male coaches. These older male coaches were “cynical,” according to Hannah, of the “follow-your-dreams” message CrAFT was conveying. One male coach argued that kids do not need this kind of ego boost, that he did not want his players to think too highly of

themselves. When I asked Hannah why it was typically older men who pushed back on her the most, she immediately brushed the idea off, saying it was just “funny and interesting” and that it just shows what they are sensitive about. In a sense, Hannah both acknowledged that older men tend to resist her workshops the most, but that they are just harmlessly sensitive about certain things.

Similarly, Audrey discussed growing up as the only girl on all boys’ soccer teams.

I do think there was a little bit more of “the sacred club” then ... [but] coaches are [now] dealing with the fact and it is a participatory event now, and we have come a long way since those years. I was an athletic kid, so it was easy for me to be in that group ... I wasn’t like a, short chubby kid with asthma and like, fifty allergies.

In this quote, Audrey suggests “the sacred club”—that is, the network of men who called the shots, and who excluded many kids from participating—has since diminished. Nowadays, it is not appropriate to talk about “the sacred club” simply because, following Audrey’s logic, it no longer exists. Instead, because of institutional and societal changes, more people can participate in sports—even those who are heavier or who have chronic lung diseases.

Laura was also aware (and wary) of the notion of an “old boys’ network,” as she called it, and, like Hannah and Audrey, pointed to its declining significance. She said:

Even around here ... New England is sort of progressive [but] it’s very traditional in a lot of ways and there is very much still sort of some of the same—um, you know, I don’t want to say it is an old boys’ network because I think that is so cliché at this point—but it is just I think the “haves” and “have nots” and I hate to see them in adversarial situations because I think that there is a lot more benefit when everybody is working together and sharing because that’s a much more beneficial situation for everybody.

Laura’s hesitation in calling out networks of old men who, from her experience, stall progress and resist Title IX reforms, is apparent in this quote. Indeed, it is an affront to *progress* to call out the “old boys’ network” nowadays: especially as a woman, calling out men might be perceived as angry feminism, as behind the times, or as professionally inappropriate. Hannah, for

example, tells a story of her basketball coach screaming at a men's coach for being equitable about court time; she says the team was so shaken by their coach's display of feminist anger that it was actually a "detriment" to their game. Indeed, the act of women calling out men is seen as shocking still.

Laura's experiences above demonstrate that engaging in rhetoric of progress often does more to obscure continuing forms of inequality than it does to highlight or celebrate change. Indeed, as I explained above and in the beginning of this chapter, as Athletic Director, Laura frequently deals with male pushback whenever she tries to reallocate sports funding to achieve equity. Sexism "bubble[s] under the surface," she says, and catches her off guard whenever it comes up. To Laura, though, sexism and "gender issues" are highly emotional problems that should be dealt with individually. In a sense, because times have changed and the "old boys' network" is a cliché, sexism, as an ideology that upholds structures of masculinity, has dissolved into individual, pathologized "sexists" and can no longer be addressed as a systemic issue of male domination. In effect, saying goodbye to the old boys' club, as many of these participants did, renders our ability to address systemic issues, like sexism, for what they are; rather, diminished to a cliché, once-members of the old boys' network now must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

iii. "Girls do it, too!": Equalizing boys & girls

Finally, there was a recurrent sense that society has progressed and that the masculine hierarchies once endemic to organized sports have collapsed so much that men and women are now, in fact, on equal playing fields. I argue in this section that equalizing the gendered practices of men and women—indeed, perhaps engaging in a "post-gender" analysis—exists in a power vacuum, one that does not consider the history of masculinity as it is so essential to the structure

of sports. That is, since organized sports were designed and implemented for men as a structure to protect and preserve (White, middle-class) masculinity (Dunning 1999; Anderson 2009; Bederman 1995) it is shortsighted to equalize the ways different gender identities participate and engage in common practices of sport.

Audrey went so far as to say that the tables have turned and women are now actually in the seat of fiscal and social power, at least in the realm of high school and collegiate athletics. Discussing her knowledge of Title IX funding, Audrey notes that women's rowing is now the "equalizer" for equitable funding and,

[men are] not happy about that! Here, these girls are walking on, no rowing experience, but they're big and strong—I mean tall and strong, they don't like the word "big"—and they're getting full scholarships, which is what happened with football. And we [women] were just like: Why are these guys just getting *everything*? So, it will be interesting to see how the power struggle has switched and how the women will, what they'll do with that—if they'll turn it around and throw it on their faces or if they'll be humble about it and appreciate that it's their turn...

Although Audrey is correct in asserting that women's rowing is often the equalizer for athletic budgets—at least at schools like Washington State University¹⁴—she dangerously presumes that funding is now, across the board, equitable. While this is simply not true,¹⁵ Audrey nevertheless uses this logic to express pride in how far women have come—in a sense, using such strong rhetoric of progress that she flips the typical gender hierarchy on its head and implores women to use their newfound power against men wisely, thoughtfully, and humbly.

While I do not wish to diminish Audrey's excitement about the significant institutional and visible gains made by women (especially considering Audrey's years of hard work and

¹⁴ "During financial crisis, the business of college sports is complicated by Title IX," <http://www.seattletimes.com/sports/college/during-financial-crisis-the-business-of-college-sports-is-complicated-by-title-ix/>

¹⁵ Women's Sports Foundation, 2011, <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/en/home/research/articles-and-reports/equity-issues/pay-inequity>

incredible dedication to Title IX advocacy), this power-evasive logic clearly proliferates an idea onto which many others have latched. When I asked Steve, for example, if there are differing expectations for men and women athletes, he replied:

No, I don't think so. When it comes down to a, you know, kind of one-on-one basis, I don't think so. I think, you know, we tend to, we still tend to focus more on male sports. Globally, I would say ... You know? But I think within communities and segments of the community ... I know, like, in this community, girl sports are pretty competitive! You know? They're pretty high priority. You know, at every juncture, you know, the girls' soccer—the women's soccer team, now, that intensifies it even more, you know? ... So, you know. I think it's equal. In many ways, I think it's equal.

Here, Steve borrows from Audrey's logic to equalize boys' and girls' sports, demonstrating the common post-feminist notion that women (once again, problematically used here as an all-encompassing, essentialized group) have achieved equalizing upward mobility within the realm of athletics (Heineken 2016). Interestingly, Steve uses the US women's soccer team as his evidence for gender equality in sports, even though, at this moment, the women's team is filing a highly publicized wage-discrimination lawsuit against the US Soccer Federation.¹⁶ Indeed, *factually*, despite common rhetoric proliferated not only by these participants but in the mainstream (like when tennis player Novak Djokovic said “women fought for what they deserve and they got it”¹⁷), women are achieving neither uniform equality nor equity, even under the authority of Title IX today.¹⁸ This is true for not only White women (who tend to be the women referred to in these discussions), but also, and especially, for women athletes of Color, and particularly low-income Black women athletes, who bear the brunt of intersecting class, race,

¹⁶ “U.S. women's team files wage discrimination action vs. U.S. Soccer,” <http://espn.go.com/espnw/sports/article/15102506/women-national-team-files-wage-discrimination-action-vs-us-soccer-federation>

¹⁷ “Novak Djokovic Says Men's Tennis Deserves More Money than Women,” <http://time.com/4265706/novak-djokovic-men-tennis-money/?xid=homepage>

¹⁸ “Lake Oswego HS softball team files Title IX lawsuit,” <http://www.kgw.com/sports/high-school/lake-oswego-hs-softball-team-files-title-ix-lawsuit/121585004>

and gender matrices of domination and who do not have an equal voice in this conversation (Bernhard 2014; Tryce and Brooks 2010).

Mark also dips into this logic, honing his argument specifically into violent practices of hazing within sports. He says:

The reality is, if you look at a lot of the hazing incidents, girls' teams do it just as much. Some of the really catastrophic ones are actually with women. Clemson is being sued, it's Mexico State that had the drinking problem. Women actually, frankly, are more—it sounds like a stereotype—but often times more cliquy and less welcoming and use ignoring [tactics] and things as weapons way more than guys do.

Mark's comments exist in a power vacuum, one that places men and women on equal pedestals, and subsequently de-genders violent practices such as hazing rituals on team sports (even if he argues the tactics men and women use are qualitatively different). His logic suggests that if women similarly engage in traditionally masculine practices, such as hazing, then those practices are no longer masculinized practices, nor are they attached to the history of hierarchical male violence in sports. They are simply women abusing other women. I do not wish to diminish the tremendous problem that is hazing on women's team—because, as Mark aptly points out, it happens quite frequently—nor is it within the purview of this thesis to engage in a complicated (yet extremely important) conversation about women's violent practices within athletics. Instead, I wish to engage with Mark's comments and perhaps reframe them to include an analysis of institutional and gendered power. That is, women can and do engage in violent practices. However, when they engage in violent practices, I argue that it should be seen as engaging in historically masculinized acts accepted by and, in fact, *built* by the men who collectively developed codified sports in the Western world. To equalize the violent practices of men and women, then, is to skirt the tremendous (and ongoing) legacy of the institutional masculinized

violence that is, in a sense, written within the rules of sports (however between the lines they may be).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that all six of these participants, who are workers at an educational non-profit that promotes “positive sport culture” to high school athletes, coaches, and parents, have had significant experiences and demonstrate a common understanding of issues related to masculinity in the institution of sport. Further, I have shown how dominant rhetoric(s) of progress have the effect of emphasizing social change in the past few decades and, in the process, unintentionally obscure and minimize continuing systems of inequality that pervade organized sport.

Ultimately, I connect these findings to an ongoing theoretical conversation within the sociological study of masculinities. More specifically, I suggest that neither Connell’s hegemonic masculinity nor Anderson’s inclusive masculinity neatly adhere to these data. As lifelong athletes and coaches, these participants demonstrate their own resistances to hegemonic masculinity through their commitment to education, their knowledge of and experiences with masculinity, homophobia, sexism, and/or racism, and their common language for discussing it, often quite critically and pointedly. However, their experiences also showcase the persisting systems of power that undergird and structure the institution of sport, and thus I cannot make the claim, as Anderson (2009) does, that hierarchies have flattened out and multiple masculinities can exist safely and horizontally in the same space. Indeed, these participants demonstrated, both directly and indirectly, that masculinity, as an organizing feature of sports, is a persisting and relevant topic.

Furthermore, hybrid masculinities, at least in the way it has recently been operationalized as individually embodied, does not necessarily adhere to these data, either. As such, I recommend a new theoretical conversation in the field of hybrid masculinities, which simultaneously complicates and continues the critical work of Bridges (2014) and Bridges and Pascoe (2014). That is, I argue that hybrid masculinities can exist within the realm of the “ideological”—or in the way we rhetorically or discursively conceptualize systems and institutions. Specifically, as I have shown in this chapter, I argue that our *understandings* of sport might be critical, as all of these participants demonstrated, but are often, intentionally or not, entangled within the increasing pervasiveness of rhetorics of progress. What happens when critical views are blended with rather uncritical rhetorics of progress is what I call, tenuously and with deference to those who come before me and who will come after, “institutionalized hybrid masculinities.” Ultimately, the desire to emphasize institutional social change dampens the ability to be critical. Indeed, the insidious caveat of emphasizing social progress is that power is often reproduced in even more invisible ways.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are several limitations to this study. The first is sample size. Although the six participants I interviewed conducted their workshops at many high schools and youth programs throughout the country (and subsequently, their perspectives are filtered through the eyes and ears of many hundreds of athletes), there is nevertheless the need for further interviews to either bolster or complicate the arguments made here. Six interviews were enough to make broad theoretical claims about a burgeoning body of work in the sociology of masculinities, but not enough to delve comprehensively into the multiple, various, and exciting experiences of the hundreds of people who work at this formidable non-profit. On this note, these data were

dampened by the limitedness of perspective. Indeed, all six participants were cisgendered and five out of the six participants were White. To explicitly incorporate the experiences of queer and gender non-conforming athletes, more athletes of Color, and/or queer and gender non-conforming athletes of Color is essential to understanding how structures of masculinity operate in complicated and intersectional ways. Thanks to these incredible six participants, though, there are bountiful opportunities for more conversation: Audrey, for example, excitedly offered me contacts of gay athletes she knew for further work in this area.

Another limitation of this study is its sole reliance on in-depth interviewing as a qualitative method. Indeed, these findings would be greatly enhanced by other forms of data collection, like observational data (perhaps of the workshops these participants give). Along these lines, this thesis does not consider the role that an educational non-profit plays in shaping the way these participants engage in these discussions. That is, these findings would be complicated and deepened by a consideration of how non-profits function: how and by whom are they funded, what are its missions, and how did it initially develop?

Future research might include not only a larger sample size of educators at this non-profit, but participation from all the way up and down CrAFT as an institution. This more ethnographic approach might do better to trace the ebbs and flows of how prevailing rhetorics and ideologies permeate and get negotiated within these institutions: How are ideologies passed down from the executives, and how are they re-negotiated, if at all, by the people actually leading the workshops? Does the non-profit's mission statement and values instill certain rhetorics within its employees, and how do these get translated into workshops? Future research might also consider in-depth interviews with the coaches and athletes who receive these workshops, to both understand what

issues are pertinent to them and whether or not CrAFT and other non-profits like CrAFT touch upon issues that feel urgent and relevant.

Implications for critical education are discussed in the next chapter.

chapter four
POWER TO THE BENCHWARMER:
Implications for Critical Education

The critical educator endorses theories that are, first and foremost, dialectical; that is, theories which recognize the problems of society as more than simply isolated events or individuals or deficiencies in the social structure.

(McClaren 2009, 61)

You know, the more you talk about it, the more coaches ... get on the same page, the more parents ... are getting on the same page, then you start to create a critical mass just to change the culture.

(Laura Newsome, participant)

*

To finish, I circle back to the beginning, when I proposed the centrality of Jay Coakley's (2011, 307) call to action to this thesis:

[...] sport-related decisions and policies remain shaped primarily by unquestioned beliefs grounded in wishful thinking, the idealized testimonials of current and former athletes, and the hunches of sport scientists seeking research opportunities and job placements for their students ... As these beliefs, testimonials, and endorsements are woven into dominant narratives, most people see little need for critical research and theory that could inform policy formulation, program design, and personal decisions about sports in everyday life.

This thesis has presented both empirical and theoretical challenges to studying masculinities within a dynamic, multilevel, and ever-changing institution like sports. And yet, despite the multiple directions—some critical, some not—this field has taken, I argue that a common thread in most of this research is the possibility of implementing critical educational programs (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) around issues such as masculinity, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and racism as these forces have been historically pent up in the development of organized sport in the United States.

In this brief concluding chapter, I weave an introductory framework of critical pedagogy (McClaren 2009, 2016; Kincheloe 2008) into sentiments from my participants about their charged commitment and willingness to bring these issues into these workshops. My main question is: How can we critically empower high school athletes to interrogate dominant systems of values that historically and contemporarily structure institutions of sport? Ultimately, I develop the possibility of building a critical sport curriculum around masculinity informed by several foundational tenets of critical pedagogical theory—a theory which, among other core tasks, urges “critical teachers to study power inscriptions and their often pernicious effects” (Kincheloe 2008, 4). That is, crafting a critical pedagogical approach to sport education would include a deep and critical glance at structures of power that historically and contemporarily support organized sport, naming these forces, and empowering students to see and name them, too. This type of approach would interrogate the underlying forces that undergird hazing and bullying in sport, for example, and would call attention to their systemic roots within male hierarchical domination, rather than likening them to aberrant behavior of choice athletes or teams. Importantly, it would place high school students in the “driving seat,” so to speak, to think critically and engage with these issues as they relate to their lives and surroundings.

In this chapter, I explicate the possibility of generating a critical, masculinity-centered sport curriculum, provided three main tenets of critical pedagogy into which these participants have already shown tremendous expertise and insight:

- (1) *Uncovering power* structures insidiously embedded in sport practices;
- (2) Maintaining a deep awareness of the *context* of the athlete/coach population, so as to engage in *relevant, specific, culturally non-intrusive material*;

(3) Focusing on, in the context of high school sports, *alleviating the suffering of the bullied*—“the benchwarmer,”¹⁹ as I call them in this chapter—not on necessarily lauding the successes of the leaders or team captains, as many developmental curricula fall victim. Following these three points, this chapter lays out possible theoretical scaffolding for generating a more critical curriculum for high school athletes and coaches. Further, given the nature of CrAFT’s non-profit, workshop-based educational strategy, a true critical pedagogical approach—which includes *consistent* commitment, institutionally and individually (McClaren 2016)—would not necessarily be conducive to the transient style of CrAFT’s interventions. As such, I offer these critical pedagogical tenets simply to inform the creation of a more critical curriculum within the context of this already existing non-profit.

I. UNCOVERING POWER

Hannah, the young White woman participant in her late 20s, expressed the most outward excitement for mentioning topics related to masculinity in her workshops:

Oh my God, I think kids would love to talk just about just like—because I think a great part of our workshops is when we’re saying, like, how do you identify as an athlete? But I think you can even blow that out into like, you know, just culture and masculinity and, like, I just think there is a lot there and it can be very powerful...

Although she admitted that it would be difficult—that she found it hard to imagine engaging in these topics with a co-ed audience, and that she was not sure how the football team (“the cream of the [masculinity] crop”) would perceive or respond to it—Hannah nevertheless expressed intense interest in incorporating this subject into future curricula. Furthermore, Hannah

¹⁹ I use the term “benchwarmer” not to diminish or poke fun at those who are excluded, but rather to re-shift focus *to* them in this institutional context. I realize some of my language in this section runs the risk of painting those traditionally marginalized by sports as helpless victims, unable to fend for themselves. This is not my intention. Rather, I recognize the institutional and personal agency of those who carry marginalized identities, and hope critical education only further amplifies these voices.

demonstrated her commitment to it by imploring that it should not just be some throwaway topic on a few slides, but a separate curriculum on its own: “I almost think it would have to be a separate type of workshop, just because I know, like, I think to give it justice and not just to be superficial on the topic...”

Already, Hannah’s eagerness to discuss masculinity and, in particular, masculine *culture*, bodes well on the transformation of the current curriculum into a more critical one. McClaren (2009, 65) suggests that cultural questions, like the ones Hannah seems eager to pose, “help us understand who has power and how it is reproduced and manifested.” Although McClaren (2009) is discussing wider cultural arrangements in his writing, this quote can be aptly translated into the institution of sport in particular, especially considering the masculine culture so deeply embedded within it.

One thing I noticed throughout my research is that topics intimately related to issues of structural power and masculinity are actually already mentioned in CrAFT’s curriculum. Indeed, many related topics are already in place, but an explicit engagement with and analysis of power is the next step in creating more critical discussions around these topics. Mark, for example, discusses hazing and bullying in his workshops, a topic central to one of CrAFT’s curricula. Walking me through his workshop, he first defines bullying and hazing for his athletes. Then, he highlights that hazing is an abusive initiation done to include, but is usually imposed upon the weakest or youngest members:

Why pick the freshmen? Because they're the weakest. So you isolate the weakest group, you force them to do a task that you don't like, and once you, yourself, find yourself in power, you immediately then turn it around and subject people that you don't even know to do the same thing with the full knowledge that you didn't like it and don't really see value in it. ... The law of unintended consequences.. first thing, is it creates a hierarchy on your team. You're immediately isolating and creating a hierarchy and is that really what you want in your team?

This quote shows Mark's sharp and insightful ability to delineate masculine hierarchies through common violent acts, such as bullying and hazing. And although Mark, as I discussed in Chapter 3, equalizes the hazing practices of boys and the hazing practices of girls, there is still room for discussion of how these abusive practices are intimately and historically tied to the development of organized sport. Indeed, Mark himself connects the topic of bullying and hazing to the military, a traditionally masculine institution prone to violence and structures of male power. In this instance, Mark shows the true possibility of engaging in discussions of power using an extant curriculum topic.

II. UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT

“The more teachers and students understand the various social contexts in which education takes place, the more we appreciate the complexity of the process” (Kincheloe 2008).

A critical pedagogical approach understands systemic context (Kincheloe 2008). To understand context is to “develop distinct practices to help particular students flourish in schools located in specific communities” (Kincheloe 2008, 7-8). Understanding and acknowledging context was a recurrent theme among my participants, and all demonstrated their ability to adapt their teaching styles to certain locations and communities. Steve had a sharp awareness of the different communities surrounding his upper middle-class suburb, recognizing that different populations of athletes face unique challenges. Astonishingly, Steve told me that, out of the thousands of youth who play hockey in his state, *none* of them come from the city near where he lives—one of the poorest cities in the United States. This staggering figure is indicative of the dramatic wealth disparity between the city and its surrounding suburbs—where Steve lives—and is inextricably linked to class, race, and the inequitable opportunity for resources and funding of

athletic programs between the two areas. It also speaks, as Steve does, to the importance of understanding context while crafting critical workshops for youth athletes.

Indeed, Steve always does research into the organization or school before he gives a workshop, understanding that different organizations or communities will respond differently to his messages:

I find a little bit about it, I look for their mission statement ... It's interesting to see the parallels when ... at a workshop for an organization that's been a partner for a number of years, they're [more comfortable] with those topics. Where, if it's a new partner, you know ... God, I felt like I had to back out of the room, it was threatening, you know? ... Those guys [older male coaches]—those people are uncomfortable. It's threatening, in a way, when you start talking about feelings and emotions that, in a male world, that's not supposed to....

Steve speaks to a recurrent theme in this thesis, which is that people—especially people in power, who feel targeted—do not like to confront these issues. In this scenario, Steve speaks to the resistance of older male coaches to discussing “soft” topics like empathy and positive emotions. Still, Steve’s acknowledgment of context—his awareness, his proactiveness—speaks to the possibility of an adaptable curriculum that crafts the critical language and learning goals depending on the community audience. In this sense, the curriculum does not remain stagnant, but digs at the needs and experiences of specific audiences.

Kayla similarly speaks to the need to interrogate and understand context as a site of particularized curriculum implementation:

I feel like the training curriculum should change when you're looking at the different communities ... It would be less impactful for us to talk about, you know challenges, you know in [an affluent suburb], right? Versus the challenges that coaches see in [an low-income urban neighborhood], right? So I feel like the training curriculum itself needs to adjust based on the different communities that they go into. ... [F]eedback that I've actually gotten ... is: Wow, it's great to have somebody that looks like us, that really understands us, you know, to come in and actually have this high-level conversation.

Because it's easier for me to call them out on certain things than it is for somebody from outside the community to call them out.

As a Black woman from a low-income community in a large city, Kayla demonstrates the specific needs and struggles facing different neighborhoods in her larger metropolitan area. A workshop given to a predominantly White school should not be the same as a workshop given to a predominantly Black school, as the needs and lived experiences of the athletes in these schools are qualitatively different. Affluent suburbs do not face the same structural disadvantages that low-income, predominantly Black and Brown urban communities face; as Kayla told me, basketball games in her neighborhood are hyperpoliced and criminalized even before the tip-off. Her experiences speak to the need and the appreciation (“It’s great to have someone who looks like us!”) for contextually-appropriate curricula as well as teachers—ones that understand and engage with issues facing particular communities, especially considering the highly intersectional construction of masculinity as an organizing feature of society.

Through both Steve’s and Kayla’s commitment to understanding context, there is an exciting opportunity to adapt a critical masculinity-focused curricula to different communities. Knowing that systems of power, like ones structured by masculinity and capitalism, are inherently intersectional (Connell 2005), it seems the employees at CrAFT already have the wherewithal to engage different communities *differently*. This is essential when thinking about how masculinities operate so complicatedly—intersecting along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability. As Kayla told me, to give Black boys and girls who live in low-income neighborhoods the same lesson as White boys and girls who live in the affluent suburbs is to skirt an understanding of context, the racialization of communities, and how structures of power interact with social actors in complicated, various, intersectional ways.

III. EMPOWERING THE BENCHWARMER

Finally, a core tenet of critical pedagogical theory is to shift learning away from dominant value systems and, instead, focus on alleviating the suffering of the marginalized (Kincheloe 2008; McClaren 2009, 2016). McClaren (2009, 64) argues that the critical pedagogue must “understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by relations of power and privilege.” Furthermore, Kincheloe (2008, 11-12) suggests,

The advocates of critical pedagogy are especially concerned with those groups and individuals who are suffering, whose lives are affected by the sting of discrimination ... Acting on this concern critical educators seek out the causes of such suffering in their understandings of power with its ideological, hegemonic, disciplinary, and regulatory dimensions.

Thus, to alleviate the suffering of “the benchwarmers”—the ones who are institutionally excluded or devalued—directly relates to the first task presented in this chapter, which is to interrogate structures of power related to oppression. Within the context of sport education, I argue that the “benchwarmers” are those who bear identities historically marginalized within organized sport, especially as they pertain to structures of masculinity: women, and especially Black women and other women of Color; LGBTQ+ people; transgender men and women; gender nonconforming folk; Black men and other men of Color; disabled folk, among others.²⁰ Certainly, one curriculum or workshop cannot possibly address the complexity and array of all these traditionally marginalized identities. Still, these participants have demonstrated a thorough dedication to this task.

Kayla, for one, exhibits a tremendously critical understanding of the multiple structures of power that constantly worked against her drive to succeed. She understands that low-income students of Color face unique barriers to success that those in predominantly White, middle-class

²⁰ To be sure, these identities, historically and contemporarily, have not been excluded or devalued uniformly or equally within systems of power. Each deserves its own analytical and nuanced delineation.

communities do not. Indeed, Kayla demonstrated her ability to talk about racism as an institutional impediment to her community, and can surely translate this essential knowledge into discussions of masculinity, sexism, and homophobia—topics about which she spoke eloquently and experientially.

In our interview, Kayla overwhelmingly demonstrated her commitment to those commonly marginalized and erased from sport participation. For example, she talked at length about her experience working with and lifting up those with mental and physical disabilities in her middle school:

I used to volunteer during my lunch break with the special needs students, right? And my volunteer work would include me reading them ... stories, helping them with their ... classroom assignments, you know, playing with them, little things of that nature. And especially, at that time, you know, working with students that had cognitive disabilities was like, what, like, is this kid is from out of this world, right? Because these were the kids that were typically teased because ... they, you know, couldn't walk on their own, or had a trouble with conveying, you know, their feelings or thoughts ... So, I started to volunteer working with these special needs students and that's where I actually met my first coach, who said to me: you know, you're tall, right? And I was always picked on 'cause in fifth grade I was too tall ... didn't really look like everybody else ... somewhat broad in the shoulders...

In this story, Kayla demonstrates her experiences with those commonly marginalized or devalued within prevailing systems of values, and her burgeoning ability to discuss the types of structures that belie this marginalization (Kincheloe 2008). As an advocate for those with mental and physical disabilities, she unearths the violent systems of worth we place on individual ability, especially in sports. Her experiences speak to an interrogation of those power-laden values and showcase her extraordinary ability to raise the voices of those who are consistently and institutionally devalued (and actively teased) vis-à-vis dominant values. She is able to involve herself in these discussions, too, as someone whose femininity and athleticism was constantly

policed and ridiculed by her peers through structures that commonly discredit (Black) female athletes.

Audrey exhibits her ability to engage with and leverage the voices of queer athletes, a group traditionally marginalized within organized sport (Messner 2007a). For one, she expresses genuine concern for (but support of) the possibility of an LGBTQ football player, pointing to several famous examples, but still implying the existence of pervasive homophobia within sports. In doing so, she showcases her awareness of power in its ideological dimensions (Kincheloe 2008)—that is, she is able to excavate the currents of homophobia that persist in an institution that was built to protect (White) heterosexual masculinity. She shared multiple experiences, too, with athletes who are queer and/or gender nonconforming or simply insecure, and who do not feel safe or happy fitting into bodily/sexual expectations imposed upon female-bodied athletes:

I remember we had a rower, one of my go-to levelheaded kids. And all of a sudden, one day, she's having this terrible time in the van. She wouldn't get out of the van, she is really crying and she's just really upset ... Turned out she just didn't want to wear that stupid uniform. I felt horrible. So, here she was just loathing for *days* that she was going to wear, because ... it's like a glorified bathing suit ... it's all really tight and she was uncomfortable. She wanted to wear her long pants and a long shirt ... wanted to be covered. She wanted a jacket on. She wasn't comfortable going around out there ... half-naked, half-dressed, for whatever reason she was going through, you know, sexually or whatever...

Audrey also has experience explicitly handling athletes who struggling with their sexuality and who are terrified of going into the locker room and changing in front of their teammates:

If you're going through transgender or gay, lesbian issues—and that's everywhere—you have to be really sensitive as a coach to be like: "Hey, just use my office. It's fine." You know, they feel like they're being attacked and nobody else is feeling that way, you have to pay attention to that stuff!

Here, and in the quote above this one, Audrey showcases her astute ability as a coach to reveal insidious systems of values (in these cases, violent heterosexist beauty standards imposed upon

young women and homophobia in the locker room) and to talk about them in clear, thoughtful, critical ways. She shows, without ambivalence, her ability to address and remedy, through careful consideration and through calculated action, those who feel marginalized, insecure, erased, or hurt by the dominant systems of values in place for athletes. This presents solid preliminary ground for developing a more critical curriculum, informed by some key tenets of critical pedagogical theory, around these issues. Indeed, there is a possibility for these systems of values to be interrogated in critical and context-specific ways through commitment to and proliferation of a critical curriculum for high school athletes, coaches, and parents.

CONCLUSIONS: A Return to High School Gym Class

The major takeaway from this thesis is that “progress” is a tricky thing.

On one hand, it is something to celebrate: women in this study, as well as women and girls all over, are receiving more recognition, visibility, funding, and credibility within the institution of sport. Quite often, it is simple to disentangle ourselves from the days of Laura’s father ushering her out of threatening town meetings. There are days when it seems quite easy to shut and lock the door of the football hallway in Audrey’s high school, where she was ritually taunted and bullied—declaring those days obsolete and paying attention, instead, to the gold medals and silver-lined trophies of amazing women athletes. The men, too, allude to a greater array of options to enact healthier, less constricted forms of masculinities. They brush off “outmoded” systems of schooling and capitalist production that once limited their options: you will be a proper man or you will spend your life, in vain, striving to achieve (narrow, White, middle-class, heterosexual) manhood. Today, though, gay boys play sports and are, in some cases, not afraid to talk about it (Anderson 2011a) and straight men feel more comfortable

exploring options without the violent side-effects of constantly “proving” their place within hegemonic hierarchies.

And yet, this rhetoric of progress—which is pervasive not only within these six interviews, but in popular media and even in academic literature—can have a dangerous effect. In analyzing the complicated constellations of stories and memories of these participants, I was able to unearth continuing, often insidious, systems of power that undergird the institution of sport, from the youth level all the way to the Olympics. Explicitly or not, these participants conveyed messages of continuing systems of sexism, queerphobia, classism, and racism that often times collude to fuel and maintain (hetero)masculinity as an organizing feature of sports and society. Steve’s sons are “humiliated” by the youth leagues in his town because they do not adhere to “proper” masculine development. Some of Audrey’s queer and/or gender nonconforming athletes do not feel comfortable changing in the locker room with their teammates, nor do they feel comfortable with the normative sexualization of female athletic bodies that occurs, even on high school teams. Kayla expressed exasperation that patrol cars lined up for youth basketball games in her neighborhood—that Black boys were policed so egregiously in ways that White boys never would be (Ferguson 2001; Rios 2011). All throughout these interviews, there were violent (but often covert) reverberations of the types of systemic power organized sport was originally meant to protect: Whiteness, heterosexuality, maleness, and the complicated collusion of these forces. To ignore them is to be complicit.

To acknowledge them, like I try to do thoughtfully and critically here, makes me think back to 14-year-old me, changing as quickly as I could in the locker room, trying to avoid the sometimes violent homophobia wrought upon whomever happened to be in the crossfire. I really could have used an education that addressed why this was happening. But, because I did not have

this critical language until well into my college days, I bore the brunt of these systems and institutions actually *structured* to foster these practices and attitudes. Instead of confronting it, I ran as quickly as possible. In seeking safety, I, too, became complicit.

What transformational possibilities might there have been had I had greater access to these critical resources in my high school days? Critical education is not enough to dismantle these embedded systems and structures of power, but it is nevertheless a way to call attention to them, to uncover “knowledge” as embedded in particular cultural arrangements, and to understand power as pent up in the dynamics interactions between people, places, rules, regulations, and institutions. Indeed, critical education is a way to point to power as it often exists invisibly—hidden within the very building blocks of these institutions, and covered by well-meaning, but ever-insidious, rhetorics of progress.

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