

## **WRIGJ97.140 Sport, the media and the construction of compulsory heterosexuality**

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Media representations of sport are particularly powerful in naturalizing and normalizing hegemonic meanings about the body and social relations. While there is currently considerable research which analyses the ways in which gender differences are constructed in the print and visual media coverage of sport (Duncan 1990; Wright 1991; Hargreaves 1994; Cindy 1996; Hall 1996), much of this research until recently has failed to question the hegemony of heterosexual relations. There are many reasons for this, not the least being the more general silences around sexuality in sport, and in many cases the failure to recognise that heterosexuality is a political institution that has largely acted as a 'beachhead of male dominance' (Rich, 1981, p.5). Hence as we shall illustrate it is crucial to acknowledge how heterosexism and homophobia work together to marginalise sporting women. Furthermore as Griffin and Genasci (1990) point out homophobia is the glue that holds sexism together. Although discussion here is directed at the oppressive structures constructed and reproduced through heterosexism and homophobia it should be understood that there are other equally damaging oppressions, moreover we recognise that there are many differential axes of women's oppression which should not be ranked hierarchically nor it assumed they are causally related. These oppressions clearly share some common elements which are interconnected through privilege, power, fear, ignorance, economics and so on and thereby effect all women and men.

In this paper we will explore these interconnections through an analysis of the media coverage of women's participation in a sport which has traditionally been taken to be central to hegemonic masculine identity, particularly middle class masculinity in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, namely rugby union. Specifically the paper will demonstrate how choices in language and visual representations of coverage of women's rugby union work to engage in a process of normalisation whereby these female rugby union players playing a 'man's game' are constituted in terms of hegemonic versions of heterosexual femininity. Thus denying the existence of and the social reality and social relations of the many lesbian women playing the game.

The various codes of football which involve full body contact such as rugby union, rugby league, Australian Football, and gridiron in the United States have traditionally been seen as areas which were sacrosanct from women's involvement and outside of their capacities. Women's participation therein challenges the validity of such sites for confirming those characteristics of masculinity that apparently remain uniquely owned and the prerogative of both boys and men, namely physical strength, toughness in the face of pain, brutal confrontation. Such displays literally embody the domination of space through force and skill (Connell 1995). Women are now engaging in such practices and in the most overt and public way live their bodies as skilled and forceful subjects.

If as Mckinnon (cited in Whitson 1994, p.358) suggests, women rugby union players live their bodies 'as skilled and forceful subjects rather than as objects of the male gaze', and by embodying power themselves, they thereby challenge 'one of the fundamental sources of male power, that is the ideological equation of physical power itself with masculinity.' Additionally, if as Messner and Sabo (1994, p.110) claim '(l)esbianism is thus recast by heterosexual culture as an emulation of masculinity' this leads to questions being raised as to how the media represent women in rugby union in such a way that it is socially and culturally acceptable, indeed this would seem to be particularly problematic for mainstream newspapers. How do they deal with reporting on behaviours, bodies, social practices which are the antithesis of heterosexual/ heterosexist femininity and which in a patriarchal, heterosexist culture are associated with hegemonic masculinity? If the answer was that they simply ignore such practices, or what would be more likely, simply ridicule and marginalise them, then while we might abhor such a response we could recognise it as largely predictable and one that we have seen many times before. And in some cases, particularly when women's participation in these games was just beginning this was likely to be the case. But with women competing at national and international levels and with some competitions established now for at least a decade, this is not such an easy position for reporters to take.

### Compulsory heterosexuality and/in sport

Crucial to a critical linguistics and for critical media analysis is a view of language as discourse; that is language as a social practice determined by social structures rather than a purely individual activity (Fairclough 1989). Discourse practices are in turn determined by socially constituted orders of discourse - that is sets of conventions associated with social institutions. Furthermore, these orders of discourse are ideologically shaped by power relations in such institutions and by power relations in society as a whole (Foucault 1979). The relationship between discourse and institutions, discourse and social structure, is in some ways dialectical: discourse and discourse(s) have effects on social structures, as well as being determined by them.

Language, symbolic representations are important because the production of meanings as writers and readers of texts is integrally connected with power. Following Foucault we take the notion of discourse as central to understanding how meanings and power interconnect to define and describe what can and cannot be said, how it can be said, by whom and in what contexts. This process must remain invisible for it to be successful, for certain ways of knowing and being to be taken-for-granted and for other ways to be marginalised, subordinated, regarded as 'deviant', 'sinful' idiosyncratic and so on. As Foucault (1974, p.77) suggests discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak ... Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the process of doing so conceal their own intervention

As discourses embody and constrain meanings and social relationships they provide the contexts in which we construct the ways we see ourselves and present ourselves to others, in other words the way we construct our identities. Moreover in institutional settings such as sport and education, the media provides people with the legitimacy to act on and in relation

to, others, to include or exclude, to privilege or punish, to marginalise and to conceal the sporting participation of minorities.

The discourses which construct heterosexuality as the only legitimate form of sexuality are powerful and pervasive and in many ways difficult to resist. These discourses by their very exclusion and silences continue to reinforce and legitimate a particular way of being, that is heterosexual, in so doing heterosexuality is not only legally sanctioned, but also normalized and socially approved. Other forms of sexuality are denied a legitimacy and normalcy through a range of strategies depending on the context including being unacknowledged, through being legislated against, through derogatory naming, through the very absence of a language that is inclusive of lesbian and gay experiences. 'Compulsory heterosexuality' thereby acts as a form of social and sexual control through the naturalising and normalising of (hetero) sexual relations. In connection with this it is apparent that heterosexuality 'typically defines itself in critical opposition to that which it is not: homosexuality' (Fuss, 1991, p.1). As such homosexuality is both defined and constructed as a stigmatized, abnormal and marginal identity that is socially threatening.

The fact that heterosexuality appears to require such shoring up and heterosexuals seem to require protection from abnormal 'others' raises questions as to whether heterosexuality is in crisis. Burroughs, Ashburn et al.(1995), for instance, suggest that 'many women's sports have gone to considerable trouble to construct an appearance of emphasized "heterosexual femininity" to destroy persistent rumours that women's sport is a haven for "freaks" or "man-hating lesbians"' (p.267). In Australia women's netball and women's basketball have gone to great lengths through choices of uniform, grooming and so on to ensure the feminine (read more sexualised) image of their sport. Sports such as women's cricket which has a long history but which occupies a sacred place in male his-story are arguably even more vulnerable to heterosexist scrutiny. The women's cricket board has responded to such (hetero)sexual scrutiny conservatively, even colluding with it by condoning and strongly encouraging players to construct themselves as appropriately feminine, i.e. that is heterosexual and not lesbian. Skirts and dresses are expected at official functions and glamour shots are available on file for media consumption. The cricketing administration thus construct 'a situation that is constrictive for lesbians and straight women and consistent with a 'culture of the closet' (Griffin, 1992 cited in Burroughs, Ashburn et al. 1995, p.271).

In connection with this, Burroughs et al. discuss a particularly notable event that occurred in January 1994 when cricketer Denise Arnetts appealed her sacking from the Australian team on the basis of discrimination. She alleged that she was dropped because she was heterosexual and married. Compared to the media's usual disregard and lack of interest in women's cricket, despite their status as international champions, the media gave extensive coverage to this event. Burroughs et al. suggest that the media's preoccupation with the issue of lesbianism indicates the extent to which heterosexist and hegemonic masculine processes operate - the coverage almost unanimously accepted Arnett's version of the story. They also describe how the other women's sport organisations including the Women and Sport Unit of the ASC and Womensport Australia were quiet on this issue. 'The AWCC was left out in the cold for fear that involvement in the debate would contaminate other women's sports with the taint of lesbianism' (p.276).

## Media coverage of rugby union

By definition the popular media address a mass audience. Different papers, magazines and television channels are however likely to address a particular set of subjects - the 'ideal subject' of its readership. Tabloids for instance are more likely to assume and address a working class readership while the broadsheet newspapers write for the middle class. Despite this neither groups of newspapers are likely to diverge from the mainstream or hegemonic discourses circulating in society though the values may be differently nuanced. We have primarily used broadsheet newspapers for this analysis, but have also included a rugby union magazine, a university newspaper and a magazine article from a Sunday 'quality' newspaper. Who writes and for what audience is important in understanding how and why stories are constructed and reconstructed in particular ways. For instance, the copy written by captain of a women's team for the Age is likely to be quite different from the commentary of a male writer for The Daily Telegraph.

As Hodge and Kress (1993, p.15) point out 'presenting anything in and through language involves selection'. He uses the example of a journalist writing about an event he has witnessed, - should the journalist call it a demonstration, a riot, a street battle, a confrontation. Which ever word is chosen it will locate his orientation, his value or ideological position to the event. Choices in language, albeit not necessarily conscious serve an ideological purpose, representing the topic from a particular point of view and positioning the reader in a particular way - that is to make the preferred reading.

## Analysing heterosexual hegemony in the print media

In seeking to engage in such a task and given the current conservative socio-political context and the largely invisible presence of lesbians and gays in the main/malestream sporting arena there was not extensive coverage to draw upon. Furthermore, given the amount of coverage any women's team sport receives, no matter what its international standing or its lengthy history of mass participation this is not unsurprising. Using the Australian Institute of Sport files, together with sources from players and helpful students, we have collected together a number of articles on women's rugby union in England and Australia for the period 1996 and 1997, which we will draw on for the analysis described in this paper. We make no claims that this is an exhaustive coverage, but we would suggest that, given the minimal coverage of women's sport in general, little may have escaped us particularly in the mainstream papers. This is particularly the case in Australia where there is as yet no national team for women's rugby.

Although the different articles we analysed addressed a variety of readerships, in some ways the themes taken up were often the same. As Hodge and Kress (1993) point out any text always addresses (or draws on) other texts, other discourses to either support or counter these. In these articles this is most apparent and explicit in the ways in which the texts assume a widespread conviction that the whole notion of women playing rugby union is something not to be taken seriously, rather it is something to be trivialised and made into a

joke. Often this is the first theme that is addressed in the article. Many of these articles take it as their main organizing idea, expanding it to answer other questions such as why would women want to play the game (given that it is the antithesis of patriarchal femininity) what do the women get out of it; how does the game differ from that of the men and so on. The intention in these articles seems at least on the surface, and certainly where the women's comments are given prominence, to build up a kind of counter discourse which describes the game as being the same as the men's game in all the ways that count. The bottom line is that those people who treat it as a joke are talking without ever having seen game. Once you've seen a game you will recognise that the women are as 'equally hard-hitting'.

Comparisons with the various aspects of the men's game are made throughout these articles, including the culture around the game. The one major difference, the journalists and the players say, is the lack of sponsorship otherwise the women play hard, drink hard, swear hard, sport the same injuries, demonstrate the same toughness (and foolhardiness - our comment) in playing injured and importantly have an appropriately reverential commitment to rugby: 'The first time I played rugby it was like a quasi-religious experience' (Rudy Maxwell quoted in Sheehan 1996, p.45). And they are accepted by the men, at least those quoted in the articles, because of this.

These women have tremendous camaraderie, courage, team spirit - the true spirit of rugby - and they bring a wonderful element to our club. (Andrew Wennerbom, the president of the Sydney University Rugby club, one of the oldest in the world, cited in Sheehan 1996, p.45).

Despite these similarities there are differences. These differences come out not through explicit statements but through a close reading of the ways in which the women are represented in the visual and print texts in the articles. One difference that is immediately evident is the way the women are referred to by the writers, and sometimes (but not always) by themselves as girls, whereas the male players in these articles and in the coverage of men's rugby elsewhere are always referred to as men.

The articles could be grouped under three main categories: firstly, those which were more descriptive or explanatory; secondly, those sympathetic but in some ways voyeuristic and subtly heterosexist; and thirdly those unsympathetic and generally misogynist.

i) The first category includes those articles (Jupp 1996; Woolage 1996) written by players such as Nicki Jupp, the captain of Birmingham University's team, and these are most likely to unequivocally construct a counter discourse without apology or patronage. Typical ways of describing the women's game in these particular articles include examples like the following quotes.

Rugby has been the fastest growing women's sport in Britain over the past decade. But people who haven't seen it tend to treat it as a joke. The reality is that although we may not go in for the stamping and raking you can see in the men's game, we are equally hard-hitting. It's not a game for softies.

Ours is much more ball-in-hand than the kick-and-chase men's game. (Jupp 1996)

ii) The articles in the second (and the largest) category in our selection, including two articles from Australia (June 1996; Sheehan 1996) and one from Britain (Howell 1996) were written from the point of view of a 'sympathetic' observer where the women and their actions were described and interviews with the women players were heavily drawn upon. Despite such a seemingly positive approach in these articles, they, in subtle ways, construct a reality which promotes heterosexuality and denies the existence of lesbian women in the game and more generally. They also construct a context in which the women's game while given legitimacy is still in some ways regarded as something out of the ordinary (that is not quite normal) to be wondered at and remarked upon.

The Georgina Howell article, 'Do women wear jockstraps?', begins for instance with

Thundering up and down the hangar-sized army gym, their appearance not improved by subzero temperatures and purple gum guards, the England squad of the Rugby Football Union for Women (RFUW) rehearse classic decoy moves. Every few minutes there is a loud thud, and another player limps off to join the queue. (p.36)

The Rugby Magazine article, 'Hail the perfumed warriors' written by Tiffany June (1996) is somewhat less robust and rather condescending in its appraisal

Although the diehard rugby traditionalists are calling it no more than a feminist invasion of their rugby fields, those who take the time to watch the girls play are pleasantly surprised at the skill level and field commitment of the players. (p.62)

The articles tend to make numerous and mostly favourable comparisons of the women's to the men's game.

I think it's great. They're just as capable and just as skilled as the men (Dawn Fraser quoted in June 1996)

Nevertheless, it should be noted that sometimes the construction of these sporting women is presented as less than that of their male sporting counterparts or in stereotypically feminine ways

It is well understood that you have to walk before you run ... 'At the moment women's rugby is at the walking stage' says Joan (June 1996, p.63)

and from a female player

Everybody has violent impulses and rugby is a fantastic outlet for these impulses. Only in the women's case it is frustration that manifests itself in jealousy, pettiness and tears. (Sheehan 1996, p.45)

iii) The third category included an article from the Daily Telegraph (UK) by Martin Johnson (Johnson 1997) captioned, 'Pigtails fly as French rule in woman's realm'<sup>1</sup>, wherein the journalist's commentary constantly undercuts the description of the game and locates the game and the women quite clearly as only worthy of great skepticism and veiled ridicule.

While this article by Johnson also begins with a comment on the women's appearance his choices of language do not indicate admiration, but draw on very conservative, stereotypical and heterosexist notions of emphasised femininity to ridicule the women. He writes

There was a time when a girl would only willingly have mud plastered all over her face as part of a package involving a hair dryer and a nail manicure - but when the face packs came off, the result was not so much an exercise in beautification as a liberal collection of cauliflower ears. (p.S12)

This article took every chance possible to undermine the women's game and to ridicule or trivialize the female players. The sponsorship of the England team by Berlei for instance provided the opportunity to quote an official describing the purpose of the sports bra as preventing breasts from 'wobbling about'.

Pointed sexist remarks are distributed liberally through the text. This is evidenced by remarks that suggest that the players are still behaving like members of the 'fairer sex', one specific comment stands out as follows

In keeping with the traditional women's prerogative, the game kicked off about seven minutes late ...

The remainder of the analysis concentrates on the three texts in category two (Howell 1996; Junee 1996; Sheehan 1996) to examine specifically how the women are constructed in terms of sexuality; how the articles deal with women who are playing a game which requires the hegemonic masculine attributes of violence, physical force and toughness associated with rugby.

One of the characteristics of these texts is that they are a mix of contradictions - for instance, the title of Junee's article 'Hail the perfumed warriors' is an obvious example. This is not surprising given the bodily and sexual terrain that the articles are negotiating. These three articles all start from a very positive and supportive stance for women's rugby; they interview the players and use the players' words to give authority but also a sense of an insider view point - what might be deemed an ethnography of the game. While on one hand they seem to be reporting on behaviour which challenges dominant constructions of femininity, at the same time they construct a very restricted version of reality, one where it is acceptable to push these limits to embody power on the field if in other ways, off (and sometimes on) the field it can be demonstrated that these players embody other elements of heterosexual femininity such as a physical attractiveness or a relationship with a man that suggests (and indeed 'confirms') heterosexuality. In other words, when you wash the mud off a truly feminine and heterosexual woman will be revealed. There are also references to behaviour on the field which constructs the women as stereotypically feminine the field there are references to 'giggling from the ruck' (Sheehan 1996, p.45), to the dilemma of 'how to control those stray locks' and to a concern with the image of the 'traditional cotton rugby shorts' (Junee 1996).

'Hail the perfumed warriors' also provides a good example of the before and after theme. One of the players Anna Tracey is shown in two juxtaposed shots - the first a close up head shot of a mud spattered, intense young woman looking sideways as though in a ruck; the second, captioned 'One and the same: Anna Tracey off and (opposite) on the field' of an attractive woman with long shiny blond hair, lipstick, mascara and shaped eyebrows. Following more action photographs of mud covered women, a later shot shows four members of the team, including Anna, sitting with the author. Facing the camera are Anna and another slim player with long dark hair. The message seems to be that these women wash up well. In a similar scenario in 'Do women wear jockstraps' the players are also described scrubbing up, applying makeup and dressing up after the game. In the 'Just bury her' article, the theme continues with Sheehan writing:

Like most women rugby players, Kate and Rudy are unbruiserlike off the field. Both are 23. Rudy ... looks good in a short skirt. As for Kate, ... she is rather elfin and has an honours degree in English literature. (p.45)

The construction of compulsory heterosexuality becomes more apparent with a close and systematic analysis of the ways in which each of the women in the England team are described in 'Do women wear jockstraps'. By the end of the article the author has referred to nearly all the women on the team and to others who are also involved in their training and management. What we have done in the table below is to list from this text all the attributes and actions associated with each of the women mentioned.

The women were who either had demonstrable heterosexual relationships or who fitted conventional heterosexual notions of attractiveness were associated with the most coverage and that coverage was predominantly devoted to these attributes. It is as though these women were used to construct a counter discourse to one which would link the 'masculine' behaviours demonstrated in the game with the 'dreaded' threat of lesbianism. As we suggested in the introduction this pervasive sporting discourse that keeps heterosexual women in their place and lesbian women closeted, invisible and fearful for their survival in the sporting arena. More dangerous and insidious is the way the text hides its intervention because of its subtlety.

#### Heterosexual evidence in 'Do women wear jockstraps?'

name of the player attributes, actions etc. associated with her in the text Dr. Jane Schindlerex international, motherly attentions, 'sacrifices .... Gill Burns(Burnsie)doughty captain, has a boyfriend, hefty Steve Peters, the coach; broken her nose two or three time; light sweet Gracie Fields voice; never swears; a 'legend'; a fervent 31 yr. old sporting heroine 5ft 11ins and 121/2 stone; gentle giant off field teaches PE at Formby; wears hair uncut since she was 14 in one, sometimes three plaits like her mum, the graceful dancing teacher from Prescott; tucking her pigtail down the neck of her hooded Absolute sweat top; her small true voice leads then in the final renditions of Swing Low and Land of Hope and Glory; a Rubens in bra and pants, wet hair snaking down her spine; a friendly looking woman in her number ones; leaping as high as Nijinsky Genevieve Shorecomely squad managerhas been in a whirlwind of activity watches shivering Karen Henders on the mathematician has trouble scaling the scrambling netshamed by the thought of help (in contrast Jamie, son of Bastow, nips over the net watched by fond parents)Jan 'Rambo' Rossa flanker with 22 English caps(has) a large bare foot(has) lump the size of an egg between knee and ankle; explains curtly; teeth marks on her arm Giselle Prangnell blue eyed blond fly half with showgirl looks 'It's a disaster' exclaims dropping her bag on the carpet ..Jacqui Edwards popular; the awesomely muscular black winger from Blackheath; the joker in the pack; a legal caseworker; a bronze medallist (in) the Youth Games; (never drank before rugby but) "Now I jump on tables and sing Delilah "an awesome sight in shorts; great black shadow glam in sharp black pants suit, eyes rimmed with kohl; put(s) on a ton of lipstick, vanished into the night with her boyfriendPaula George (Georgie)exuberant full-back with gentlemanly physique; natty as a dapper Edwardian gentleman, turns up in a crisp white collar, arranges a blue cravat, and one polished boot resting on the table teases out her curly quiff with the sharp end of her hairbrush; has captivated the company directorJulie Twigg (Twiggy)25 year old, the centre, Dad at the game, cruises down the park exuding delinquent cool and gives it the silent thumbs up; a laconic Scouse who has almost psychic communion with the ball; has played rugby since she was 10 ... but this her first cap; 'I'll be

murdering a few in the bar after.'; ...with the beautiful inevitability of an athlete on a winning streak ... begins to run with the ball, ponytail flying, seemingly alone on the park; ... on and on she glides etc. As she trots past me she raises her fist in the air, just for me, and someone by my ear is cheering their head off. To my surprise its me.' (39); flings her wet hair back and yodels; beaming Twiggy presented with her first cap Lisette Mayhewa pocket-sized Venus; ferocious, little ... with blonde hair and curly eyelashes has trouble with the security guard at the gate, who has to have it confirmed that she is a member of the squad. Warrant Officer Marion Barstow a sturdy brunette in khaki; bellowing speech; has a husband and two young children (cf'd to Corporal Beer (male) not described at all) Siobhian O'Donovan 'red-headed' physiotherapist; American masters in sports injury Piggy Ponsford 13 stone hooker; gets down to tangling with the Predator Jane Mangham loose head prop with 17 England caps; has a spectacular black eye Emma Mitchell one of the fearsome Mitchell twins; executes with 'Molly' a classic back-row move Jayne Molyneux (Molly) the winger "Rob" Clayton flanker; stays on the floor doubled up over her hand Sarah Wenn (Wenny) a civil engineering tender-planner and trumpet player with 23 English caps; is left sitting on the ground, her hands covering her face

Concluding remarks

What these articles have in common is the way that these women rugby players are presented and constructed as non threatening to the stability and order of the heterosexual gender regime. Explicit references to this lack of danger and the fact that these women are not trying to make a political point are illustrated in the following indicative statement: 'These women aren't burning their bras, nor are they attempting to carve another notch in the feminist belt. They simply want to play a great game for love not money ... ' (June, 1996, p.64). This comment is not surprisingly in the Australian Rugby Review magazine - the female reporter here is (re)assuring the primarily male readership of rugby players that they need not feel endangered by these women as they align themselves with men and their politics, their drinking culture and so on. In the Jockstrap article this is less overt but in some ways it is still seeking to assure the readers that these are the kinds of women you know (and love) - these therefore are 'real' heterosexual, motherly or attractive women who like to have a good time and at the same time play damn good rugby. There is nothing to feel threatened by here.

If and when (rarely) the 'lesbian question' is addressed directly it is to deny the social reality in which to be lesbian has legitimacy and is valued. It is a question to slide away from by evoking the myths which have surrounded rugby since its inception as an educative tool to socialise the male leaders of the Empire. As Rudy (quoted in (Sheehan 1996)) reveals the presence of lesbians on the hallowed rugby turf is 'Another myth is that it's a game for lesbians ... That's not true. It's a game for rugby players. That's the only thing that matters.' I (Sheehan) didn't ask about lesbians I didn't care. I care if these women are part of the world-wide rugby family. The greatest thing about rugby is that the culture of the game is as vital off the field as on. One of the reasons New Zealand is the perennial world power of rugby is that the entire society supports the game; it draws the Maori and the Pakehas together in a common love for the awesome traditions of the All Blacks. (p.45)

We would argue that sexual differences do matter and that naming is in itself an act of power, like Perez (1994, p.106) we believe that '(w)ithout our identities, we become homogenised and censored'. The sporting world and the media have much to answer for insofar as in the main they continue to reinforce dominant discourses about heterosexuality and thereby continue to build up the myths about women and sport and act 'as if' lesbians did not exist.

To look for a different approach we turned to an article on women in Australian football. Kate Lawrence, a long standing player, says sexuality can be an issue but that '(t)he fact that some of the women in your team are lesbians makes for acceptances of differences in the team.' She adds, '(s)ometimes you get two women on a team who are together, and that wouldn't happen on a blokes team' (Brady, 1997, p.C1). We would add that this latter point may not always be the case, indeed there is now in Britain an openly gay rugby team called the Kings Cross Steelers. It will also be interesting to watch the impact of Ian Roberts coming out as gay in the Australian Rugby League. Returning though to Lawrence's first point about acceptance of differences, there are already some arenas where sporting lesbians and gays can be themselves, for instance, the gay games and other similar events (see Clarke, 1997). Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go in the sexual main/malestream sporting arena before there is any significant and sustained acceptance of sexual differences.

At the beginning of this paper we asked how do mainstream newspapers report on a game in which women embody all that is taken to differentiate women from men - physical strength, toughness and so on and given that in such contexts like attributes in a woman are taken to be a sign, indeed confirmation of the fact that she is not a 'real' women, therefore she must be a lesbian. Not surprisingly our analysis revealed that although the authors constantly address this discourse, rarely is it explicit and most often it is through the foregrounding of attributes which are consistent with dominant notions of heterosexuality. Thus these authors (and others) make invisible the relationships and realities of those women who are lesbian. It is through what is constantly not said as much as what is said that the existence of lesbian rugby union players is denied and obliterated. In doing so such discourses shore up, reinforce and publicly sanction heterosexual versions and beliefs about femininity and thereby contribute to the maintenance of compulsory heterosexuality - and the invisibility of the experiences of sporting lesbians. The power of such sporting discourses should not be underestimated, clearly they contribute to defining and in many cases dictating what counts as acceptable sporting behaviours and displays. Through such processes (hetero)sexuality is maintained, policed and acceptable sporting boundaries established and patrolled. This keeps all sporting women in their (limited) places and leaves lesbian women particularly fearful of discrimination and harassment (see(Clarke 1995)). Thus whilst on the one hand it is encouraging that women are playing what traditionally have been seen to be male sports it must be remembered that the sporting script that is outlined is a particularly narrow one. It is as we have seen a script that still requires a large degree of sexual and social conformity from women players, that is they have to portray observable evidence of a heterosexy image through their dress and mannerisms so that the 'stigma' of lesbianism is defused. Through doing so the hegemony of heterosexuality remains largely unchallenged, thus heterosexuality remains as yet another 'regime of truth' and the deleterious impact of heteroreality on all our sporting lives remains intact.

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1 The title itself could be taken to be an allusion to a conservative women's magazine in Britain