

Sports Sex



The intersection between metrosexuality, gender, sexuality, and sports is the principal focus of this book. Chapter 1 addresses three of these elements, leaving the concept of metrosexuality to be defined in the next chapter. In order to bring the remaining concepts together, I explore “sports sex” here. By this term I refer to how sports culture conceives of gender and sexuality. I have closely examined an extreme facet of sports culture which goes by the name of “jock culture.” Here we find a vivid representation of traditional gender and sexual mythologies. These mythologies circulate in the macrocosm of society and are reflected in the microcosm we designate as sports culture. After explaining what I mean by jock culture as well as gender and sexual mythologies, I explore four aspects of sports sex in order to better grasp the world of sports. These features are sports rape, homosocial desire, and homosexual and heterosexual outings.

Two American studies published in the 1970s attributed names to sports culture, “SportsWorld” and “jock culture.” In 1975, columnist and novelist Robert Lipsyte coined the term SportsWorld to characterize “the values of the arena and the locker room [which] have been imposed on our national life” (*SportsWorld* ix). Lipsyte identified these values as toughness, playing by the rules, and an over-emphasis on both winning and team spirit. Inspired by Lipsyte’s work, Neil D. Isaacs published *Jock Culture, U.S.A.* in 1978. Isaacs’s term “jock culture” has remained helpful as a critique of sports culture. He uses it to refer to aggressive drives, dysfunctional players, and violent, destructive behaviors. Thirty years after his initial work on the subject, Lipsyte was still warning readers about the values of

jock culture. In *SportsWorld*, he noted that “these values, with their implicit definitions of manhood, courage, and success, are not necessarily in the individual’s best interests” (ix). Similar arguments can be found in *Jock: Sports and Male Identity*, a collection of essays dating from the 1970s and edited by Donald F. Sabo Jr. and Ross Runfola. One of the critical assumptions of this book, that “sports shape many undesirable elements of the male role and perpetuate sexist institutions and values” (xvi), effectively summarizes the general reflection of the time on jock culture.

Gender and Sexual Mythologies

It was unusual for the time and perspicacious of Lipsyte to see gender as part of the debate on sports culture. Isaacs noted that “In general, sports serve the political function of maintaining the order of the status quo” (22). Part of this status quo or conservatism, as Lipsyte sensed, concerns respect for a normative definition of manhood. When Lipsyte made reference to “playing by the rules” in his critique of sports culture in the 1970s, he had in mind gender rules as an example. Jock culture offers males normative gender rules. Metrosexuality, on the other hand, proposes nonnormative guidelines, which is why the sports world and metrosexuality seem on the face of it to be diametrically opposed. They offer divergent gender and sexual mythologies. These differences can best be observed by addressing the excesses of jock culture. The great metrosexual paradox is that despite all these seeming incompatibilities, the most celebrated metrosexuals of our time come from sports culture.

Chapter 2 of Brian Pronger’s *The Arena of Masculinity* explores the notion of sexual mythology. Pronger designates power as central to differentiating sex from gender. Stating that sex refers to a physiological distinction between male and female, Pronger then makes it clear that “gender is a cultural distinction that divides power between men and women” (48). Such a distinction is expressed by the use of “masculine” to describe the exertion of power and “feminine” to signify the state of disempowerment. This fundamental structuring of patriarchal power leads Pronger to observe that “Gender is a myth that justifies, expresses, and supports the power of men over women” (52).

In his analysis of the sex/gender binary opposition, Pronger borrows the notion of “myth” from Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies*. The

term refers to “a form of communication, a way of transmitting meaning that fuels the understanding people have of themselves and their culture” (50). Pronger allies myth to what seems “natural, ahistorical, universal” (51). Sexual mythology is therefore a set of beliefs and cultural practices about sexual differentiation, which in Western culture relies on patriarchy. It is through patriarchy that power is attributed to males and withheld from females. Maintaining the idea of a “natural” hierarchical order between the “opposite” sexes, patriarchy grounds itself in the gender myths of masculinity and femininity. The myths respectively designate certain acts, gestures, and behaviors as being “natural” for males or females. Pronger argues that “The gender categories of masculine and feminine are fundamental to the structure of patriarchal power” (52).

After identifying gender myths (accepted beliefs of what constitutes appropriate behavior for males and females), Pronger then introduces the “heterosexual myth,” which is based on heteroeroticism and defined as an “erotic interest in gender different from one’s own” (64). Like gender itself, the erotic arrangement which enables the mythic power differentiation between males and females to take place is another cultural invention. This is evidenced by the orthodox quality generally attributed to heteroeroticism and withheld from homoeroticism. Pronger defines the latter as “the eroticization of basic gender equality” (70).

As Pronger suggests in his title, sports inhabit a dominant arena where the gender and sexual myths are enacted. For Pronger, the gender myth combines three axes: “physical sex (male/female), sociocultural status (man/woman), and signs of gender (masculine/feminine)” (54). Sports tend to segregate the sexes into distinct teams. Insofar as it is commonly believed that sports help produce “men,” there is a close connection between athletic proficiency and masculine gender status. Furthermore, codified rituals on and off the sports terrain are either perceived as “normal” signs of masculinity or, on the contrary, interpreted as feminizing.

Jock Culture

Jock culture allows a close-up look at how sports help reproduce gender myths. Robert Lipsyte is right in specifying that jock culture is a particular problem in sports and that it is not synonymous with

sport itself. Using the term “SportsWorld” in 1975, he claimed that jock culture is “a grotesque distortion of sports” (*SportsWorld* xiv). Its values “create a dangerous and grotesque web of ethics and attitudes” (ix). After noting that a boy is initiated into jock culture through sports, Lipsyte specifically defines the culture in terms of behaviors which are physically and mentally unhealthy. These behaviors include machismo, desperate competition, bullying, violence, and being “tough, stoical, and aggressive” (“Surviving” 178). In May 2004, Lipsyte argued before the American Psychiatric Association that “Psychiatry has not taken enough interest in jock culture as a window into other American pathologies” (Hausman 19).

Lipsyte’s 2004 text, “Surviving Jock Culture,” defines some of the codes of jock culture which are damaging to the individual and society. Here he criticizes the win-at-all-costs imperative, the hypermasculine rituals, and the “bad boys” who are in need of psychological help. Also under fire is the jock’s sense of entitlement and the feeling that he is above the law. This is a consequence, no doubt, of blind adulation from fans, coaches, and the media. Lipsyte singles out jock culture’s use of homophobia to shame and humiliate players as particularly reprehensible. Going beyond Lipsyte’s perspective, Ken Hausman affirms that “The only people that jock culture disparages as much as homosexuals [. . .] are women—an attitude that is fostered early and becomes an entrenched part of life by adulthood” (19).

Using Pronger’s analysis of gender myths as a base, I interpret jock culture as a phenomenon which endorses, sustains, and justifies the myths of masculinity and femininity in contemporary Anglo-American cultures. It is a culture founded on the supremacy of males and the subjection of females. It propagates the gender myths, insisting on the “natural” differences between men and women and, finally, it relies on the heterosexual myth, attributing naturalness to heteroeroticism and unnaturalness to homoeroticism.

Sports Rape

A small but not negligible number of athletes attempt to obsessively carry out the gender and sexual myths endorsed by jock culture. Particularly since the turn of the century, sports commentators have been struck by how an increasing number of athletes defy the law with impunity. The codes of jock culture, taken to an extreme limit,

are dangerous, antisocial, and occasionally illegal. Jocks who subscribe to its values feel the constant necessity to prove their manhood, masculinity, and heterosexuality. According to jock culture logic, the best way to provide simultaneous proof of all three is for a male athlete to have sexual intercourse with a woman. The more athletes have sexual relations, the more masculine they seem to themselves and to others. Heterosexual conquests are thus equated with manhood, even though such conquests may include rape.

Rape, a particular excess of jock culture, may be seen as an enactment of what Pronger terms the masculinity myth. Pronger argues that "The violent rape of women is the ultimate consummation of the violence inherent in the myth of gender" (65). Pronger links rape to Western culture's gender myths in general by arguing that "It is in [rape] that the mythic power difference between men and women is most clearly realized. It is the debasement of a woman, wherein she is not only made subordinate and brutalized, but is also reduced to a mere object" by a man "in his pursuit of the erotic incarnation of his mythic, masculine power" (65).

Sports rape (rapes committed by athletes) has already been well documented in the United States. One of the major contributors to this documentary effort is lawyer and investigative journalist Jeff Benedict. He is the author of three books outlining the cases, background stories, and sexual abuses inflicted on women by a minority of overpaid and oversexed jocks. His first book, *Public Heroes, Private Felons* (1997), exposes cases of sexual and domestic violence carried out by athletes. Published a year later, *Pros and Cons* provides two substantial sections on rape, while examining the criminal behavior of NFL players. More recently, *Out of Bounds* (2004) explicitly depicts what the subtitle calls "the NBA's Culture of Rape." These three texts provide detailed descriptions of a global phenomenon. A significant number of athletes are taking advantage of their status, money, high prestige, and immediate legal aid to harm or have forcible sexual intercourse with spouses, female partners, or total strangers.

Media coverage of celebrity athletes such as Mike Tyson, O.J. Simpson, and Kobe Bryant has been particularly extensive. This reporting, however, tends to cover up rather than expose the extent of sex crimes perpetrated by athletes. As Benedict discovers in his inquiry into football criminality, it is a phenomenon which is more widespread than commonly imagined. Benedict found that in 1996–1997 over a third of NFL players (509) had criminal histories

that he was able to access. Of these 509 players, 109 had been arrested a total of 264 times, mostly for domestic violence and aggravated assault. Benedict thus concluded that one in five NFL players had been charged with a serious crime including rape.

Benedict's 2001–2002 study of the NBA's culture of rape, violence, and crime revealed that 40 percent of all players had been the object of a formal criminal complaint for a serious crime. He checked the criminal records of 177 nonforeign-born NBA players (of a total of 417) and found 71 had been arrested for felonies or misdemeanors. It is a figure which doubles the criminal rate of NFL players. Offenses included rape, assault, and domestic violence. Benedict observed in the case of rape complaints filed against NBA players that "Usually, when a police complaint is filed against an NBA player for rape, the player never ends up being charged, much less convicted" (81).

In Britain there has been similar negative reporting on jock culture's sexual excesses manifested through rape. In October 2003, readers of the *Independent* found an article on soccer titled "No Flowers, Please, for a Game That Lost Its Soul." The author, James Lawton, also added a subtitle which provides a description of the state of the game in early twenty-first-century Britain: "Drink, drugs, violence, cheating, orgies, obsessive gambling, alleged gang rape." Lawton's piece was published shortly after a seventeen-year-old girl accused five soccer players of rape and two others of sexual assault. The case was later dropped due to insufficient evidence.

Equally, in October 2003, a Leeds soccer player allegedly raped a twenty-year-old girl in a car. This was followed by an article in the *Observer* the same month which deplored the culture of excess behind a practice called "roasting" whereby a girl performs oral sex on one partner while another partner has intercourse with her. The article claimed that "Modern footballers are now seen as drunken, debauched and out of control" (Burke, Campbell, and Asthana 16). This claim received further confirmation in March 2004 when several Leicester City soccer players were accused of sexually assaulting three German tourists. All charges were subsequently dropped. Following this renewed media interest in allegations of sports rape, James Lawton returned in 2004 to vent his rage against what he called "this most pampered generation of sportsmen" who were disfiguring a national game ("Football" 56).

In Australia the following year, sports rape aroused similar media interest. After Australian articles described the alleged sexual

habits of six rugby players, Peter English in the *Guardian* informed British readers of the “macho culture in Australian sport” (25). It is worth noting that the term “macho culture” is the British and Australian equivalent of the American “jock culture.” English drew attention to rape and sexual assault allegations dating back to 2000. Soon afterward, *Independent* journalists Kathy Marks and David Randall titled a March 2004 article “And They Call It the British Disease.” The article, later republished in the *Canberra Times*, was subtitled “Jock Culture Is Turning Elite Sportsmen into Animals” (“Why Do Good Sports Turn Bad?”). The journalists condemned the “unquestioned adulation of elite sportsmen” in Australia and the status accorded to British soccer players which “now borders on the religious” (Marks and Randall, “Good Sports” A35). A revealing illustration of the entrenched nature of jock culture in Australia is a statement made by the country’s prime minister, John Howard, who was quoted as saying: “At a time like this, I stick up for the game, not put the boot in” (A35). This comment was made after more than twenty rugby and Australian football players had been accused of rape or sexual assault.

Commentators on the global rise of rape, violence, and crime in jock culture all agree on one thing: when society gives inordinate, unquestioned adulation to young, spoiled, testosterone-filled, ego-obsessed athletes, such hero worship is bound to be problematic. If professional sportsmen were not automatically granted star status, paid gross salaries, courted by advertisers, and surrounded by avaricious agents and expert legal teams, perhaps there would be less risk for the women they meet. Whatever the case may be, it remains that jock culture, at its most extreme, objectifies women, condones nonconsensual sexual congress, and congratulates sexual criminals for their aggression. Metrosexuality, on the other hand, sees no reason to objectify women or to render them submissive. Male domination is not prized as a distinguishing characteristic of metrosexual masculinity.

Homosocial Desire

In sports culture, nonnormative sexualities are highly problematic, since sports sex is synonymous with heterosexism and homophobia. Numerous studies have investigated the presence of homophobia in

areas such as education and the military. One text published in 2005 also brings sport to the center of the debate. Eric Anderson's *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity* argues that "Sport manages to maintain and reproduce orthodox notions of masculinity that are based on homophobia and misogyny" (74-75). In order to justify the claim concerning homophobia, Anderson offers a number of hypotheses demonstrating "how sport has remained behind the times" (65). This is achieved by reinforcing a single-track vision of sex, gender, and sexuality. Anderson claims that "Sports are a near-total institution in which athletes find it difficult to escape a single-minded way of viewing sex and gender" (66). The "single-minded," exclusionist view espoused by athletes, coaches, and commentators justifies and propagates hatred of difference. It also motivates a rejection of nonheteronormative behaviors.

Paradoxically, sports can also encourage sexual ambiguity. This is because homosocial desire, deprived of the athletic context, can easily be confused with homosexuality. Defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as "social bonds between persons of the same sex" (1), homosocial desire is reflected in male bonding, a phenomenon typically observed in team sports. Sedgwick, however, posits a "potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (1), a continuum which sports seek constantly to disrupt by separating the homosocial from the homosexual. Such a disruption, however, is difficult to produce because of a double-bind situation. Sedgwick believes that "For a man to be a man's man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being 'interested in men'" (89). This double bind helps explain, according to Sedgwick, why football "can look, with only a slight shift of optic, quite startlingly 'homosexual'" (89). This sort of claim has been heard before. In a 1974 interview, Gore Vidal opined: "I can't imagine anyone who was not largely homosexual wanting to be a baseball or a football player, having to live with other boys so much of the time" (237). Vidal's humorous quip concurs with Sedgwick's double-bind theory and suggests they share a similar interpretation of sports sex.

It is useful to compare Sedgwick's work on the homosocial with chapter 6 of Pronger's *The Arena of Masculinity*, "Sex and Sport," which explores the specific domain of sport and what is termed "the homoerotic paradox" (182). Pronger explains this paradox as

the encouragement of homosocial behavior in an environment where homophobia is usually rampant. Paradoxically, according to Pronger, “the hierarchy of gender difference compels men to find satisfaction in one another” (178–79), and sports are a principal arena where such pleasure can be found. Jock culture, especially, is bent on trying to disrupt the homosocial/homosexual continuum by forcefully denying that there is a homoerotic dimension in sports and by vilifying the homosexual.

In order to have access to an insider’s view of jock culture and the homosocial in sports, it can be helpful looking at Dennis Rodman’s first autobiography, *Bad as I Wanna Be*. Here Rodman explores some of the codes of jock culture that he perceived to exist around him during his NBA career. Masculinity for Rodman (as Pronger and Lipsyte theorize) is restricted to being “tough and macho. Everyone’s a man’s man, tough and mean” (*Bad* 210). In other words, he conveys a gender myth concerning masculinity which has two important consequences for sport: it excludes less virile behaviors and stigmatizes such behaviors as signifying weakness, femininity, or homosexuality. Yet Rodman also underlines the close bodily contact between players on the court by observing that “Man hugs man. Man pats man on ass. Man whispers in man’s ear and kisses him on the cheek” (*Bad* 211). Rodman reminds his reader that in the late 1980s Isiah Thomas and Magic Johnson used to openly give each other such kisses before a match. Interpreting these acts as “classic homosexual or bisexual behavior” (*Bad* 211), Rodman endorses academic discourse concerning sport’s single-minded way of viewing sex and gender (where in the public imagination such bodily contact is not supposed to erotically arouse, as the male athlete can only be heterosexual). Rodman thus explores the slippery line between being a “man’s man” and being “interested in men,” while helping us understand how a gay athlete could disturb the heteronormativity of sports sex. Furthermore, Rodman reminds us that a principal technique employed in keeping the homosocial nonsexual is to vilify homosexuality. And, finally, given that jock culture’s extreme interpretation of the masculinity myth is indicative of society in general, *Bad as I Wanna Be* suggests why only such a small number of professional male American athletes have declared their homosexuality in the last quarter of a century.

Homosexual Outing

In the three major American team sports, football, basketball, and baseball, only six professional players have stepped forward to be counted as homosexual. Football has three names (David Kopay, Roy Simmons, and Esera Tuaolo), baseball two (Billy Bean and Glenn Burke), and basketball one single name, John Amaechi. All these athletes came out after retiring, thus demonstrating how difficult it is for a gay professional sportsman to be open about his sexuality.

The most recent case of a homosexual outing in the world of American professional sports reveals the seething homophobia that hampers gay athletes from publicly acknowledging their homosexuality during their professional careers. The former NBA player, John Amaechi, played professionally until 2003 when he left the Utah Jazz team. In February 2007, after the launch of his autobiography, *Man in the Middle*, the media relayed comments made by Tim Hardaway, another former NBA player, during a radio interview. Hardaway's vilification of homosexuality is shocking for its hatred and bigotry. He told the radio journalist: "Well, you know I hate gay people, so I let it be known. I don't like gay people and I don't like to be around gay people. I am homophobic. I don't like it. It shouldn't be in the world or in the United States" (Zeigler). This vitriolic excess caused Hardaway to be banned by the NBA from participating in an All-Star event; he lost his job as a sports advisor and a coach. Still, this anti-gay invective provided a message, especially to young people, that homosexuality should be eradicated from sports.

In Britain, a very similar history of ignominy and shame has been attached to gay sportsmen. Only one professional British athlete, soccer player Justin Fashanu, has revealed his homosexuality. In 1990, he sold his story to a tabloid after having successfully sued another newspaper in 1982 for printing gay rumors. Fashanu left Britain in 1995, and then found a job as coach with the team Maryland Mania. He fled the United States in 1998 following allegations of sexual assault. A month later, he hanged himself in London, leaving behind a suicide note containing the words: "Being gay and a personality is so hard" (Clark 124). Not surprisingly, no other active or retired professional athlete has come out in Britain.

The case of another soccer player, Graeme Le Saux, is representative of British sports homophobia. In 1999, a fellow player tried to insult Le Saux by wiggling his bum at him during a match. Le Saux,

who was married with a child, persistently attracted “poof” and “faggot” insults. He is said to have been singled out for homophobic vilification ever since he “went away on a camping holiday as a teenager with a male friend, collected antiques and read *The Guardian*” (Stanford 6). The British journalist who quoted this list of “crimes” referred to homophobia in soccer as the “sport’s ugliest taboo” (6).

There is every reason to believe that jock culture’s homophobic rituals are similar in Australia and Canada. Rugby player Ian Roberts is the only professional athlete to have come out in Australia. This 1995 case has been analyzed elsewhere in discussions of masculinity and sport (Coad 144–48; Miller 72–78). Unlike some of the tragic ends which marked the lives of nearly all the gay professional athletes who outed themselves in the United States and Britain, Roberts’s career after leaving the world of rugby has not been marred by ignominy. At last report, he was going his own path after a three-year course in acting and dance at the National Institute of Dramatic Art in Sydney. Olympic gold medalist Mark Tewksbury made his outing in Canada in 1998 after retiring from swimming. He later became copresident of the 2006 World Outgames held in Montreal.

This cross-cultural survey suggests that in different English-speaking countries where metrosexual athletes have been observed, there is a strong reticence on the part of professional sportsmen to publicly identify themselves as homosexual. Such silence concords with the generalized homophobia of the sports world. If we consider that metrosexuality has often been confused with homosexuality, sports culture would logically be an unlikely place to harbor metrosexual males. At the same time, it could be pointed out that the prevalence of homosocial desire in sports is conducive to the development of metrosexuality.

Heterosexual Outing

A sign of jock culture’s fear of confusing a man’s man and being interested in men can be detected behind the urge that some athletes have to initiate a “heterosexual outing.” Modeled on homosexual outings, this recent phenomenon involves high-profile figures who claim heterosexual identity in a public context. Duke Blue Devil center Christian Laettner (who had been taunted by chants of “homo” at games during his university career) started the trend in

1991 by referring to gay rumors in a *Sports Illustrated* article. He later told a news service that he was “definitely straight” (Montre 1C). More assurances about his heterosexual identity were given in an article in *People Magazine* as well as in an ESPN interview.

The Laettner case reveals what can happen to a successful young athlete who rebels against the gender myths of jock culture. Curry Kirkpatrick, the *Sports Illustrated* interviewer, traces rumors of Laettner’s reputed homosexuality to the fact that “As a vaguely weird joke designed to shock a few football players, Laettner walked around holding hands with a fellow freshman” (73). The journalist also provides statements made to the press by Laettner and his co-captain roommate, Brian Davis, which added fuel to the controversy. In March 1991, Davis told the *New York Times* that “the two most important things in my life are basketball and Christian [. . .] We know we’re not gay [. . .] We [still] can tell each other we love each other” (Kirkpatrick 73). Earlier, the *Raleigh News and Observer* had quoted Christian as saying: “I spend 95 percent of my time with Brian. I don’t want anything else; I don’t need anything else [. . .] All I want to do is be with Brian” (Kirkpatrick 73). The unusually affectionate language of the two ballplayers effectively draws attention to the difficulty the sports world can have in distinguishing the homosocial from the homoerotic.

During his interview with Kirkpatrick, Laettner highlighted this difficulty through his carefree (some might say “careless”) disregard for the expectations of jock culture by observing that “The stereotype of a bigtime athlete is that he’s supposed to be able to get a date with anyone he wants and that he ‘gets around.’ It’s stupid. I wasn’t doing any of that. I had male friends. I wasn’t seen with any females. I had bigger and better things to do. So now it’s I ‘get around’ and I’m gay” (73). High-profile jocks (as Laettner and his fans all know) are expected to provide constant visible proof of heterosexuality. And in the absence of girlfriends, a public statement asserting that one is not sexually interested in men is increasingly being judged necessary to offset same-sex suspicions.

While not commenting on the rumors, the *Sports Illustrated* journalist includes in his text a series of descriptions of the “devilishly different” Laettner (the title given to the article), which go against normalized gender expectations concerning a college athlete. From the “moussed curls” (63) of the “sensitive fellow” (64) to the interrogative “Are we talking screaming diva here?” (64) Kirkpatrick’s

choice of language persists in distancing Laettner from the jock stereotype. Furthermore, the reader is informed that Laettner's roommate introduced him to silk shirts and hairstyling. According to his roommate, Laettner "spends an hour posing in front of the mirror. He knows he's the prettiest man walking" (64). For want of a behavioral term such as metrosexual in the early 1990s, Laettner's stylish good looks and effusive passion for another athlete were interpreted as signs of homosexuality.

In November 1991, Earvin "Magic" Johnson continued the heterosexual coming out trend when he instigated a double outing on the *Arsenio Hall Show*. While publicly announcing his HIV status, Johnson also felt the need to distance himself from some other victims, telling viewers: "I'm far from homosexual. Far from it." The studio audience proceeded to applaud. He reiterated the denial to *Sports Illustrated*: "I have never had a homosexual encounter. Never" (Johnson and Johnson 22). In *Are We Not Men?*, a study of masculine anxiety and African American identity, Phillip Brian Harper provides a detailed reading of the reactions of the media and other NBA players at the time of Johnson's declarations. Harper is right to argue that "the greater purpose of that denial" helped in the "establishment and maintenance of proper masculinity" (23). Likewise, Randy Boyd, a writer for *Outsports.com*, a Web site devoted to homosexuality and sports, scoffed: "[Magic] had just reassured the straight world that [. . .] he was still a Man."

Johnson gave an interview to the gay and lesbian magazine *The Advocate* in April 1992. He explained his public denial of having had a homosexual experience: "I wanted everybody to know that it wasn't just a gay disease" (Brigham 36-37). He then went on to describe homophobes as "stupid people" (37). However, when asked how NBA players would react to a gay ballplayer, Johnson seemed to proffer homophobic suspicions by suggesting that he believed all homosexual men were sexual marauders on the lookout for prey. He told *The Advocate* interviewer: "It would be tough, I'm sure, because they've always got to shower [together] and that whole thing. They wouldn't know if the guy's going to come on to them or not" (37). This fear of sexual advances from a gay player suggests a negative stereotyping of homosexuality that Johnson seems to have internalized.

Three NFL quarterbacks (Troy Aikman, Kordell Stewart, and Jeff Garcia) and baseball player Mike Piazza have also made public statements insisting that they be identified as heterosexual. Rumors

about Aikman's sexuality appeared in a book written by a sports columnist in 1996, prompting the player to characterize such allegations as criminal. In 1999, Stewart reportedly told his fellow players: "You'd better not leave your girlfriends around me, because I'm out to prove a point" (Silver, "In Control" 44, 46). The object of homophobic abuse, Garcia told an interviewer in 2004 that such "knocking" was a sign of jealousy (Buzinski). New York Mets catcher Mike Piazza called a press conference in 2002 to announce his heterosexuality. Piazza's public act seemed to be linked to the suggestion of a newspaper columnist that a top player for the Mets was gay.

The British sports world seems to exert the same type of unrelenting pressure on athletes which ultimately leads to the need for heterosexual outings. Subject to multiple insinuations concerning his sexuality, British world heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis provides a striking illustration of both this need as well as the perfidious extremes of jock culture expectations. (Hasim Rahman, for example, an opponent in a 2001 world title fight, referred to an attempt by Lewis some months before to take legal action over a fight decision as a "gay move"). Annoyed by a succession of homophobic slurs, Lewis retorted in a manner which is as comic as it is degrading. In a desperate attempt to distance himself from homosexuality, the boxer plaintively asked an interviewer, "How can they call me gay? I'm 120 percent a man's man" (Tatchell). Understandably, the confused innuendo arising from what it means to be a "man's man" tended to substantiate the very accusation that Lewis was trying to dispel. Yet his attitude was far less ambiguous when he denigrated homosexuality as being synonymous with weakness and effeminacy.

Human-rights campaigner Peter Tatchell wrote to the boxer to ask him to stop denying these rumors, arguing that this gave the impression that homosexuality was something shameful and degrading. Instead, he advised Lewis to treat homophobes with the contempt they deserved, rather than fall into their game of demeaning homosexuality. Observing the extent to which British sports were homophobic, Tatchell also told the *Guardian* in November 2001 that "There are, today, several top British sports stars who are gay. They worry constantly about being found out [. . .] They lead lonely, miserable lives. Some go to absurd lengths to project a straight image, even to the extent of having phoney girlfriends." The case of Lewis suggests that jock culture always demands a girlfriend in order to

“prove” a heterosexual orientation and therefore establish beyond doubt an athlete’s manhood.

The tendency in sports culture over the last fifteen years to witness heterosexual outings from certain athletes may point to insecure sexual identity from these players, but more significantly it suggests generalized homophobia, a lack of tolerance concerning nonnormative sexualities, and a confusion between the normative and the normal. In contrast, metrosexuality does not discriminate against homosexuality or insist on heteronormativity. Here we have yet another incongruity in bringing together sports culture and metrosexuality.



The great paradox of jock culture and its interpretation of sports sex is that while subscribing to heteronormativity, it keeps women at bay and keeps the boys together. Jock culture encourages close homosocial contact between males, but will not countenance homosexuality. In order to deflect suspicions of same-sex interests or practices, jock culture constantly denigrates homosexuality as a means to insist on its heteronormativity. This obsessive need to conform and be normative explains why an athlete who is openly homosexual is still a taboo subject in sports culture. Heterosexual outings are strident attempts to subscribe to the gender and sexual mythologies which determine societal norms. Such conformity suggests that sports sex is not just a microcosm of attitudes and behaviors confined to athletes. Sports sex transmits homophobia and misogyny. It highlights and exacerbates ambient gender and sexual mythologies, the function of which is to establish behavioral norms and stigmatize certain gender performances and sexual acts as abnormal. This is the culture which produced the most important models of metrosexuality in the twenty-first century.