Game, Set and Match to Exclusive Masculinity: Men, body practices, sport and the making and remaking of hegemonic masculinity.

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Abstract

There is a continued understanding of sport within contemporary western society that it is an activity in which some are more ‘able’ to take part than others. This assumption is often based upon unquestioned social constructions of gender, sexuality and the body. In this thesis sport is considered a significant site where hegemonic masculinities are made and remade. It also considers the potential significance of body practices as a central means through which these masculinities are formed. The arguments developed in this thesis are supported by research conducted among male participants of sports clubs (gay and straight) in the South East of England. Participant observation and interviews were employed in order to examine bodily and gendered performances on and off the sports field and were assessed in relation to the wider inequalities faced by various sections of society. Feminist research and the more recent branches of research found in sociology and cultural studies have highlighted the disadvantages experienced by women in general, but at the same time prevalent forms of what I term ‘exclusive masculinity’ remain to an extent unchallenged, and this is particularly evident within sport. Exploring issues relating to the body, masculinities and sexuality creates the opportunity to consider whether the radical potential found in marginalized sports (in this case a gay tennis club) can provide a challenge to the exclusive practices prevalent in mainstream sport.
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Introduction

True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies - to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body.

(Connell 1995 page 45)

I have always been aware of the significance of the body in relation to my own understanding of myself and the presentation of my 'self' to others. I was aware of how it could help or hinder me in social situations in many ways. For instance, being male, white, tall, slim and agile I could sense the way these corporeal qualities afforded me status in different circumstances. At the same time, my body could hamper me in many other social situations. For instance, it could be too weak or it could be too young or too old. These bodily traits informed my thinking about myself and created various ways in which I could present a social identity. Consequently, throughout my life I have been constantly aware of using my body to perform in certain ways and present a particular form of identity.

I have always enjoyed sporting activity. My parents were both enthusiastic sports players and sporting activity was a big part of my family life. My experiences of team sports at school, however, were not always enjoyable and this influenced my later participation in certain sports. I can remember in my early teens returning to the UK after spending several years at a school in Australia where I had been an active swimmer. Arriving in England in the middle of a cold and wet winter I found that I was not really very good at football and did not particularly like it. Because of this I initially suffered a degree of rejection from my peers. Football was not only the major sport for boys in the curriculum but also a main topic in social conversation. The school did not have a swimming pool and tennis was only
played by girls in the summer. I can remember being quite confident about my body whilst in Australia, but found the initial period at school in England a set-back in terms of my self-esteem. It was strange not to be popular and my first reaction was to concentrate on school work. As such, in a small space of time, my social identity had been reconstructed because of my inability to conform to a specific sporting activity. Things changed later when I became involved in the school swimming team and in local tennis clubs, but I have never forgotten the sense of not being a 'fully-fledged' male in those early days at school.

I can also remember, as a teenager, wanting to play a number of sports but being restricted by my body type and also by my pre-conceptions of what taking part in certain sports entailed. For example, I liked the actual game of rugby, but felt that I was too 'skinny' to play competitively and at the same time was not really attracted to the excessive machismo displayed by rugby players. Not only was a particular type of body required to take part but there appeared to be an unwritten need to adopt the set social rituals associated with an organized sport such as rugby, for instance, heavy drinking, violence and sexism.

At that time, any thoughts of being different were related to my perception of my body in comparison to others. At school I never had cause to contemplate my sexuality. Heterosexuality was a 'given' and I never had any reason to question this. Problems that did occur arose from my own bodily performances, particularly on the football pitch and my concerns to demonstrate that I was just like other men, not from my sexuality. I can remember the term 'gay' being used only in relation to 'camp' television personalities, such as Larry Grayson or John Inman, but even so, the references were understood more in terms of their effeminate bodily performances rather than specific sexuality.
Sport, particularly tennis and swimming, has remained a big part in my life. I have always been involved with some form of club or team and have always endeavoured to continue playing by joining local clubs whenever I have moved location. Over the years this has meant that I have played in many clubs throughout the country and on reflection it is within this setting that I have been able to observe how performances of particular types of masculinity predominate at the expense of others. Initially, my participation was based solely within traditional organized sport based around competitive play: swimming galas at school, ratings tennis tournaments as a teenager and league matches at University and in clubs. Recently, however, I became aware of gay sports groups and thought that these would provide an opportunity to take part in activities where the social would take precedence over the competitive and, consequently, where macho, heterosexual male posturing would not be considered appropriate.

My experiences in both mainstream and gay sport provide a useful background against which to raise questions about the body and masculinities. The social arena of sport is also an interesting space where the body performances of other men can be observed and considered in relation to broader questions of masculinity and sexuality. Consequently, I have attempted to incorporate my personal experiences into this thesis so that I can consider the extent to which cultural processes have informed not only my status as male but also wider social constructions of masculinity. In addition, I explore the extent to which the body plays a part in these constructions.

The Research

In terms of a thesis, my own musings do not provide sufficient explanation for how the social acts upon the individual, whether other men approach their bodies in similar ways or
if they see their bodies as influential in the construction of their own masculine identity.

Part of this study's 'foreshadowed problems' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) arise from the personal experiences described above. However, there is also the need to rethink the generalisability of these individual impressions alongside more detailed investigation which incorporates existing research literature and empirical evidence. Much of the literature written on sport upholds many taken for granted assumptions about those considered most able to participate. These assumptions are generally based upon unquestioned social constructions of gender and the body. In mainstream sports literature and journalism, performances of the young, professional male body are considered most noteworthy. It is also within mainstream sociology, particularly areas which claim to describe the sociology of sport, where these assumptions often still remain unchallenged. It is away from the specific location of sport where more reasoned debate has surfaced. Most noticeably in post-structuralist readings of the body, for example, Butler’s (1993) Foucauldian account of gender performativity, which have highlighted the problems of continued constructions of gender based upon binary distinctions. However, my concern with many post-structuralist accounts is their reliance upon exclusively linguistic sources for their claims and the subsequent marginalisation of corporeality.

I have set out to explore the extent to which other men adopt bodily practices in their everyday lives. Explanations which emerge may provide the opportunity to develop and improve sociological understanding of the processes and practices through which body performance can be said to constitute gender and sexuality. At the same time I believe that it is important to consider the extent to which marginalized groups have the ability to challenge the current sporting framework which is invested heavily in hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, this thesis explores sport as a significant site for the making
and remaking of hegemonic masculinities. It also considers the potential significance of body practices as a central means through which these masculinities are formed. Using these aims as guidelines, I have compiled the following questions which form the central themes for the research:

To what extent is hegemonic masculinity made and remade through body practices associated with sport?

What are the body practices through which hegemonic masculinity is made up within these sites?

Do these body practices operate at the expense of other forms of masculinity, femininity and sexuality?

How do these body practices intersect with relations of class, race age and (dis)ability?

Does tennis, as played in an alternative site, (such as a gay and lesbian tennis club) subvert or reproduce hegemonic masculinity?

Practical Issues

The research was conducted as part of a full time research scholarship funded through the Pavis Centre at the Open University. This began in October 1999 and the ethnographic material was collected from then until the end of 2002 from selected research sites in the South East of England. In chapter two, I provide more details of the sites and the methods used.
In chapter one I explore theories which have already been developed in this field. I begin with an exploration of current theories relating to sport and gender and then continue with an investigation of arguments based upon the body and gender. I am particularly interested in the ideas developed by Connell (1995) and his attempts to understand the social significance of the body through body practices. At the same time, the concept of disciplined and regulated bodies developed by Foucault and incorporated in post structuralism is useful, particularly when applied to gender, for example, in the writings of Judith Butler (1993).

I additionally address the notion of individuality and the way it can be expressed through the body. I explore the extent to which displays of the body can be expressed in Bourdieu’s (1977) sense of 'cultural capital' where a particular 'type' of body appears to carry much greater cultural 'weight' and, therefore, needs to be assessed in terms of its importance in the everyday activities of the individual. It is also important to gauge the extent to which there is any awareness of the body and how prevalent pursuit of the physical is within our 'habitus'.

In chapter two, I provide an account of the research methods adopted in this study. I have used ethnography, specifically participant observation and depth interviewing, in order to assess the extent to which body practices inform the construction of masculinities and how they are performed within the setting of sport. Observations provide the opportunity to assess these body practices as they occur in the present, whilst interviews, in the form of sporting life-histories, enable the exploration of body practices through the life course.
Aspects of Grounded Theory (Strauss 1987) were employed in the analysis of the data as it is particularly suited to theory building projects. Grounded Theory provides a set of procedures that can be used to guide the researcher through previously unmapped territory by ‘grounding’ the emerging theory in repeated cycles of data collection, analysis and reflection. However, less rigorous approaches are also utilized, such as Goffman’s (1972) ‘dramaturgical’ method, in order to provide a broader methodological position. In addition, the active, reflective approaches found in feminist methodology (Gluck and Patai 1991, Stanley 1993) are applied, particularly in relation to addressing individual accounts of the body and recognising my part within the research process.

In chapters three, four and five, I present the results of the research. The data gathered provides the opportunity to build a discussion based upon cultural attitudes toward the male body, gender and sexuality. I am, consequently, able to identify and document the ways and extent to which body practices can be said to have been constructing masculinities in specific local practices, together with the meanings participants themselves give to these. At the same time I explore whether the radical potential found in marginalized sports can provide a challenge to the exclusive practices of heterosexual male-based, traditional organised sport. For this study, it is argued that a liberal based agenda adopted by organised gay community sport fails to utilise the opportunity to challenge heterosexual hegemony (Butler 1993). I suggest that liberal agenda merely reflect heterosexual, male values based upon bodily performance and in turn create an exclusive, masculine arena (Pronger 1990, 2000) within sport.
Chapter One

Literature Review

Sport, Masculinities and Body Practices.

Clearly, sport continues to be an institutional practice through which men's collective power and privilege vis-à-vis women are reproduced and naturalized. Yet, the experiences of individual men or groups of men within sports settings are not uniform.

(McKay, Messner and Sabo 2000 page 7)

The main argument presented in this thesis is that hegemonic masculinity is maintained through bodily practices. This is particularly evident in the field of sport which has established a position within contemporary social discourse as an arena almost exclusively occupied and enjoyed by heterosexual men. Whilst it is apparent that different masculinities are constructed in a range of social spaces, I suggest that the bodily practices formulated in sport reinforce hegemonic masculinity at the expense of other versions and consequently contribute to gender and bodily based discriminatory practices.

In order to investigate these claims, it is important to provide an account of the literature which has addressed issues relating to both sport and bodily practice. I start, in section one, with an exploration of sociological explanations of sport and masculinities and then, in section two, look more specifically at current theoretical debates which focus upon the body and gendered practices.
Section One: Sport and Masculinities.

Sport and historical processes

Sport occupies a central position in contemporary western culture. It is a multi-billion pound industry, but at the same time a pursuit which holds significant meaning in the lives of individuals. As Hargreaves (1986) states

Sport stimulates young men to dream of escape from boredom and deprivation. It is eulogized by educators, philanthropists and social reformers, appropriated by politicians and promoted by the modern state. (Hargreaves 1986 page 1)

However, as Hargreaves goes on to argue, sport is problematic precisely because, in comparison with other institutions seen as directly related to the state, the power relations within it are largely unrecognised. Hargreave's historical overview is useful in terms of tracing the emergence of sport from an institutional perspective and is located clearly in terms of power relations theorised through a Marxist framework. However, there has been a tendency for those who have adopted this approach, such as, for example, the figurational accounts of Elias and Dunning (1986), to apply class in a generalised sense. Those who have access to power are simply categorised as white, middle-class men. Although this analysis is instructive, there is little exploration of the conflict and contradictions within this group and there is only passing reference to the role of the individual body or the different versions of masculinity found both within and external to class categories.
Nevertheless, it important to be aware of the relationship between sport and the formation of sporting 'character' applied to men. The focus of this thesis is on how sporting practices construct masculinities and sexualities rather than on the historical development of sporting institutions and power relations inherent within these. Although exploring the historical development of sporting institutions is useful, these accounts tend to assume class as a 'simple' category and ignore gender and sexuality as problematic within this. However, in terms of the aims of this thesis, it is still important to recognise that, historically, there has always been some form of 'sporting' physical activity although it was not until the Victorian era that it really started to take its present form (Haley 1968, Brailsford 1969, Malcolmson 1973, Bailey 1978). The Victorian period can be seen as influential in shaping the way many sports are played today. At the same time, the cultural transformations in attitudes to health and the body in this period can also be considered as contributory factors to the social understanding that sport was, in particular, a space for the healthy, male body (Haley 1978, Park 1987)

Hargreaves (1986) provides an account of the way sport developed into its current form and how the ethos of Muscular Christianity was significant in the formulation of what he termed the dominant male ideology in English public schools during the 19th century. It is this construct of an ideal form of masculine behaviour located in action and heroic deeds which has prevailed within sport practice in more recent history and contributes to contemporary idealisations of sporting masculinity. Hargreaves also argues that during the latter stages of the twentieth century with the decline of heavy, manual based industry and a relative decline in the incidence of large scale wars, the sports field became a primary social space for displays of this form of masculinity.
In addition to the emergence of organised sport during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a strong relationship between work and leisure time developed (Cunningham 1980). It is arguable that the whole socialisation process for men and women is now geared towards employment where futures are mapped out in terms of a chosen occupation or career. Although this relationship towards employment is influenced by other social factors, particularly gender, race, class and disability, it is reasonable to claim that a large proportion of an individual’s life is built around training towards and then maintaining a specific career. Men and women are also categorised in terms of relationship to the workforce; those who work and those who do not, such as the unemployed, the retired, the disabled, children and students. In contrast, leisure time is seen as time ‘outside’ of work and importantly as ‘free’ time. The greater historical presence of men within the workplace may also provide one explanation for sport occupying a position as a male space. In the past, men may have experienced a broader distinction between work and play, where sport has been invested in more heavily because of its relationship to leisure. However, in contemporary society, where the majority work in order to provide an income and means of support rather than the pursuit of a vocation, leisure time continues to hold great significance for the individual. Not only as a means for attaining pleasure, but as a way of expressing an identity (Tomlinson 1990). It is a time which is considered ‘one’s own’, a time to pursue an activity of one’s own choosing even though the whole process of participation in leisure activities is organised through either government or commercial directives.

Sport, for those outside professional circuits, has maintained its position in general consciousness as being ‘free-time’ and as such pleasurable. Even the blatant commercialism and organisation of contemporary sport and leisure time has not
diminished its hegemonic status (Hargreaves 1986 and Clarke and Critcher 1985). For
men, in particular, developing knowledge of sport as well as developing sporting prowess
is a prime area for the acquisition of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977, 1988). The body can
provide an initial display to others that one has been involved in sporting activity, not only
in terms of 'on court' performances but also through specific bodily gestures and
techniques which are associated with particular sports. For example, within contemporary
western youth culture, capital is achieved through performances which are directly
attributed to 'cool' sports, such as basketball and surfing. Displays to others can be
inferred through specific bodily presentations such as walking with a stooped gait with
one's arms hanging low in the manner of a basketball player. Achieving a particular 'look'
(Nixon 1996) requires knowledge on behalf of the performer of the social significance but
can also be seen as an indication of the historical specificity related to idealized, bodily
presentation and sporting performances. For example, during the latter stages of the
twentieth century there was a transformation in male bodily presentation which gave the
impression that young men should be socially aware of the need to acquire a specific
image. This often entailed maintaining a glorified representation of the 'hard', muscular
male body as a signifier of authentic masculinity and can be evidenced in the popularity of
films stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone. During the same
period, in the fashion industry, for instance, clothing adopting a sports theme has proved to
be popular and has provided a means to attract men into the consumer market (Edwards
1997). Idealized maleness is generally represented in association with being tough and
heroic. However, although there may have been more recent outward changes in the way
men present their bodies, the masculine ideal has remained as that of 'tough guy' and the
pursuit of heroism can be traced to what Segal (1997) describes as the late Victorian
Although I am not aiming to account for the historical emergence of sport within this thesis, it is still important to remain aware of the social processes which can be seen to have played a significant part in contemporary understandings of sport and, in particular, the construction of masculinities. The consideration, albeit briefly, of historical perspectives provides support for my claims that contemporary sport remains a predominantly male territory.

Sport as male territory

In 1982, Paul Willis wrote about the strong association between masculinity and sport.

It is also clear that sport is strongly associated with the male identity, with being popular and having friends. Rugby and football are archetypal here. We imagine men to be at their most gregarious, expansive and relaxed in the pub after the match.

(Willis 1982 page 122)

However, Willis’s identification of an area so ‘strongly associated with male identity’ did not result in subsequent critique of the discriminatory practices inherent within sport.

Rather, the focus of the majority of sociological research on sport continued to explore the broader issues of class based power relationships, predominantly in sports such as football or rugby (Dunning 1986, Hargreaves 1986, Williams 1994). Consequently, there has often been a taken for granted attitude within the study of sport of it being male territory and where issues relating to gender and sexuality have been left unquestioned. Many studies have focussed upon typologies of male participants, either players or spectators, in terms of class (Williams 1994, Taylor 1995) or authenticity (Fiske 1992, Redhead 1993, 1997)
and have been predominantly located within football. Whether this is the result of the predominance of heterosexual men in sports sociology is debateable, although there is much evidence to support the accusation that the majority of writing within this field is conducted by them. The few notable exceptions of work located from within sport sociology which attempt to address this imbalance are tellingly from either gay men (Pronger 1990, 2000) or women (Jennifer Hargreaves 1994, Caudwell 2003). What is important to recognise is that there are clear gaps within this field relating to questions of gender, sexuality and bodily performance. I believe that investigations of sport provide an opportunity to explore the claim that body practices are central in the construction of masculinity and at the same time provide a rich source for gathering accounts from other men. Investigations of sport also expose the researcher to an area within contemporary culture which, although generally considered part of the established order, still remains an aspect of society where discriminatory gender practices are often left unchallenged.

In mainstream sport, I argue, a version of masculinity based on a particular kind of bodily performance continues to prevail. This operates not only in organized sport but also within sports groups initially established as alternatives to mainstream (predominantly heterosexual male) practices, for example those involving gay men and women, heterosexual women and disabled people. As such, contemporary sporting practice produces and promotes an environment where displays of traditional masculinity, those which present competitiveness, aggressiveness and toughness, are seen as normal and necessary. It is the perceived understanding of a traditional, ‘natural’ version of masculinity which dominates sport and continues to hold immense power. Connell (1995) notes that in many schools a version of masculinity championed through competitive sport is hegemonic and, consequently, sporting prowess becomes a test of masculinity. Even
those who do not like sport, he suggests, have to negotiate, usually with difficulty, a relationship to it.

Participation in violent sports, especially those with a potential for injury, reinforces and naturalises notions of masculinity that value physical dominance. It is worth noting the popularity of many contemporary sporting heroes, for example, Vinnie Jones, Mike Tyson and Paul Gascoigne. They were aggressive and dirty in their sporting performances and adopted a ‘win at all costs’ approach to their particular events, often risking injury - whether to themselves or to their opponents. Their aggressive displays on the field were valorised by the media creating celebrity ‘bad boy’ personalities which were popular even with audiences unfamiliar with the specific sports they played (Whannel (2002). The sports commentator and the spectator can also play a part in this by condoning and expecting use of aggression in sporting contexts, particularly, for example during international contests (Whannel 1992).

Physical displays which result in injury provide evidence of masculine performances away from the field. Young, White and McTeer (1994) show how sporting injuries are seen as battle scars. They link the declining significance of male physicality in the sphere of work to the symbolic importance of strength and force in other social arenas, such as fitness and sport behaviour. As such it has become normal for men to play sport in an intensely confrontational manner. Young, White and McTeer’s study is similar to my study and provides a useful comparison as they also interview men about sport and body practices. In their case they were able to interview sixteen current and former athletes and ask questions relating to how they entered into sport and the extent of parental influence. They found that the general response to injury and pain was to ignore or carry on until they were
physically unable to do otherwise. The injury itself caused a greater effect to self-esteem and sense of masculinity rather than the physical pain or disability. Interestingly, all the respondents found incapacitation difficult to deal with as it was considered that the injury was a sign of weakness and a barrier to them being able to assert or display their masculinity to its full extent. There was a feeling that incapacity rendered them 'less than' male.

What becomes apparent is that the men in Young et al's study regard their bodies as a central component in the formulation of their understanding of masculine performance and also how they are seen by others. The men's relationship with their bodies also highlights the importance of the physical body in the way that it is experienced and used as an expression of identity. At the same time, there is a 'taken for granted' acceptance of the body where the men accept physical pain and injury as an everyday part of their 'masculine' lifestyle.

Having established in the last two sections that sport remains a predominantly male social space, I want to explore the types of masculinities found within it and the specific versions which are considered appropriate and inappropriate for participation.

**Masculinities in Sport**

McKay, Messner and Sábo (2000) provide an overview of current research into men and sport. They argue that critical studies of masculinities and sport should continue to embrace feminist theory and take into account the knowledge that constructions of masculinity are interwoven with constructions of femininity. One of the problems, for them, however, of recent critical feminist work on men’s experiences of sport has been the
overemphasis on the negative outcomes resulting from participation, for example, violence, misogyny and homophobia. This focus has led to a distinction between “men’s sports” and “women’s sports” where male sport is viewed as overly competitive and aggressive in comparison to the more playful, less competitive realm of women’ sports. McKay et al suggest that studies in sport have focused too much on how conservative sport structures reproduce existing inequalities without acknowledging the diversity of sporting activities and their potential for disruption and resistance. They write

The focus on ‘difference’ among women (or among men) and on multiple systems of inequality does not mean ignoring gender. It means starting with the recognition that gender tends to vary in salience in different times and at different social locations.

(McKay 2000 page 10)

Messner (1992) argues that, what he calls, dominant masculinity promotes an attitude in which the body is used as a weapon or a tool to achieve goals. Domination of the body and the bodies of others becomes important, not only those of opponents but also team-mates, women, ethnic minorities and gay men. He suggests that in sport there is a covert intimacy - a form of doing together rather than mutual talk about inner feelings. However, De Garis (2000) suggests that this presumption of masculinity in sport causes problems, particularly in relation to expressing emotions. Instead of ‘covert intimacy’, De Garis believes there is a ‘somatic intimacy’. In his study of a boxing club he found that bodily actions and intimacy encountered in the ‘safe’ environment of the gym provided the appropriate place “to express intimacy because the textual representations of boxing as masculine and violent deter allegations of weakness or femininity.” (De Garis 2000 page 97)
Interestingly, De Garis found that the primary axis for verbal intimacy was age, not gender. The study is useful in that it does acknowledge the problems in addressing masculinity and sport but, in the case of this study, there is often a particular notion of masculinity which is identified or looked for, which in turn becomes the focus. De Garis argues that the intimate relationships formed between men within the social space of sport (in this case the boxing changing room) reveals greater sharing of personal emotions than is often given credit, especially if applied along with other social factors, such as age. However, because of the focus on boxing and the emphasis within the sport upon physical aggression, his example appears to reaffirm the notion that men are unable to express emotion unless they prove that they are masculine in the first place and, consequently, the expression of feminine traits is still considered unmanly. In this case, displays in the boxing ring prove heterosexual masculinity in the same way that it is acceptable for a football player to cry after losing a highly competitive football match (Whannel 2002). At the heart of this is the underlying conflict between masculinity and the understanding of subordinated femininity. In the case of the crying football player, an un-masculine display of emotion is counteracted by the prior performances seen on the pitch and the general social context of football being male territory. There is the implication that 'proper' masculinity equates with heterosexuality and, consequently, that sporting prowess equates with heterosexual masculinity. Thus, in terms of sport, the feminine serves to establish what is not expected in sporting performances. Presumably, following Butler (1993), the notion that men inhabit 'failed' forms of heterosexual masculinity suggests that we would expect to see them having to negotiate this in some way. Therefore, the accounts of elderly men and gay men are particularly useful as they could be considered 'outside' conventional sport because they are seen as weaker versions of masculinity but are still able to take part in competitive sport. In my study, I include the accounts of older men and
gay men for whom sport is still a part of their lives as well as those men considered suitable, who, because they are young and heterosexual, conform to hegemonic notions of what constitutes an ‘appropriate’ sporting identity.

An additional criticism of De Garis’ is that he is very much part of the field he is studying. He is a keen boxer and wrestler and it appears at times that he is trying to defend boxing as a legitimate sport. Frances Heidensohn (1985) speaks of the ‘vicarious identification’ in much of traditional male based sociology. She is referring more specifically to the sociology of crime and deviance, but as I mentioned above, this can also be applied to the sociology of sport where much work has been gathered by men about male sport. Wheaton (2002) has also pointed out that few ethnographies of sport by male researchers acknowledge the researcher’s gendered identity. At the same time there is often a sense of reverence in the way the men write about sport in general. I have attempted to use sport as a means to gain access to the lives of other men and during the early stages of this research I began to realise that sport occupies a far greater part in men’s lives than I had originally thought. However, although the main research site for the study has been based on a specific sport (tennis), I did not set out to champion its cause. Organised sport is still riddled with exclusion rather than inclusion not only in terms of age, class, gender, race and disability, but also in its continued reinforcement of a narrow version of masculinity based on aggression, competitiveness and intolerance.

Many sociological studies of sport also tend to focus on the serious or professional male athlete, someone whose career is based on physical performance (for example; Messner 1990, 1992, Klein 2000, Young, White & McTeer 1994). Often there is a distinction between the player and the spectator or supporter, who has to experience the sport
vicariously through the exploits of the player. This excludes the accounts of the majority of other men (and women) who may participate in sport at varying levels and where sport is not a career or means of livelihood, but rather an aspect of their lives which is nevertheless extremely important. The amateur or social sports player, in comparison to the professional player, participates in a voluntary capacity and has less to gain in terms of economic capital, but often the enthusiasm is greater than that of the professional. Whereas much research focuses upon male dominated sports such as football and rugby (Williams 1994, Taylor 1995, Nauright, 1996, Finn 2000, Wag 2003) broader research has indicated that sports such as tennis and swimming remain more popular as participatory pursuits regardless of gender and age than football and rugby (Bennett 1999).

Young et al (1994) also note the irony that athletes are considered to possess the ideal male body. For it is ultimately gained during the self-destructive pursuit of sporting activity through neglect of pain and injury by pushing the body to excess and more often than not administering drugs to enhance performance or mask injury. Not only are young men pressured into conforming to the ideals promoted by traditional mainstream sport, but more recent cultural changes in the representation of the body, particularly through consumerism (Featherstone 1991, Mort 1996), have contributed to a greater expectation for the presentation of particular ‘types’ of body. Hence the growth of commercial industries based on social pursuits related to the quest for an ideal body and the increased demand for products related to tanning, cosmetic surgery and dieting. Much of the research which focuses on this area concentrates on the pressures experienced by women to achieve the ideal body, for example, Wolf, 1990; Bordo, 1990; Black and Sharma, 2001. However, it is important to look at this in a wider context as pressure can be seen to be exerted on both sexes and particularly the young. For the young person there is a

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greater social pressure to be part of the youth scene, which, for example, relates heavily to the (dance) club scene. In this environment, semi-naked dancing for both males and females is virtually compulsory and a particular version of body performance is learned together with an awareness of how to display the body in an appropriate fashion (Grogan 1999).

Apart from being a social space which is considered a male territory, contemporary, organised sport also requires from its participants a particular orientation towards the body based upon discipline and regulatory practices.

Sport and disciplined bodies

Heikkala (1993) regards sport as a prime example of the production of disciplined bodies. He primarily focuses on the professional sports person, but the association with the amateur enthusiast and the popularity of sport and leisure as a pastime for a majority of the population places greater value on these ideas. Heikkala draws upon Foucault (1984, 1986) and applies the idea that athletes are subjects, not only of external authority, such as those exerted by sporting governing bodies, but also through 'their own understanding and reflection relative to the ways they fulfil the plans' (Heikkala 1993 page 401). These techniques of the self allow individuals to perform operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being in order to transform their identities within these practices and in turn achieve happiness and/or perfection. This relates to sport well in that although it is evident there is external control and power enforced by governing authorities, there are other factors within the process. Sport is not always compulsory, particularly outside of school there is a voluntary element. People do have an element of
choice in joining a tennis club or enrolling at a leisure club in the same way that going to a
night-club is seen as an individual choice. As Heikkala explains

Sport is not forced labour; it must and does include a strong voluntary flavour.
Significantly, the will to do better must also carry a strong internalized feeling of a
‘need’ of discipline and conformity to the practices necessary for achieving the desired
goal.

(Heikkala 1993, page 401)

The recognition that there are other factors which influence participation in sport is
important. In terms of my study, theoretical perspectives which concentrate solely upon
the historical processes in relation to external institutionalised power structures do not
fully account for social practices which are not completely compulsory. This particularly
applies to the men in my study who take part in sport for many reasons other than financial
reward. For Heikkala, taking part in sport means, for the athlete, accommodating a will to
do better or become perfect, which in turn carries a strong sense of a need for discipline.
As well as applying an interpretation of Foucault, Heikkala employs Nietzsche’s (1990)
concept of ‘bad conscience’. Bad conscience is a consequence of normalizing techniques
and is the instrument of control either internal or external. In the case of the athlete,
becoming better or achieving perfection can be demonstrated through victories. Thus,
plans are made to make sure that training regimes and subsequent sporting performances
are moving in the right direction towards the goals set. Bad conscience acts as a form of
guilt, causing the athlete to reflect upon the negative aspects of not achieving their goals.
No wonder athletes easily overtrain after a compulsory period of rest, which may have resulted from illness or injury. A bad conscience drives them to catch up with the planned training program. (Heikkala 1993 page 401)

These disciplinary practices cause the athlete to mount a quest for, what Heikkala, considers an unobtainable goal and at the same time is potentially both physically and psychologically damaging. Competition, in terms of success or failure, contributes to this process, causing a constant assessment of perceived progress. Evidence from my study suggests that such arguments apply to at least some amateur sports people, maybe more so if taking into consideration the voluntary nature of the activity and the absence of material rewards.

Sport and Sexuality

Sexuality is one specific area in which Foucault (1987) addresses the regulation of the body and the restraints placed upon it. Sexuality provides an instructive example of the social processes which impose upon the physical body and is a reason why I have included it as a focus in my study. As I suggested above, particularly in sport, the physical assertion of one's masculinity is constantly put to the test and for the gay sports player there is often the potential for a conflicting sense of identity. Segal suggests that 'the fine line between 'true' masculinity (which is heterosexual) and its opposite (which is not) have been increasingly transgressed' (Segal 1997 page 150) by the gay community in its assimilation of hegemonic masculinity. She sees this in the way many gay men have adopted a 'super-macho' style based on traditional images of the heterosexual male. This has seen increased outward bodily performances, such as body-building and macho posturing and the growth of gay sports seeking to emulate heterosexual sports. For example, in the last decade in
England there have been a number of gay sports groups established, such as the Kings Cross Stealers (a gay male rugby club), which compete in mainstream leagues. The problem with this, as Segal correctly points out, is that the valuation of this form of masculinity as a powerful identity is reinforced rather than challenged. This is an area which I explore in my research when I assess the position of the gay male sports player in terms of his role within the specific location of a gay sports club.

Sport powerfully interacts with discourses of sexuality. The popular understanding of the professional sportsman is one of athleticism, strength, virility and attractiveness. This is promoted as the ideal form of masculinity, not only for men to aspire to, but for women to find attractive. The athlete’s image is constructed through a discourse of physical and bodily performance. Most professional sports, particularly football, boxing and rugby, are highly physical, often involving contact with other men and there is generally a practical requirement to be physically strong. Often, particularly within the United Kingdom, there are also expectations for exhibitions of hegemonic masculinity, on and off the field, such as excessive drinking and brawling. Sport, therefore, provides not only a site for learning social codes relating to gender but can be considered a prime site where hegemonic masculinities are made and remade. Consequently, sport is a significant part of a social arena in which masculinities and femininities are constructed, learned and structured in relations of domination and subordination (Butler 1993).

Through sport the young man learns about the values of competition, valour, gentlemanly behaviour and how to treat those who do not (or should not) possess sporting prowess, in particular, women, disabled people, homosexuals and the aged (Park 1987). According to Park, the emphasis upon specific masculine performances produces conflict in later social
relations during adolescence when the young male sports player may have to confront sports women or gay sportsmen. The implication is that there is little accommodation for, or acceptance of, alternative gender or sexuality within mainstream sports unless they resemble hegemonic forms. Probyn (2000) uses the example of Ian Roberts, the Australian professional rugby player who 'came out' in public (albeit during the latter stages of his career). On the one hand Roberts was heralded by the gay community as a 'normal' and athletic man who happens to be gay. On the other hand, Probyn notes how Roberts' body was used as a beard for his gayness which for a time was employed as a means to hide the possible shame of being gay. He was large, white, physically working class and played in the position of the forward which is typically the role of muscle in the side and not known for being sophisticated. It is interesting to consider whether this understanding of shame derives from not being 'masculine' enough. In the case of Roberts, any slur of 'gayness' upon his masculine identity was overshadowed by his ability to perform outward displays of hegemonic masculinity. As such, within sport, the social fear of displaying what is considered to be subordinated masculinity contributes to the continued presence of a hegemonic masculinity informed by heterosexuality.

Probyn relates shame to competitive drive, which in turn highlights the significance of sport's relationship to the body. This is particularly evident within sport where the physical body is positioned as a central means through which social identity is presented. For instance, Probyn identifies the way in which shame and the body often go hand in hand.
It is perhaps more intriguing that sociological accounts of sport in the main refuse to enter into the dynamics of competition, and the bodily experience of shame that so often accompanies sport.

(Probyn 2000 page 20)

The argument expressed is that competition, or the social value placed upon competition, creates an environment where there is a constant need for individuals to contemplate their bodies in relation to other bodies. This is particularly evident within sporting practices where the body is central to participation. Not only do I provide an account of the individual understanding of competitiveness as an aspect of sport and a display of masculinity, I also explore the process of shame in the individual’s understanding of her or his body. This not only applies to competitive sport, but also to everyday activities such as the use of a public gym or swimming pool. Probyn cites the locker room as a prime example. By applying the notion of shame, Probyn provides the example of how an individual is constantly directed towards contemplating his or her body, either consciously or unconsciously, in terms of successful performances on the field or in comparison to other types of body (for example more muscular or slimmer) in the locker room. Sport, therefore, provides a key component in reinforcing the importance of corporeal power relations. This can, in turn, be directed to gender relations and the continued acceptance of masculine assertiveness and aggressiveness as being socially acceptable. Thus, Ian Roberts, was accepted because his masculinity was not compromised by ‘gayness’. His physical and bodily displays are predominantly grounded in western, heterosexual understandings of male performance and the male body. He is left with little to be ‘ashamed’ of and, in turn, normative presentation of his body negates any shame to be derived from being gay.
Consequently, sport provides a useful setting for exploring masculine identity and understanding of the body. My research draws upon some of these ideas, especially in relation to men and their ability to participate in sport. Using both gay and straight respondents highlights the extent to which the body is central in presenting a normative version of masculinity. Although marginalized in terms of mainstream sport, gay men who participate in gay sports are still influenced by traditional bodily performance-based ideals. This causes conflict with the inclusive aims generally promoted by alternative sport.

O'Neill (2001) describes the problems faced by gay, disabled men within the gay community. The men he interviewed were discriminated against to a greater extent within the gay ‘scene’ and in general they considered other able bodied gay men were less welcoming because of their fixation with the body beautiful. O’Neill’s work provides further justification for the focus on gay men’s experience of their bodies. Interestingly, the men O’Neill interviewed were keen to identify with being gay rather than disabled, which may suggest that stigmatisation of the body is considered socially more injurious in comparison to subordinate sexuality.

A gay group or association, it could be reasonably assumed, is established because of an understanding of collective subordinated sexuality. But in terms of a collective identity, the gay sports club has conflicting ideals. On the one hand, it has been set up to provide an environment away from the oppressive heterosexuality found in general sports clubs. Whilst, on the other hand, the club is based around competitive sport and adopt traditional sporting procedures.
Pronger (2000) suggests the emancipatory power that appeared initially within the Gay and Lesbian community, particularly in its approach to sport, has been quelled in recent years through the attempts to 'normalize' and become part of mainstream sport. This is particularly relevant to the themes in my research as it is in these attempts to adopt 'normal' sport practices that hegemonic masculine performances are often adopted and accepted. Although Pronger acknowledges advances in the cause of Lesbian and Gay movement, in making it more visible and transforming sport from its history of systematic oppression, he suggests there are still only a few high profile openly gay athletes and that there has been no scholarly research that shows mainstream sport to be a significantly welcome environment for sexual minorities.

I suggest that the progress of L&G community sports, seen in the light of the socially transformative ambitions of some of the historical streams of the G&L movement, has been more about dominant socio-cultural systems (including sports) appeasing, co-opting, indeed diffusing the transformative possibilities of the sexual margins than it has been about increasing human freedom.

(Pronger 2000 page 225)

Importantly, Pronger demonstrates how the possibility of challenging discriminatory practices, both within sport and other social spaces, is limited by certain power systems which tend to maintain unfair positions of power. In sport, homosexuality has traditionally been organized as negatively and prohibitively other to mainstream (heterosexual) sport. In gay community sport, particularly in North America, a liberal approach has been adopted which seeks to provide access for lesbians and gays to the mainstream rather than confront or challenge its core ideals. Pronger cites the Gay Games as a prime example of
an 'inclusion' approach. For him, gay sports culture is the very model of liberal, inclusive lesbian and gay politics and aspirations. Consequently, it is a very popular form of mainstream gay culture. This expresses dominant gay liberal philosophy where lesbians and gays are positioned as similar to anybody else, for example, in that they shop, eat, have families and play sports. Gay sports, it follows from this line of reasoning, proves normality in the same way that being a successful business person or doctor proves gay normality. Because of this many gay sports organisations seek legitimisation from traditional sports authorities, for example, the gay tennis group in my sample adhere to the Lawn Tennis Associations regulations, instead of attempting to think about sport in ways which address inclusive practices.

Although Pronger believes that gay sports have provided lesbian and gay people the opportunity to enjoy sports in an inclusive and safe environment, ultimately it has made these people conform to the established norms, particularly those based on oppressive male heterosexual codes. Speaking on a broader level, Segal agrees when she suggests that

> It is now a commonplace perception that gay men have more in common with straight men than gay women, and vice versa.

(Pronger 1990 page 149)

The conflict of interests for the amateur gay male sports player provides an important aspect of my research. The argument is that the promotion and display of a particular form of masculinity through bodily practices reinforces the dominant version of masculinity to the detriment of others. This discrimination in sport can be experienced by gay men,
women and many heterosexual men alike. By focusing upon this I want to explore whether there is potential to be found in the transformative aspects of subordinated, or alternative, sporting practice (such as a gay tennis club) and the extent to which subordinated groups have the ability to challenge current discriminatory practices evident within mainstream sport. This is also why I have attempted to assess whether some of the ideas proposed by Butler (1993) in relation to queer acts and performativity, if read in terms of bodily practices and ethnographic research, could be applied to orthodox sport in order to highlight and challenge the discriminatory normative practices which currently prevail. Thus, for instance, within gay sports, is there potential to be found in the acts which 'queer' the performances rather than reinforce the normative?

In this section, I have attempted to demonstrate how sport occupies an integral, and complex, position within contemporary culture. From a historical perspective, sport has emerged into its current form as both a powerful institution within broader political contexts and, importantly for this thesis, a social space which continues to be considered male territory. Consequently, sport is a social space where hegemonic masculinity is made and remade to the extent that representations of alternative or 'failed' masculinity are marginalized. The prioritisation of hegemonic forms of masculinity results in the continued discrimination of women, but also those men considered unable to present the appropriate hegemonic displays. During this process it becomes evident that the body, gender and sexuality are central factors in the construction of contemporary understandings of sport. As such, it is necessary to explore these themes further.
Section Two: The Body, Gendered Practices and Sexuality

In the previous section I explored a range of literature which specifically located sport as a theme. The intention was to demonstrate the contribution of sport in the construction of hegemonic masculinity and how many accounts of sport fail to fully take into consideration the significance of the body, gender and sexuality. Often, within the sociology of sport, these issues are considered 'outside' of what is seen as the legitimate focus for study. Therefore, in order to address the issues central to this thesis it is necessary to explore broader concepts which relate to the body, gender and sexuality.

Sociology has only recently acknowledged the significance of the body as a central theoretical concern (Turner 1984, Frank 1990, Shilling 1993). The body has been generally disregarded by sociology to the extent that, according to Turner (1984), theories of the body only emerged when the problem of nature versus culture became a major consideration. Turner's materialist theory of the body is important in that it recognizes body practices, particularly where social labour addresses both the individual and collective body. For Turner, there is a need to debate the question of nature before developing a theory of the body. According to him, as mainstream sociology did not initially encompass the debate about nature it subsequently failed to develop a theory of the body. Turner suggests that because sociology has its origins in questions surrounding the emergence of industrial society it has tended to privilege the history of economics, law and politics over the history of feelings, emotions and corporeality. Consequently, theories of the body have emerged either outside sociology or in a submerged form inside the discipline. For example, this becomes more evident when taking into account the
development of feminist theory which recognised the significance of women's lives and their experience of their bodies in relation to broader social institutions such as the family and work.

More recently, many sociological accounts of the body have attempted to incorporate a broadly post-structural position where the focus has been on the heterogeneous techniques, practices and forms of training which are constructed through discourse and regulate the individual. Much of Foucault's theory has been influential in these accounts of the disciplined body, especially in the way power is located in knowledge structures (Foucault 1977). However, his arguments which are generated through secondary readings of historical texts have contributed to a boom in other sociological studies adopting similar research methods. Turner (2002) has described a consequent problem in contemporary social theory as being related to the proliferation of text based 'descriptive' sociology. Turner suggests that mainstream sociology has failed to develop concepts which relate to the individual. Instead, it has focused on the structures governing individual bodies leaving little room to explore the potential of individual agency. This is particularly the case with Foucault's (1987) exploration of the social regulation of pleasure. Here Foucault provides a convincing exploration of the discourses which construct a social understanding of pleasure and its subsequent regulation. However, it is possible to argue that Foucault fails to take into account the actual individual bodily experience of pleasure. This is particularly ironic when taking into account Foucault's subversive personal behaviour and his predisposition towards sadomasochistic practices (Ebiron 1992, Miller 1994).

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, it is important not to overlook theoretical work which has placed greater emphasis on social structures. For example, in the case of a
sport such as tennis, it is foolish to ignore the relevance of class structures which have historically played a significant part in its positioning within contemporary sport. This is especially the case when taking into consideration the varying levels of social status which are ascribed to different types of sports. At the same time, as I have described in section one of this chapter, gender is significant as a social category which also contributes to the contemporary understanding of sporting practice. As such, I believe that it is important to recognize the contribution of Bourdieu (1977, 1990) who describes the relevance of class, in terms of cultural capital and status and Butler (1990, 1993) who focuses upon the discursive limits of gender and sexuality.

**Social structures and the body**

Language structures are the starting point for Bourdieu (1977, 1990) in that speech acts inform and shape the habitus. Habitus, in simple terms, can be considered as cultural background where a multitude of tastes, styles and manners constitute a form of cultural identity. However, for Bourdieu, it also operates as a link between the subjective accounts of the individual and the objective evaluation of the social.

Social life cannot, however, be fully understood as simply the aggregate of individual behaviour. Bourdieu develops the concept of Habitus in an attempt to provide a bridge between the subjective and the objective, which is considered an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted.

(Jenkins 1992 page 95)
Speech acts occur through linguistic habitus, such as speaking properly and a linguistic market which determines what can and cannot be said. Language, and in particular the linguistic market, also provides a link with Butler who focuses upon the role of discourse, as materialised in speech-acts, in creating normative discursive understandings of gender. Bourdieu, however, operates from a more traditional sociological standpoint. He derives much from the works of Marx in his focus upon specific social groups exerting power over subordinate groups. However, rather than the capacity of dominant groups to maintain their power through ownership of the means of production, for Bourdieu, power is expressed through their ability to define what society holds in distinction. It is no longer the means of production which constitutes domination but socially recognized taste which has the capacity to determine terms of distinction. Domination is mediated by ‘taste’.

Thus, for Bourdieu, the ‘habitus’ reflects a member’s internalisation, as natural, of the taste of his or her class.

In terms of establishing a class position, habitus often involves the social presentation of taste as natural or ‘second nature’. The notion of second nature is a predominant feature in body presentation. For example in contemporary society, greater esteem is given to those who are able to present social performances of ‘natural beauty’. An individual who has achieved a specific body image through, for instance, excessive training, dieting, steroids or plastic surgery does not carry the same cultural capital as a slender model who can eat anything without gaining weight or the handsome actor born with a good ‘bone structure’.

Bourdieu is instructive as he describes the social world and the way individuals achieve understanding of this social world through bodily practice. The concept of practice is particularly relevant to the research aims as it provides a means of acknowledging the role
of the individual and individual experience in wider social relations. For Bourdieu, practice is firstly located in space and in time and secondly, it is not consciously organized and orchestrated. For instance, Bourdieu talks about social relations in terms of how an individual develops ‘a feel for the game’

A mastery acquired by experience of the game, and one which works outside of conscious control and discourse (in a way that, for instance, techniques of the body do)

(Bourdieu 1990 page 61)

Bourdieu’s concept of a social actor learning the rules of the game is similar to Goffman’s (1972) sense of theatrical activity. Both acknowledge the role of the individual within social interaction, but Bourdieu develops this further when he refers to doxic experience. This relates to the notion that people take themselves and their social world for granted, that is, they do not think about it because they do not have to. This relates well to the example of gender and masculinity I employ in my study. For instance, it is interesting to consider whether heterosexual men think less about their masculine identity as an aspect of their social world in comparison to gay men who have to negotiate their social worlds with the constant knowledge that their sexuality is considered socially unacceptable. Unless, that is, the ability to present normative masculinity through bodily presentation is problematic for both straight and gay men alike.

Bourdieu’s metaphor of social life as a game does have problems though, as Jenkins (1992) points out. Games have rules and are learnt through explicit teaching as well as practice, which is important for social competence. However, in sport, excellence is prioritised whereas only competence is needed for the habitus. The problem with this
description is that Bourdieu does not fully account for the difference between competence and excellence. This is a factor particularly in the sports field where competence allows participation, but only to an extent. The social constructions of gender and sexuality create barriers to participation regardless of competence or excellence. Thus, within sport, the continued focus on excellence, in the form of idealized versions of bodily performance, is not fully covered by the concepts of taste and cultural capital when taking into account gender and sexuality.

An important aspect of this relates to Hexus which can be considered as forming the style and manner in which actors perform, such as gait, stance or gesture. Hexus presents a social performance of where the individual is located within the habitus. It also demonstrates the importance of the body in Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the habitus. For it is in bodily hexis that the idiosyncratic (the personal) combines with the systematic (the social) and mediates a link between an individual’s subjective world and the cultural world into which he or she is born and which she or he shares with others. Thus,

For Bourdieu, the body is a mnemonic device upon and in which the very basics of culture, the practical taxonomies of the habitus, are imprinted and encoded in a socializing or learning process which commences during early childhood. This differentiation between learning and socialisation is important: the habitus is inculcated as much, if not more, by experience as by explicit teaching.

(Jenkins 1992 page 76)

In habitus, power derives from the taken for granted aspects of the performances. Socially competent performances are produced through routine, in the sense that the actor’s
competence is demonstrated in their not necessarily knowing what they are doing. For example, many men, I would suggest, may perform hegemonic masculinity competently, but would not necessarily be able to recognize their actions clearly or describe the concept of masculinity.

As previously suggested, Bourdieu moves from an orthodox Marxist reading of class when he develops the concept of distinction, which is a broader analysis of lifestyle. A key characteristic within this is taste and its relationship to social identity. Bourdieu is able to recognize the complexity of cultural relations where more abstract forms of distinction can be learnt from available social structures and performed through the body via hexus. Thus, if this concept is applied to explorations of the body and masculinity, one can assess the various forms of cultural capital which operate within these areas and the extent to which performances of the body maintain existing constructions of gender and sexual identity. At the same time, Bourdieu acknowledges the importance of the political agenda established within these concepts as they invariably highlight many forms of inequality, particularly in relation to gender, sexuality and the body. Therefore, central to Bourdieu’s argument is that struggles about the meaning of things and specifically the meaning of the social world are an aspect of social struggle. Throughout his work, Bourdieu provides the same argument that social reproduction of the established order is largely secured by symbolic violence, a process of cultural reproduction. This is particularly evident in contemporary society where male domination of women continues (Bourdieu 2001). Applying arguments which have arisen from subordinated groups, such as the women and gays provides the opportunity to challenge some of the existing and taken for granted aspects of contemporary culture. Consequently, I consider Bourdieu instructive, in relation to the aims of this thesis, because he recognizes that study of gender and the body, particularly if
applied to the performance of subordinated gender, is a means by which we can challenge existing discriminatory practices.

Feminist studies (for example, de Beauvoir, 1972; Firestone, 1979; Wolf, 1990; Butler 1990, 1993; Segal, 1997) have highlighted the problematic nature of masculinity and how certain forms of masculine performance have maintained their cultural dominance. It is also these prevalent forms of masculinity which continue to provide the formula through which men construct an understanding of their bodies and gender identity. Assessing the extent of male bodily practices in the construction of gender is only apparent if we are aware of these dominant forms. Feminist readings of the gendered body also allow consideration of the extent to which gay men identify with subordinated interpretations of their own masculinity. As such, it is important to acknowledge feminist accounts which identify the conflicting nature of gender relations. For example, Segal (1997) is critical of the dominant versions of masculinity which preside at the expense of women and alternative forms of masculinity. In these, there is a social understanding of ‘manhood’ which still carries greater symbolic weight in comparison to ‘womanhood’ and one of the problems resulting from this is a constant focus on the divisions or differences between men and women. Constant focus on heterosexual masculinity causes an emphasis on presenting a distinction between male and female behaviour and, in turn, presents to others the accepted version of gender. The use of binary distinctions of gender creates a distorted understanding of what ‘being’ male or female entails. For example, within sports there is the constant assumption that men are more able to take part than women. Often in this setting, the language used to describe sportsmen is presented as powerful and dominant, whereas for women it is weak and subservient (to men). I believe that subordinate forms of masculinity, particularly homosexuality, have the potential to challenge these taken for
granted assumptions and also provide the opportunity to expose the inequalities and limitations of positioning heterosexual masculinity as the model form.

Men, in general, still have greater access to cultural prestige and political power compared to women, but it is only particular groups of men who occupy positions of power. For Segal (1997), class and race are the chief factors for inequalities between men, but it is gender and sexuality which present the major threat to hegemonic masculinity. The position of power occupied by heterosexual men is justified through a biological determinist understanding of gender based on natural difference. These power relations are continually reinforced through institutional practices such as heterosexual marriage. Consequently, gay men pose a threat in terms of their blurring of these gendered binary distinctions. As such, according to Segal

There is nothing at all surprising about homophobia and the reassertion of men’s rights and traditional masculinity operating in tandem. Both are a defence of the dominant form of masculinity enshrined in marriage, a ‘masculinity’ which is - despite its rhetoric - less a state of mind or body, than the various institutionalised routines for preserving men’s power over women and over men who deviate from masculine ideals.

(Segal 1997 page 158)

Segal analyses masculinity in order to assess the relationships of gender in contemporary society and how constant reinforcing of gender binaries establishes an uneven balance between the sexes. There have been attempts within post structuralist feminism to move beyond the limitations of these binary distinctions by highlighting ways in which normative assumptions can be disrupted. Butler (1990) does this by focusing more
specifically on alternative sexual practices as well as gender. Her ideas are important, to this thesis and generally, because of their focus on the body and bodily performances and also because of the potential impact to be achieved by challenging the whole sex/gender matrix. This can be applied particularly in the male dominated world of sport where these ideas could be incorporated in order to challenge existing discriminatory practices, not only in terms of gender and sexuality but also in relation to social definitions of the able body.

**Sexual bodies**

Butler (1993) describes how normative gender is produced through language and how, in consequence, bodily performances create a social demonstration of normative behaviour. However, rather than being a theatrical performance or reproduction of learnt existing, set social practices in the interactionist sense (Goffman 1972), these bodily performances constitute a discursive ‘act’ and, as such, for Butler, power is formed within these acts. For Butler, performance presumes a subject is already at hand or in existence whereas performativity contests the very notion of the subject and has the ability to create meaning. Butler starts with the Foucauldian premise that power works in part through discourse and to produce and destabilize subjects but goes on to contemplate performativity (particularly in speech acts but also through bodily performance where she uses the example of drag as a means of highlighting performances where gender is questioned) as the aspect of discourse which has the capacity to produce what it names (Butler 1993 page 225). Performativity is based on an expectation of what is considered gendered behaviour. The expectation ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates. Butler also notes that performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition or ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body.
Butler (1997) also draws upon some of the theories of Bourdieu in order to explore further the role of the body. She focuses on how the habitus is formed over time and how this formation produces a belief in the reality of the social field in which it operates. Through this process of formation there is a sense that bodies are being animated by social conventions and in turn reproducing and ritualising these conventions into practices. For Butler this means that the habitus is both formed and also able to form

In this sense, the habitus is formed, but it is also formative: it is in this sense that the bodily habitus constitutes a tacit form of performativity, a citational chain lived and believed at the level of the body. The habitus is not only a site for the reproduction of the belief in the reality of a given social field – a belief by which that field is sustained – but also generates dispositions which “incline” the social subject to act in relative conformity with the ostensibly objective demands of the field.

(Butler 1997 page 155)

Butler applies Bourdieu’s concept of bodily hexus and doxa where the notion of the taken for granted world located in the doxa corresponds, to an extent, with Butler’s interest in normative practices. Both theorists are keen to explain the relevance of ordinary language and the way in which the body is invested more heavily in ordinary or everyday language. However, Butler is critical of Bourdieu in that his suggestion that the individual is coerced into acting into conformity reduces the potential of agency.

In Bourdieu’s account of performative speech acts, the subject who utters the performative is positioned on a map of social power in a fairly fixed way and this performative will or
will not work depending on whether the subject who performs the utterance is already authorized to make it work by the position of social power she or he occupies. (Butler 1997 page 156)

For Butler, the social performative is not only a central part of subject formation but a factor in the ongoing ‘political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well’ (1997 page 160). This presents the possibility of a speech act as an insurrectionary act. This aspect is important, but it could be claimed that Butler does miss the opportunity to go further in acknowledging the role of the body. Both Bourdieu and Butler recognize the relevance of ordinary language as opposed to philosophical or intellectualised language in the construction of normative power relationships. However, the significance of the ‘bodily act’ not only in terms of expressing language but as a means of expression for the individual is not taken far enough.

However, Butler’s concepts are helpful to my thesis because she puts forward the idea that sex has the power to destabilize gender. As a gay woman, she is also able to draw upon personal experience in order to question the complex ways in which gay people respond to their sexuality

I sought to understand some of the terror and anxiety that some people suffer in ‘becoming gay’, the fear of losing one’s place in gender or not knowing who one will be if one sleeps with someone of ostensibly ‘same’ gender. This constitutes a certain crisis in ontology experienced at the level of both sexuality and language. (Butler 1997 page xi)
However, the condition of being gay is understood in terms of the social regimes of
signification that describe it. The 'fear of losing one's place in gender' provides a
legitimate context to account for the discourse which describes the social understanding of
gay but does not fully account for the participation in the physical experience which
resulted in the terror and anxiety suffered by the individual.

Butler presents the argument that in the case of heterosexuality, or any other dominant
form of ideology, crafting or determining a sexual position always involves becoming
haunted by what is excluded (Butler 1994 page 34). The more rigid the position and
greater reluctance to accommodate alternative forms creates a problem that the stance
needs to be defended and invariably becomes hostile to those alternatives. Thus, for her,
the greater the binary distinctions which promote social understandings of male and
female as separate, opposite gender positions the greater the intolerance generated through
these practices. For Butler, this can be seen in contemporary heteronormative practices and
in the way institutional practices shape social understanding of the body. For instance, the
social understanding of pregnancy, which is associated with a biological understanding of
gender rather than a discursive framework, produces acceptance of it being a feminine
space (1994 page 33). The same could be applied to sport, where the discursive framework
rationalizes it as an arena where male physical activity and performance is considered
natural in comparison to women's sporting performance. Butler is critical of the discursive
framework which positions heterosexual men in a binary opposition to women. The binary
also positions gays as opposite to heterosexual men and alongside women. This distinction
creates a normative understanding of the heterosexual male as superior to women and
gays.
For Butler, transformative possibilities are to be found in queer acts which provide the opportunity to oppose and de-stabilise normative understandings of gender behaviour. According to her, the concept of performativity is the aspect of discourse which has the capacity to produce what it names. Through repetition and continued citing, in the case of speech acts, this production occurs. Thus,

performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established.

(Butler 1994 page 33)

Therefore, in terms of sport, a gay tennis club presents the initial opportunity for what could be considered a queer act. This is because the understanding of sport is established within heterosexual discourse where gay is equated with feminine or failed masculinity and, consequently, not considered a part of it. A gay tennis club initially causes reconsideration of the broader understandings of sport and gender in the same way that Butler provided ‘drag’ as an example of a performative queer act. However, as Butler states, the performatve only works if it is constantly repeated and recited. Therefore, in terms of the gay tennis club, queer acts would have to destabilise the performance of tennis as well as gender because the act of a gay man or woman playing tennis would not necessarily call into question the ontological effects already installed within sport discourse.

Another problem is that these acts are located within language which leaves little room in Butler’s argument to make the transition from queer (abstr)acts to bodily based acts of subversion which actively engage the individual or groups of individuals. Thus, the example of a queer act, such as drag, could be considered as too subjective in that the
overall view of drag as a performance does not fully take into account the social processes through which the individual came to engage in an act which is already understood as subversive in some way. According to Kirsch (2000), Butler, along with many other strands of current queer theory, fails to take into account other social factors, such as class and, ultimately,

pose the danger of forgetting that observable norms do exist, and are enforced through socialization, and are fundamental to the exercise of power.

(Kirsch 2000 page 18)

Butler's reliance upon exclusively linguistic sources is also problematic. Edwards (1998) offers a reasoned critique when he suggests that

As an analysis within the discipline of literary criticism per se this seems perfectly appropriate; yet to propose that this then forms the mainstay of contemporary sexual politics or even, perhaps more appropriately, the foundation for a queer cultural critique is overstating its significance and fraught with difficulties, not least of all the extrapolation of social and political developments through an analysis of elite cultural texts.

(Edwards 1998 page 475)

I have included the arguments of Bourdieu and Butler as I believe that they contribute significantly to contemporary debates about the continued status of heterosexual masculinity. They also attempt to consider the body and body performances within the process of constructed gender identities. Bourdieu is instructive in terms of his
reconfiguration of class which incorporates a broader acknowledgement of lifestyle and culture and the way these can be expressed as cultural capital. Butler’s arguments are also helpful, particularly in terms of her application of sexuality to the gender debate and her recognition of the potential of transformative aspects found in subversive ‘queer’ acts. Although I may not support Butler’s theoretical standpoint wholeheartedly, her arguments relating to queer acts are important to consider, especially when bearing mind that I am attempting to explore the potentially transgressive space occupied by a gay tennis club.

Masculinity and the physical body

As I have indicated, Bourdieu and Butler do acknowledge the importance of the body within their arguments. However, I find that they overlook the corporeal aspects which ultimately influence the way an individual develops a sense of his or her own identity. I mentioned above that this was a criticism of Foucault, and part of the critique lies in the focus solely upon social structures and, in particular discourse. As I am interested in the ways in which men create understandings of their own bodies and in turn develop understandings of their own masculinity and others, I have been drawn to theoretical positions which acknowledge the role of the body in shaping external social practices. Consequently I believe the works of Connell (1995 and 2000) are more instructive as he is able to apply a social constructionist approach which incorporates the physical body within these social processes. As Connell suggests

Bodies, in their own right as bodies, do matter. They age, get sick, enjoy, engender, give birth. There is an irreducible bodily dimension in experience and practice: the sweat cannot be excluded.

(Connell 1995 page 51)
Connell is relevant to my study as he argues for a stronger theoretical position, than those which focus solely on either the individual or discourse, which recognises the role bodies have in social agency and the influence they have in generating and shaping social conduct. For Connell, the body is the central means through which gendered identity is constructed. However, he argues that it is still important to recognise other external factors which influence directly or indirectly the construction of gendered identity. For example, he suggests most research on sport emphasises the ways in which disciplinary practices produce gender and thereby fails to capture the individual pleasure gained from the actual physical pursuit itself (Connell 1995 page 61). In addition, he notes that the ways in which individuals experience their bodies vary. For example, an organized competitive tennis match, between two players, produces different emotions and feelings in comparison to the pleasure gained from hitting a ball to another person in a park or on a beach. Each can be considered physical, sporting pursuits but at the same time, the individual participating in them does so for contrasting reasons. This suggests that social factors interact with individual experiences of the body. This in turns creates a need to recognise not only the social forms and practices which underpin the individual’s ability to take part in sport but also the unique experiences or physical thrill of bodily-based expression. For example, social codes may dictate the appropriateness of an individual taking part in an organized sport event but this does not necessarily take into account how the individual enjoys the experience. In a similar manner, it is difficult to understand from a purely Foucauldian perspective the individual enjoyment experienced by an elderly woman or an elite athlete when taking part in physical exercise or, for that point, why an individual who is excluded from an activity at the normative social level would want to continue to take part on his or her own or with other excluded people.
Also, on a broader level, Foucault does not fully account for individual bodily experiences, such as those associated with homosexuality, which are socially defined and socially regulated but continued even in the face of social exclusion. I described in the introduction how I enjoy sporting and physical activities, but have had to manage and negotiate my sexuality in order to continue taking part in mainstream sport. Thus, the bodily pleasures experienced through sporting activity have to be managed within a social understanding of the discourse of sexuality, which in this case may diminish my ability to take part.

It is here that I believe Connell is particularly instructive as his arguments form the basis of an understanding of the importance of the body and bodily practices. Connell attempts to incorporate the role of the biological in the social construction of gender and also applies a sociological reading of the social world where social actors are exposed to the restrictions created by social structures. He writes

> With bodies both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined, we face a pattern beyond the formulae of current social theory. This pattern might be termed body-reflexive practice. (Connell 1995 page 61)

Body-reflexive practices are, he argues, formed through a circuit of bodily experiences which link to bodily interaction and bodily experience via socially constructed bodily understandings which lead to new bodily interactions. As a result, Connell argues that social theory needs to account for the corporeality of the body. He writes
Through body-reflexive practices, bodies are addressed by social process and drawn into history, without ceasing to be bodies. They do not turn into symbols, signs or positions in discourse.

(Connell 1995 page 64)

As such, materiality continues to matter and practice makes the world. Connell incorporates the corporeal to cultural definitions of gender in order to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of masculinity and femininity.

Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex. Bodily experience is often central in the memories of our own lives, and thus our understanding of who and what we are.

(Connell 1995 page 53)

The acknowledgement of the relationship of the individual to his or her body is what distinguishes Connell’s argument from others. He demonstrates how this corporeal relationship is at the same time influenced or governed by social definitions, for example, especially in the case of gender where there are classifications of masculinity and femininity. The body then is the starting point through which social definitions of gender can be read and, at the same time, as the individual experience of the living body is recognised there is the potential for a form of agency in the form of practice. Connell suggests that human practice makes the reality in which we reside.
Practice makes a world. In acting we convert initial situations into new situations. Practice constitutes and reconstitutes structures.

(Connell 1995 page 65)

For my study, I have also located the body as a central factor as it is implicated in gender enactment through various techniques, practices, forms of training or modes of comportment. Any questions relating to gender construction, sexuality, sporting participation and performance, I argue in the thesis, need to incorporate the role of the body within these social processes. It is important to stress that, like Connell, I am interpreting the body from within what might broadly be described as the theoretical position of social constructionism. The acknowledgement of the physical body is important as an aspect of a neglected area within this position. However, and equally important, this concept does not in any way embrace biological determinism.

**Hegemonic bodily practices**

Connell’s theoretical strength also derives from his use of Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony which provided a more sophisticated reading of orthodox Marxist class relations by arguing that ruling groups maintain power through the consent of the masses rather than their coercion. Connell applies this to readings of Foucault, psychoanalysis and feminist theory in order to explore gender and, specifically, masculinities. He writes

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

(Connell 1995 page 77)
Although Connell implies that there is a prevailing hegemonic masculinity, there are also particular masculinities which are hegemonic within specific local groups. For example, in sport, the body is used by the player to present the opponent with signs of strength and power. In this case, it is often exaggerated forms of heterosexual masculinity related to displays of strength and power which are considered most appropriate for success. Consequently, bodily displays which signal weakness are to be avoided or masked. Weakness is equated with feminine performances with the effect that hegemonic masculinity dominates at the expense of those who are considered unable to perform in the appropriate way, namely: women, gay people and the disabled. In the case of the range of masculinities, hegemonic masculine oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. (Connell 1995 page 78)

Although gay masculinities are the most conspicuous of subordinated masculinities, Connell acknowledges that there are heterosexual men who are subordinated by their bodily performance (sissies, wimps etc.). This he sees as a “symbolic blurring with femininity” (Connell 1995 page 79). The relationship between sexuality and bodily performance is an important aspect of my study as I focus upon the interplay between the body, understandings of gender and the subsequent different levels of status conferred on them. There is, however, a problem which Connell does not fully clarify when he talks of ‘gay’ masculinity. Although he does take into account other social factors such as race or class, Connell falls into the trap of categorizing gay men as a singular group which is problematic in that there are many openly gay men who are still able to present hegemonic
masculinity. Although some gay men are subordinated in the broader sense of the term they could be considered relatively successful in comparison to other heterosexual men. In this way, it is hard to generalize that all gay men are subordinated in the same way. On a broader level, the concept of hegemony, because it stresses contestation, allows us to think about competing masculinities, many of which become (temporarily) hegemonic in specific local contexts.

Within sport, it may be more relevant to talk of subordinated homosexuality as there are few openly gay professional sports players. Again, though, there are exceptions. Ian Roberts, mentioned above, the former Australian rugby player, is a prime example of a successful sportsman who has come out as gay. However, popular interest in Roberts tends to focus on his presentation of normative masculinity through his body rather than his gayness. It is again hard to suggest that Roberts is subordinated in the same way that women who enter sport are. Similarly, Meyer (1991) describes how the movie star, Rock Hudson, was able, throughout his career, to present an accepted version of masculinity which masked his sexuality. This was achieved primarily through the physical presentation of his body and keeping his sexuality hidden from the general public. In certain circumstances, gay men are able to comply with hegemonic understandings of normative masculinity, particularly in areas such as traditionally male based employments (Nardi 2000).

Although Connell demonstrates the importance of recognising a variety of masculine identities, these tend to be more related to a reading of heterosexual masculinities. Gay sexuality is defined in terms of a version of masculinity rather than as a complex range of identities to be found within the description of gay. Therefore, if the concept of hegemony allows us to think about competing masculinities, it needs to be applied to gay
masculinities. Thus, in terms of gay men taking part in sport, there is a range of experiences which need to be acknowledged before it can be asserted that all gay men are subordinated within sporting practices. In terms of bodily practices, I suggest that it is the case that many gay men are able to replicate hegemonic masculinity within the context of sporting practice.

The central focus of my research is the body and the understandings of bodily performance related to representations of normative masculinity and femininity. As such, Connell’s hegemonic masculinity is best interpreted as a manifestation of bodily performance where the idealised version of masculinity is based on traditional heterosexual male expression at the expense of subordinated femininity. Providing examples of the variations in the experiences of gay men, in comparison to heterosexual men, is a useful way of evaluating the importance of body practices. I would suggest, then, that the gay men who are more likely to be subordinated are those whose bodily performances display feminine characteristics. As Segal (1997) suggests

> Although the persecution of homosexuals is most commonly the act of men against a minority of men, it is also the forced repression of the ‘feminine’ in all men. It is a way of keeping men separated off from women, and keeping women subordinate to men.

(Segal 1997 page 16)

Connell acknowledges a form of complicity among men in his version of hegemonic masculinity, where, even though only a small percentage of men rigorously practice it a majority of men still gain from it. They profit from what he calls the ‘patriarchal dividend’ (Connell 1995, page 79) and I would suggest that many gay men, based upon their ability
to perform hegemonic masculinity, are also complicit with this. They are able to gain from the patriarchal dividend to the extent that they can achieve relative success in material terms. However, successful performances of hegemonic masculinity and returns from the patriarchal dividend are achieved at the expense of any momentum in the quest for gender and sexual equality.

Overall, Butler is helpful in terms of her contribution to queer politics and the relevance to this thesis is that I can attempt to develop an understanding of her concept of queer acts in relation to queer sporting practices. Particularly if applied to mainstream sport, Butler is more radical than Connell because she is more determined to dismantle the apparent presumptions based on gender and sexuality and is quick to dismiss notions of naturalness in relation to gender. For her, queering language provides the opportunity to highlight existing assumptions of gender and sexual practice and expose the limitations of heteronormative gender based discourse.

Butler produces some compelling arguments, particularly in relation to the notion of performance and queer acts. Reiterative acts constantly reinforce the normative and maintain understandings of (hetero)normative sexuality. Butler, to an extent, ignores corporeality and individual consciousness, by allowing constructions of gender to be dictated by discursive structures. However, I feel Butler is relevant because she employs sexuality as a means to highlight the normative practices found in understandings of gender. For her, and importantly for my study, homosexuality demonstrates a contrasting performance of accepted gender and with it the idea that alternative sexual practices have the power to destabilize heterosexual hegemony. She writes
Certainly, I do not mean to claim that forms of sexual practice produce certain genders, but only that under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is used as a way of securing heterosexuality. 

(Butler 1999 page xii)

The production of normal or ‘normative’ gender is a central concern for Butler and part of this involves establishing a link between gender and sexuality. In terms of my thesis, I feel that Butler’s arguments in relation to gender performances and queer acts provide additional weight to Connell’s concept of bodily practices. The notion that the policing of gender contributes to reinforcing heterosexuality is a valuable argument and gains greater resonance if applied with Connell’s description of the circuit of bodily reflexive practices. For it is within this circuit that the policing of the social operates at the same time as the policing of the body.

Overall, I suggest that Connell’s positioning of the body as more central in the construction of gender provides a more instructive account of contemporary masculinity as he is able to present greater insight through the use of empirical evidence. In my study I aim to provide support for the claim that body practices are central in producing social understandings of gender and sexuality. This, I feel, becomes more evident when incorporated with analysis of sporting practices, gender and sexuality.
This thesis explores sport as a significant site for the making and remaking of masculinities and the extent to which body practices contribute to this process. In the introduction I devised a series of questions which provide the focus for the research. To recap, they are as follows:

To what extent is hegemonic masculinity made and remade through body practices associated with sport?

What are the body practices through which hegemonic masculinity is made up within these sites?

Do these body practices operate at the expense of other forms of masculinity, femininity and sexuality?

How do these body practices intersect with relations of class, race age and (dis)ability?

Does tennis, as played in an alternative site, (such as a gay and lesbian tennis club) subvert or reproduce hegemonic masculinity?

These questions shape the structure of the thesis and informed the selection of methods. I have attempted to conduct research in the manner most appropriate for responding to these issues. In the introduction I also described how experiences of my own body in conjunction with the social processes to which I have been exposed shaped my own identity. Because of this, I have constantly compared my experiences with those of other
men and women. Like other men, I too have been exposed to the cultural processes informing my status as a male which, in turn, may have occasionally produced a sense of unease in relation to my body. At the same time I have not always felt comfortable with accepted understandings of what being a 'real' man entails, whilst remaining aware that I should perform particular versions of masculinity in different social contexts. Consequently, I have often had cause to reflect upon my body and masculinity while growing up and these reflections inevitably form part of the background to and the way in which I approach the fieldwork.

In this chapter, I begin by exploring some of the methodological issues which ultimately shape any research procedure and the perspectives which, I believe, contribute most effectively to achieving productive ethnography. I then describe the specific methods identified as most appropriate to the research aims, namely, participant observation and interviews and explore the reasons for incorporating these. I also describe the process through which I identified suitable sites and cases for investigation. I conclude the chapter with an exploration of some of the ethical issues which inevitably arise whilst conducting ethnographic research.

**Methodological Issues**

The conflict between positivism and naturalism has been extensively debated (for instance, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, chapter one) and often this has been framed within arguments surrounding the merits or disadvantages of either quantitative or qualitative research procedures. Positivism is based upon the principle that all scientific theories are open to testing where they can either be confirmed or falsified through rigorous objective
scientific examination. Naturalism, on the other hand, claims that it is possible to obtain subjective accounts from within the culture under investigation and that it can make claims about the nature of social practice whilst at the same time remain independent of the researcher. Criticisms of these perspectives are based upon their claims to record reality and the failure to recognise the role of the researcher within the process. The problematic nature of attempting to remain neutral or scientific during the research procedure has been contested by more recent branches of sociological enquiry. For example, Foucault was critical of the realist approach and stressed the fact that social research is a socio-historical phenomenon which functions as part of a broader process of surveillance and control. Foucault, along with other post structuralist theorists, has highlighted the role of the researcher within the research process not only in terms of the problems related to achieving neutral accounts, but also the neglect of the political within any form of research. Awareness of the importance of recognising political processes within ethnographic practice has also been highlighted by the continuing influence of Marxism and, since the 1980s, with the emergence of feminism and feminist methodology. However, rather than reject realism, I have adopted a broader realist view which takes into account many of these criticisms. In other words, realism which incorporates a reflexive approach is considered, for the purposes of this research, productive. According to Hammersley and Atkinson, reflexivity implies that

The orientations of the researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them. What this represents is a rejection of the idea that social research is, or can be, carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the particular
biography of the researcher, in such a way that its findings can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 page 16)

Therefore, the points I made in the introduction relating to aspects of my own identity, such as gender, sexuality and sporting performances, not only influence my personal life history, but also the whole research process. Recognising the reflexive processes at play means that I can locate the research within social, historical and political processes and, at the same time, take into account the effect that these have on the research procedure.

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) it is also important to recognise how theory is bound up with the method of selecting and collecting data, analysing it and writing it up. Wacquant, in his reading of Bourdieu, states that theory should not be removed or apart from the research work that nourishes it. He writes

Bourdieu maintains that every act of research is simultaneously empirical (it confronts the world of observable phenomena) and theoretical (it necessarily engages hypothesis about the underlying structure of relations that observations are designed to capture). Even the most minute empirical operation - the choice of a scale of measurement, a coding decision, the construction of an indicator, or the inclusion of an item in a questionnaire - involves theoretical choices, conscious or unconscious, while the most abstract conceptual puzzle cannot be fully clarified without systematic engagement with empirical reality.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 page 35)
The distinctive feature of Bourdieu's argument is his approach to 'reflexivity' and entails the systematic exploration of the 'unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 page 40)

A commitment on behalf of the researcher to reflexive approaches, now common in qualitative research, owes a huge debt to feminist studies. Feminist methodologies have been significant in their recognition of the social processes at play which have ultimately shaped the way in which women's lives are experienced. The focus of much of feminist research has been the specific social and ideological locations which women have historically occupied (for example, areas such as the home, Oakley 1974, motherhood, Woodward 1997, and sexuality, Petchesky 1986). Much of this research has incorporated a qualitative reflexive approach to fieldwork so that accounts of women's lives can be evaluated in terms of broader social processes which have more often than not determined their subordinate position in comparison to men. Skeggs (1997), for example, effectively applies the critical theory of Bourdieu whilst at the same time adopting a qualitative feminist approach to her analysis of working class women. The identifications amongst the women in her sample provide the central focus for her investigation into the influence of class as a factor in shaping the women's identity. Whereas there are positive associations to class identity experienced by men, Skeggs found that class was experienced by women as exclusion (Skeggs 1997 page 74). I have attempted to incorporate similar methodological approaches in my research by recognising the social spaces which have been significant in my life and at the same time can be seen to occupy a broader social
space for men. Therefore, I have identified that active sport participation is considered an integral aspect of male identity and is, consequently, worthy of investigation.

Other feminist researchers (for example, Anderson and Jack 1991, Stacey 1991, Stanley 1993) have also advocated a self analytical approach which should be applied to the research process. This has been productive in research exploring the lives of women but can equally be applied also in studies of men and enables them to not only explore their own lives but the lives of other men. Consequently, much of feminist methods incorporates a form of active research where the intention is that, through the revelations which emerge during the research, there is the opportunity for both researcher and researched to gain from the experience. Obviously, this implies that the researcher often has an agenda which is brought into the research. However, it is the explicit recognition of the personal, political and social influences at large within the entire research process which enables more productive enquiry and counters many of the criticisms justifiably directed at solely positivistic or naturalistic studies. As Hammersley and Atkinson succinctly suggest

By including our own role within the research focus, and perhaps even systematically exploiting our participation in the settings under study as researchers, we can produce accounts of the social and justify them without placing reliance on futile appeals to empiricism, of either positivist or naturalist varieties.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 page 21)

A commitment to reflexivity has been understood by some researchers as necessitating the abandonment of the sense that this form of research tells us about anything other than the
research process itself. In contrast to this, and in common with Hammersley and Atkinson, I am arguing that, in however mediated a form, the material gathered can tell us something real about really existing social worlds. What follows is a description of the process of selecting concrete methods which I considered appropriate in relation to the research aims and the methodological issues discussed above.

**Methods Selected**

**Observations**

In all forms of social research there is always some element of observation. In chapter one, I made claims for the need to recognise the importance of the body when theorising the social construction of masculine identity. I identified Connell’s (1995) concept of bodily practices as a productive argument in that it clearly demonstrates how social processes and corporeality are involved in individual and social formulations of gender and sexual identities. Connell based his arguments on the interviews obtained from a range of men and I had initially envisaged incorporating interviews, conducted in a similar manner to the life history approach he used, in order to analyse further some of the issues relating to masculinities, and in particular body practices and sexuality within the context of sport. Participant observation was originally considered a means to gain access to men within suitable research sites and supplement the interviews. However, as the research progressed it became rapidly apparent that there were limitations in using only interviews. A focus on body practices appeared to create a greater requirement for observations of the various bodily techniques and gendered performances at play within different social situations. Especially within the context of sport, it appeared even more appropriate to utilise aspects of participant observation in order to record body practices at large and in the present and
then supplement these with recorded interviews which would provide an opportunity to reflect upon social process and the life course.

When I began to develop the research themes, I also did not presume that any men who took part in subsequent conversations or interviews would want to discuss their bodies openly. Participant observation was, therefore, a useful means of gaining information about and watching bodily performances and also provided opportunities to engage in or listen to conversations which I did not necessarily have to instigate or take an active part in. I was able to participate and observe at the same time, for example, whilst on a running machine or in a changing room, which meant that I could observe other men and how they presented their bodies as well as how they interacted with other men and women. The same applied to the tennis clubs, where I was able to participate and observe either during a game or whilst waiting to play at club sessions or in journeys to play other teams. Within the tennis club environment, as a participant, I could listen and observe others and also, occasionally, direct topics of conversation although I generally maintained a watching and listening approach as the interviews provided the opportunity to focus on specific themes.

As is well known, interactionist sociology has utilised observation in order to demonstrate how actors learn and then perform ‘normal’ behaviour. For example, Goffman (1972) adopted observational techniques to show how the body is a central factor in the process of learning social conventions. He compares the body to units which are either ‘vehicular’ or ‘participation’ units. Vehicular units are comparable to a car in the way that pedestrians move about and negotiate public spaces, literally performing bodily manoeuvres. Participation units describe the process where individuals navigate the streets (i.e. the
social space) either accompanied or alone. Using observation, he was able to describe the organizational structures at play when bodies perform these manoeuvres in social spaces.

More recently, Duneier (1999) adopted a traditional form of interactionist observation in his study of working class street traders in New York. The detailed descriptions provide valuable insights into areas of social life often neglected in wider society. In the case of Duneier, he was an outsider and much of the appeal of his work is found in his attempts to gain access to the group and his experiences once ‘inside’. However, I did not have to encounter the problems faced by an anthropologist who has to unravel and interpret the social codes of another culture. I have been exposed throughout my life to the social expectations of a culture which has specific codes in relation not only to the body and masculinity but also age, gender, race and class. I have not always been a researcher and have had to deal with negotiating society and other people in the same ways that others have to in their lives. I have acquired a history of observations and experiences which have been formed in earlier stages of my life but can now be reflected upon in a more sociological framework. The men in my research sites have had similar experiences, but at the same time have collected these in differing individual circumstances and may or may not assess their lives in the same sociological manner. It is the purpose of this study, therefore, to explore my subjective account of men’s bodies and masculinity, which I have constructed during my life, by exploring the accounts of other men. However, as I have mentioned earlier in the chapter, awareness of the reflexive nature of the research process enables recognition of the problems of being over familiar with the research settings. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995 page 103) suggest, it can be sometimes difficult to suspend one’s preconceptions. In my case, I needed to take into consideration many of my
preconceptions, in particular those relating to masculinity, sport, the body and the research process.

However, the ability to participate ‘inside’ the research site is a major strength of observational ethnography. There are many worthy examples to be found in early interactionist studies, such as Foot-Whyte (1955) or Becker (1963), but more recently there have been many studies which address masculinity and the body and incorporate participant observation (for example; Aycock, 1992; Fussell, 1992; Klein, 1993; De Garis, 2000). Although not specifically intended as sociological research, Fussell’s study is particularly interesting in that it adopts a reflective approach to his own experiences as a novice body builder and charts the process through which he transformed both his body and social identity and, consequently, was able to occupy the role of ‘body builder’. Fussell’s autobiographical reflections of the physical routines and social practices, which he had to learn and then ritually perform, demonstrates the significance of Connell’s (1995) argument that the physical body is both informed by and a contributory factor in social processes.

Occupying an insider position offers the researcher the opportunity to witness and record many social activities and processes not available to other forms of sociological research. In the case of Aycock (1992), he was able to observe other men during regular sessions at a gym in order to apply a theoretical interpretation of the disciplinary practices which inform the body as well as gender that are apparent in such an activity.

In all of these insider accounts there is an acknowledgement of a process which has to be experienced over a period of time. Consequently, participant observation is highly time
Fussell’s experiences of body building covered a period of four years and in most cases of worthwhile observation, several years is the norm.

On a broader level, I was attempting to explore some aspects of everyday life which could be considered potentially subversive, in particular gay sport. Observation can be highly effective in such circumstances. For example, Kates and Belk (2001) used observation as a means of analysing the significance of lesbian and gay pride days. They attended and observed annual gay pride marches and events over several years and were able to conclude that even though commercial processes had become a major part of what had originally been political motivated activities there still remained an emphasis on resistance. On a similar level, I had also wanted to gauge whether political motivations were apparent at the gay tennis club and observations and conversations provided the opportunity to monitor this.

Interviews

During the research I became familiar with a range of men and even though I cannot presume to know every part of their lives there were many shared experiences which eased the formal barriers which can sometimes exist between researcher and interviewee. As I was studying an area with which I was already familiar, I could also talk with confidence to the other men not only about sport but about shared social experiences. For example, at the straight club I could discuss freely local issues and events or at the gay club, issues relating to sexuality. Participants' understanding of me was thus informed by the fact that I was one of them. Most of the men I later selected for the interview sample were familiar to me before the interviews and this prior knowledge was gained mainly through my
activities in the clubs during the first year. To an extent, all interviews are affected by
information outside of the interview itself, such as, the motivation of the interviewer
immediately prior to the interview, the background to the study, or the setting of the
interview. It is impossible and undesirable to eliminate factors of this kind. As described
above, much criticism of interviews is directed at the authenticity of ‘naturally’ occurring
data, with the idea that the role of the researcher upsets the balance of these data.
However, there are a variety of ways in which interviews can be conducted. I wanted the
interviews to be part of a broader social process of interaction which included playing a
game of tennis, chatting and sharing experiences in a similar way to interactions and
conversations between friends. In these cases, talk often adopts a form of interviewing, for
example, questions like “where did you learn to play?” or “what do you do for a living?”
In most cases people like to talk about themselves and are happy, in the right conditions, to
have the opportunity to put their lives into some form of perspective. It is, therefore, the
task of the researcher to translate these ‘life’ conversations into sociological text. In terms
of the interview, I am obviously constructing the conversation in some way by the very
fact that I have an agenda and a series of themes which I want to discuss. However, as I
outlined above, remaining aware of the process of co-construction enables the researcher
to analyse subsequent material with this in mind.

All the men in my study were willing to be interviewed, although for the sake of
anonymity I changed their names. I was aware of the problems of ‘trusting’ the accounts
of the respondents but, again, in this case the respondents did not divulge information
about themselves which could be considered potentially incriminating. However, I was
also aware of the ‘sensitive’ nature of talking about masculinity and sexuality. Talking
about sexuality is not an everyday practice, especially for men and I attempted to
overcome this through the initial approach of the interview and the focus upon life history in relation to sport, leisure and lifestyle rather than a direct assault upon the body and sexual identity. For example, Young, White and McTeer (1994) were able to draw useful conclusions about masculinity in general from their interviewees in research which used participation in violent sports as the focus for discussion. Although, the topic of sexuality may be considered problematic for some of the men at the mainstream tennis club, it may be less so for the members of the gay tennis club bearing in mind that attending a gay venue is, to an extent, making some form of declaration or conscious decision about one’s own sexuality. However, by adopting a similar format in the interviews with all the men in the form of sporting a ‘life history’, I was able to gain some access to the relevance of sexuality in relation to the men’s everyday practices and bodily performances. As such I was able to assess the significance placed on important issues, for example, whether the gay men in the sample articulated their own sexuality as being a factor in their ability to participate in sport in comparison to heterosexual men.

Sport was initially offered as an explanation to the men of the purpose for the research project. I ventured, when asked, that my research was based on a study of sport, the body and participation among men living in the south-east of England. It was often difficult to explain fully the aims if my research and I did not assume that all the men would be as enthusiastic about the topic as I was. I was more concerned that I should obtain informal consent to the interviews and that I should explain the context of the study and my position as a PhD research student. The fact that I was also a member of the clubs and intended to continue taking part after the interviews meant that the men had the opportunity to clarify any points after the actual interview. I attempted to adhere to the principles of active research, where
Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. (Holstein and Gubrium 1997 page 114)

I also wanted to be able to share aspects of the research with the men. I describe some of the ways I was able to do this later in this thesis. I intentionally offered broad explanations of the research aims, rather than detailed descriptions, so that I would not influence the responses in the subsequent interviews and build reactivity into the process. Therefore, as sport was essentially the topic of my thesis, I focussed on this aspect and avoided direct reference to the masculinity and sexuality, unless it was raised by the respondent in the interview.

For this study, I felt that in-depth interviews in the manner of life-histories would be the most appropriate form of research tool. The life history approach provides the chance to assess how other individuals account for their lives over a period of time whilst at the same time gives the researcher an opportunity to assess these accounts in relation to other social factors and the accounts of others. I have adopted methods similar to Connell (1995) and Skeggs (1997) as I feel they share similar concerns. Connell successfully used interviews to demonstrate the importance of bodily practices. The men in his sample were able to reflect upon their experiences growing up and, consequently, Connell was able to demonstrate how the body informed individual lived practices as well as wider social practices. Connell conducted thirty interviews which were taken from four different social groups. Life history was used to gather information about social and historical change.
There was not only a comparison made between the lives of different men but also in the groups selected. Three groups were identified as being marginalized or subordinated to society in some manner, whilst the forth group represented patriarchal heterosexual middle-class men. I attempted to adopt a similar approach by gathering a series of life histories, but at the same time, I wanted to address some of the issues which were not fully explored, particularly in relation to sexuality.

Anderson and Jack (1991) highlight the strengths of life histories by providing examples of their own work. By critically examining some of their own interviews they demonstrate ways to obtain full benefit from the accounts given by the respondents and at the same time gain deeper understanding of women’s lives. Anderson demonstrates the need to 'shed agenda' in order to gain access to relevant information. The relationship with the interviewee is vital and can sometimes be hampered by the unconscious need to focus on the specific project. Quoting an example of an interview with a woman from a similar background, Anderson shows how she missed the opportunity to gather important information. She writes

The interview’s potential is severely limited, however, by my failure to encourage her to expand upon her spontaneous reflections and by my eagerness to document the details of her farming activity. Not until later did I realise that I do not know what she meant by “nervous breakdown” or “overdoing.” The fact that other farm women used the same or similar terms to parts of their lives alerted me to the need for further clarification.

(Anderson and Jack 1991 page 15)
The need to clarify what the respondent means is an important factor in any research. Particularly as I wish to compare different social groups of men, I cannot presume to know all the ways they express and account for their lives. Anderson also provides a useful insight into the value of reflective and considered interview techniques. She writes

What I learned by listening carefully to my interviews is that women’s oral history requires much more than a set of questions to explore women’s unique experiences and unique perspectives; we need to refine our methods for probing more deeply by listening to the levels on which the narrator responds to the original questions. To do so we need to hear about what women implied, suggested, and started to say but didn’t. We need to interpret their pauses and, when it happens, their unwillingness or inability to respond. We need to consider carefully whether our interviews create a context in which women feel comfortable exploring the subjective feelings that give meaning to actions, things and events, whether they allow women to explore “unwomanly” feelings and behaviours, and whether they encourage women to explain what they mean in their own terms. (Anderson and Jack 1991 page 17)

Jack stresses the importance of being aware that the researcher is an active participant in the research process. Listening becomes crucial in the interview situation. Jack argues that one of the most critical areas for attention is where the interviewer feels they know what the respondent is saying. This implies that the researcher is already appropriating what the respondent says to an existing schema, which means he/she is no longer listening to the respondent but fitting the response into what they already know. Jack suggests the need to be careful to elaborate meanings from the respondent and not presume understanding of phrases or words but ask for clarification.
Because women have internalised the categories by which to interpret their experience and activities, categories that 'represent a deposit of the desires and disappointments of men', what is often missing is the woman's own interpretation of her experience, or her own perspective on her life and activity. Interviews allow us to hear, if we will, the particular meanings of a language that both women and men use but each translates differently.

(Anderson and Jack 1991 page 19)

Jack suggests that by immersing oneself in the interviews and being aware of moral language the researcher can listen to interviews. Anderson and Jack provide examples of how the oral history interview needs a shift from information gathering, where the focus is upon the right questions and interaction, to a focus upon the process or unfolding of the subject's viewpoint. By adopting this form of oral history interview technique I was able to draw upon a range of subjects' viewpoints and a range of experiences. For instance, during the interviews, the men were able to tell me about areas of their lives which would probably not emerge in general conversations. I was able to ask about past experiences of sport during their childhood and schooldays which meant that the conversation was focussed more upon the interviewee than the interviewer. Consequently, a simple question such as 'tell me about your experiences of sport at school' would enable the respondent to describe a range of significant experiences, not only for him but for the research.

The need to account for historical process is also an important aspect in my decision to use life history as a main research tool. It is the relationship to historical change which provides an additional factor in assessing the extent to which body practices influence
making and remaking of hegemonic masculinity. As Plummer (1983) points out, a subject will be constantly moving between developments in their own life cycle and external factors, for example, political changes, developments in technology or economic changes. Plummer refers to work he carried out with Jeffrey Weeks where they gathered life histories of elderly and young gay men. Although the subjects faced common problems related to the general stigma of homosexuality, the experiences of a twenty-one-year-old and a seventy-year-old were vastly different. This related particularly to the different historical circumstances each confronted. For example, the older man had experienced economic depression, two world wars and a denial both legal and socially of his sexuality. Plummer suggests that through the subject’s accounts

we can glimpse not only the social life of England between 1920 and 1975, we can also begin to grasp how the very experience of homosexuality has shifted.

(Plummer 1983 page 70)

Plummer’s use of the life history method provides a justification for wanting to incorporate it as a suitable means of gathering information about men and their bodies in my research. It is a method which produces rich material and at the same time the opportunity to evaluate the differing experiences of men at different stages in their lives. The interviews I conducted, although not specifically aimed at providing a detailed account of historical change, did provide material which I could use to assess the ways in which exclusive masculinity did or did not inform masculinity at different stages in the life course.
Participant observations and interviews, in the form of sporting life histories, are the methods incorporated in this research and were employed in order to gather data which could be used to support the research aims. However, before I could do this I needed to locate an appropriate research setting and establish cases and samples for subsequent observations and interviews.

The Case Study

Setting

One of the main problems faced by ethnographic researchers is locating a suitable setting for investigation and then gaining access to it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). When I first thought about how to locate a setting which would accommodate a broad range of men it dawned on me that I already had a means of access to the lives of many men. Throughout my life, and in a similar manner to other men in contemporary western society, sport has played a significant part. It affects most men to the extent that it becomes a means of defining oneself in relation to others. To participate or not presents a statement about one’s identity and, as I described in chapter two, is generally regarded as an essential activity for a ‘normal’ male. Embracing these ideals (or not) involves making statements about oneself to the rest of the world. Organised sport for men, whether in the school, at work or at leisure (participant or non-participant) is an everyday part of their lives and the popular understanding of sport as an activity which is personal free time remains strong. In some circles it is still seen as time for men together, away from work and a social space away from women. I realised that through my associations with various
clubs and leisure centres, I had access to a broad range of men with different social backgrounds and identities.

Practical issues were a major factor in locating and selecting the research sites. I wanted to include several clubs so that I could have access to a range of men. This meant that I had to take into account the practical problems relating to travel and finance. It would have been impractical to locate the case study in different areas of the country. Not only would there have been the financial burden of travelling between the sites but there would also have been restraints upon research time. An important aspect of ethnographic research, especially in the initial stages of gaining access to and becoming accepted within the setting, is the time spent becoming a familiar face to others. It is during these times that initial encounters and observations shape the form of the research and provide the opportunity to select samples for detailed investigations. Therefore, a major consideration in the research was related to my ability to attend the sites I selected on a regular basis so that I could then target specific samples as the research themes developed.

As I was living in the area, I initially approached a number of clubs in the South East of England with the intention that I would be able to gain access to a range of men and address aspects of age, class and sexuality. From these I chose organisations which would become the core setting for the ethnography and at the same time provide the means to address the major themes in the thesis. The following is a brief description of each.

**Sports and Social Club 1** was part of a large paper mill based in the South East of England. The mill had for many years been the largest employer in the town. The town itself was predominantly working class with the majority of employment found in semi-
skilled and unskilled labour. Until the 1960s the town was still a market town with a regular cattle market. Although there were still traditional links with the rural lifestyle, agricultural traditions had been in steadily declining. There had been a recent increase in new houses accommodating commuters into London. As such, the town was similar to many other areas in England which are on the outskirts of a large city. The sports and social club provided a centre not only for employees and families (both current and retired) of the mill but also associate members. Like many large employers, the mill provided a range of sporting and leisure activities at subsidised prices. The chief sports were football and cricket although other sports were provided for, such as tennis and bowls. The tennis club drew upon a cross section of the community, ranging from teachers and retired heads to production workers at the factory. Many of the male players also took part in other sports, particularly football. In many cases, the older male players had moved on to tennis after finding team football too physically demanding once they had reached their thirties.

Sports Club 2 was a club for gay and lesbian players with a membership (at the time of the research) of about one hundred and fifty. The club held weekly sessions for social tennis and also ran many other activities, including an annual international tournament as part of wider involvement in the Gay and Lesbian Tennis Association (GLTA). The membership was drawn from a wide range of gay men and women (although more recently the club had become predominantly male). There were students, professionals and unemployed people of differing ages and backgrounds. The club was formed in order to provide a safe environment for gay men and women to play sport and although membership is almost totally gay, heterosexuals are welcome as guests. I first became aware of the existence of gay sports in general after I moved to the area in 1993. A friend
had told me about a group of gay men who played tennis on a Sunday morning at a public tennis centre. The gay tennis club used in the study was established in 1995 by several gay men who had previously attended the Sunday morning club. I had known these men through my association with the Sunday morning club and had started going along to the new club when it had formed.

**Sports Club 3** was initially included as a third tennis club in the case study in order to provide a contrast to the works based sports club in terms of class background. The club was based in an affluent area of London and the membership, in contrast to the works based sports club, was predominantly well educated and middle to upper middle-class. As the research progressed I felt that the need to address a comparative class aspect was less important as I wanted to concentrate more upon bodily performance and sexuality as central themes in the study. However, the club provided a useful site to conduct some of the interviews with men from the gay tennis club. The gay tennis club did not have its own premises, so I was able to offer an additional incentive for some of the men to take part in an interview by providing access to facilities. At the same time I was able to incorporate my experiences and observations at the club with my analysis of the other clubs.

**Sports Club 4** opened in the South East of England in 1997. It was the first large scale private gym/leisure centre in the area. It occupied part of an industrial and leisure development in the area which included a large Multi-screen cinema, a large nightclub and restaurants. Many of these developments emerged in the nineties and draw upon the out-of-town consumer developments which are based on the ‘Mall’ shopping centres popular in North America. In these, the consumer can, in effect, visit one area to use the gym and leisure facilities, then eat at one of the restaurants, go to the cinema and finish the evening...
at a bar or nightclub. The development represented a recent upsurge in the economy of the local area. Historically, the local towns had been predominantly working class, with the main sources of income based around local public service industry. The regeneration of business along with the access to London and the continent had helped the area prosper in comparison to similar large towns in other parts of Britain. The health club was part of a large leisure group which had initially focused on the leisure market of bingo and arcades, but had recently expanded and at the time of the research had about twenty other gyms throughout the UK. The club focused on attracting the ‘leisure’ or ‘lifestyle’ market and made a conscious effort to avoid previous associations of gyms with dingy basement settings frequented mainly by steroidal body builders.

Throughout my participation in the clubs described I was able to observe many men (and women) and identify a sample of men for interview. In the process of the research the central focus became the sports clubs 1 and 2 which, from now on, I term the straight club and the gay tennis club respectively. These definitions are mainly intended to assist the reader as it cannot be claimed that everyone in the straight club is in fact heterosexual or, similarly, everyone in the gay tennis club is homosexual. However, the categories ‘straight’ and ‘gay’ do provide useful comparative definitions in terms of the assumptions about sexuality prevalent in the clubs. Sports club 3, as I mentioned above, was initially included to address class. Although during the course of the research, a specific site for class became less important, the club was useful in many other ways. From now on I call this the middle class club. Sports club 4 was used primarily for observation and I have called this the health club.
In each of the above clubs, I became a full member. The research period began in October 1999 and I remained a regular participant in all for three years, apart from sports club 3 which I attended for the first year and then maintained membership during the second so that I could use the facilities for interviews if needed. In the tennis clubs, I made a conscious effort to attend as many social club sessions as possible. I was fortunate in that the straight club had social play sessions on Monday and Wednesday evenings, the middle class club had theirs on Thursdays and the gay tennis club met on Sunday evenings. At the same time, I made myself available for league match play. Again, I was fortunate in that I was able to gain regular spots in the clubs which fielded teams in local leagues.

Eventually, in the straight club, I was able to take over the captaincy of one team which meant that I became a more central figure in the club. In the gay tennis club, although there were no league teams, there was a competitive singles ladder and an annual tennis tournament. At one stage, the opportunity arose to run the singles ladder, which I volunteered to do. This provided further access to many of the men in the club. By the end of 2002 and during the writing up period of 2003, although I continued to remain a member of the clubs, I stopped attending and participating as intensively as I had during the research period.

I also joined the health club at the start of the research so that I could initially conduct anonymous observation as a contrast to the wholehearted participation in the tennis clubs. At first I started attending at differing times in order to observe a range of participants so that I could take into account the varying social and temporal spaces particular groups may occupy, for example during the daytime or after work. I did this for the first year and then adopted specific times in order to observe other regulars over an extended period. I
attended three times a week, usually on the same days and generally between 5pm and 8pm when the health club was busiest.

Focus on tennis

Many of the foreshadowed problems (Hammersley and Attkinson 1995, page 24) identified in the research related to how I would be able to gain access to the lives of other men so that I could assess the relationship of the body to masculinities. My previous experiences of tennis, and sport in general, meant that the initial groundwork for establishing potential cases was made easier. Tennis can be considered a major international sport, which gains a large amount of coverage in the media (Whannel 1992) and remains a popular participant and spectator pastime. Therefore, it can be claimed that tennis, as an instantly recognisable sport for the majority, also occupies a significant space within contemporary culture and, consequently, is understood in terms of broader social and political contexts which can be applied to many aspects of mainstream sport. At the same time, tennis is also untypical of many other mainstream sports in that it is one of a few that enables men and women to play together in a competitive organised situation (as opposed to, for example, rugby or football) and also allows single sex and mixed sex activities. This provided a useful opportunity to analyse the dynamics of men only situations and mixed situations, which in turn enabled me to question the men in the samples about gender relations and also observe various contrasting social situations.

My access to the clubs and ability to enter them with ease was assisted by my ability to play tennis to a fairly high standard and my previous experiences of sport in general.
Tennis, therefore, provided what Merton (1987) describes as a ‘strategic research site’ in that it enabled access to a range of men in an environment where I already possessed knowledge and sporting capital. It provided, not only a space to talk to men about their bodies, but also a means to explore specific social relationships based upon gender, sexuality and the physical body.

Access to sport is often an arbitrary process for men and women. Not only are there the social expectations relating to gender which may limit participation, but often the availability of particular sports facilities determines the level of access to it. There are also external factors at play, such as family influence, school provision, geographical location and economic considerations. Because of this, I did not feel that I had to worry unnecessarily about the historical class aspects often associated with a sport like tennis. In their study of everyday cultures in Australia, Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999) found that tennis was one of the most popular participant sports played by respondents. Although they found that there were differing modes of participation, either formal or informal, they suggest that tennis is

a sport that carries at once a high cultural value and a broad appeal across the generations, the sexes and the social classes.

(Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999 page 130)

Obviously, Australia has contrasting cultural and geographical influences affecting its approach to sport, but the study by Bennett, Emmison and Frow demonstrates the broader participation appeal of a sport like tennis in comparison to other mainstream sports such as football or rugby, which are more exclusive in terms of those considered able to play. The
British Lawn Tennis Association recently conducted its own report into participation and attitudes to tennis and although very much based on market research principles the results suggested a broadening in the range of participation among the social classes (LTA 2002).

In the cases identified for the research, the gay club had a broad range of members from different socio-economic backgrounds, although the emphasis was more upon the social categories A B and C1 as described in the LTA report. This may also be indicative of those who lived in a large city. The other clubs catered to a range of class backgrounds, although the straight club which formed part of a large works sports and social club, derived more from a traditional working class background, was also where many of the members participated in other sports, such as football, cricket and hockey.

There are other gay sports clubs, but for many gay men there appears to be a greater attraction to sports which cater for the individual in comparison to traditional organised team sports which have historically remained homophobic (Messner & Sabo 1990). Swimming has been one of the most popular attended events in the Gay Games, but this does not compare favourably with mainstream sport where organised swimming tends to be aimed at younger children. Tennis also provided a broader research sample in terms of age, gender and sexuality than other mainstream sports such as football or rugby.

Selection of respondents

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) identify the importance of theoretical sampling within the research selection process. Drawing upon Glaser and Straus (1967), they describe two complementary strategies vital within this process which, firstly, minimize the differences
between the cases and, secondly, maximise the differences between cases. According to them, this increases the density of the properties relating to the core categories and delimits the scope of the theory (1995 page 43). I had originally intended to target three specific age groups in order to provide a contrasting sample, but as the research progressed and the focus developed more towards the body and sexuality as the main themes, adopting rigid age groups became restrictive. There were also problems in finding elderly respondents from the gay tennis club.

Throughout the initial period of participation in the clubs, I was able to observe the members and ascertain the varying degrees of skill, confidence and competitiveness displayed by them. This meant that I was able to observe body practices in more depth. I noticed how different levels of status were awarded to specific types of bodily performance. Playing ability and performances of hegemonic masculinity appeared to contribute to the status achieved. Because of this, I decided that it would be relevant to the research aims to include some aspect of these bodily performances within the selection process. Consequently, I selected a range of men from the clubs based upon my initial observations of their playing performances. I wanted to be able to compare and contrast the experiences of both the body and sport in relation to bodily performance and sexuality. This task was relatively easy, in that the straight clubs had members who played for teams based upon playing standards and the gay tennis club also differentiated players according to playing ability. At the same time, I was able to observe different types of bodily behaviour and I attempted to include those who appeared to have played sport throughout their lives through their displays of sporting technique and those who were relatively new to the sport. I also included those who I considered were outwardly competitive on court. By drawing specifically upon the straight club and the gay tennis club, I was able to funnel
the research into a main focus which incorporated the making and making of hegemonic masculinity and the influence of body practices in this process as the key theme. During the first year of the research when I concentrated upon participant observation, I was able not only to watch but also listen to the men and join in conversations. It became apparent that the men were experiencing the clubs and their bodies in different ways. Focusing on the straight club and the gay club meant that I could concentrate upon the body and sexuality as major themes. Consequently, I was able to include questions in the interviews which I hoped would provide relevant material for analysis. For example, I became aware that many of the men achieved varying levels of participation in sports. For some men, the gay tennis club was their only access to sport whereas others belonged to other (straight) clubs or played other sports. In addition there appeared to be an obvious emphasis upon bodily performances which prompted me to consider the experiences of a range of gay men and investigate how they became involved in the gay tennis club in the first place, their past experiences of mainstream sport and their experiences whilst at the gay tennis club. Therefore, in the interviews, I was able to generate questions which were specifically aimed at these topics and provided the opportunity to compare and contrast the responses with other members selected in order to establish whether there were any significant themes emerging.

As such, I decided to select ten men from each of these clubs so that I could make comparisons between the men in relation to sexuality, body performances and their ability to participate in sport. At the same time I attempted to obtain interviews from a range of men within these sub-groups. Throughout the research there is constant decision making on behalf of the researcher. As Hammersley and Atkinson suggest
Decisions must be made about where to observe and when, who to talk to and what to ask, as well as about what to record and how

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 page 45)

Acknowledging these decision making processes is part of the reflexive approach to the research. However, even though I attempted to remain aware of my role as a researcher and the external elements which influenced my decision, it is difficult to provide a precise rationale for selection as there are undoubtedly elements of co-construction within the process. I cannot make claims that I objectively selected a broad sample as there may have been members of the club that I did not want to interview, whether consciously or unconsciously. Much of my success in obtaining the interviews would have depended upon my ability to develop relationships with the other members in the first place.

Although none of the men I asked to take part in an interview declined, I was fairly sure that they would be willing before I asked them. As such, the initial period of becoming a member of the clubs and taking part in various activities laid the groundwork for my subsequent attempts to ‘sound out’ potential interviewees.

There are also elements of coincidence within the selection process. For example, although I was a regular participant in the clubs during the research period, when I was ready to start interviewing I drew up a list of potential respondents but there were many, particularly in the gay tennis club, who did not always attend at the same times as I did and, consequently, on several occasions there were men I asked on the spur of the moment. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that there are three major dimensions which occur within sampling are related to time, people and context. Recognising the sometimes arbitrary nature of the decision making process not only enables the researcher
to account for potential foreshadowed problems he or she may encounter, but also opens up possible revelatory aspects not initially expected in the research.

The interview sample consisted of twenty men aged between eighteen and seventy four. Ten were selected from the works based sports club and ten from the gay tennis club. The intention was to document in informal interviews the general understandings of their bodies and how this may have informed their construction of masculine identities. The inclusion of a life history approach (with the focus upon experiences of sport) allowed for the assessment of the life course, particularly in relation to bodily performances and sexuality. The consideration of social process also complimented the observations which were conducted as part of the present and enabled further assessment of the body practices witnessed during the research.

The selection of different age groups also allowed for a means of comparison which incorporated an assessment of possible transformations in understanding of the body. I was then able to assess the relevance of the range of social practices experienced by the men. Talking to the men and obtaining recorded accounts enabled me to evaluate whether there was any correlation with perceived understanding of the male body to the lived practice of the individuals. This meant that I could account for the relevance of body practices in the construction of masculinities. For example, whether older men responded differently to contemporary understandings of the male body if they had learned to contemplate their own bodies in a different era and how this compared to the accounts of a much younger respondent.
With the chosen sample I was able to contrast the experiences of different age groups and also heterosexual men and gay men. I was able to assess the relationship of sexuality to participation and performance in sporting contexts and wider society. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the sporting theme provided a ‘cover’ for the ethnography to an extent that any of my efforts to conduct research in the area of masculinity and sexuality were treated without a sense of threat. And given that the general approach was considered to be sporting theme, there was already an initial common ground. The familiarity I had achieved through the active participation also promoted greater relaxation during the interviews and enabled me to observe at close quarters interaction between different members of the clubs. The sporting theme also brought with it an element of cultural capital which I was able to exploit in that it generated a willingness to take part in the interviews.

I have provided brief profiles of the men selected below:

**Straight Club**

Edward (74)

Edward was born in London in the 1920’s. He lived with his father, mother and two brothers. One was older by four years and the other younger by seven years. By all accounts he had had a happy childhood. His father had been sporting in his youth, excelling in football and cricket and had encouraged the children to be active in their leisure time. Free time was taken up with sport and games which generally involved some form of ball sports. There was competition between the brothers. Edward’s older brother was a very good football player, which influenced Edward taking up cricket and then later tennis as his chosen sport. Edward, in his working life, had been an engineer.
Jim (71)

Jim had lived for the majority of his life in the local area. He lived with his second wife and had four children, two by his first marriage (He was the father of Simon). He described his early childhood as being difficult, not only because of financial hardships, but also because of the war and the early death of his mother which meant that his father had to raise the family single handed. Jim had been an active member of the tennis club for many years and was considered one of the of its influential members, because of the amount of time he spent there.

Albert (71)

I have known Albert for a long time, not only through the club but through the family friends and relatives. As an older member of the club he was well known and generally popular among the other members. He had lived in the area for most of his life, apart from a short period abroad and in the South West of England. He had at one stage worked for several years at the mill. For the latter part of his working life, Albert had worked as a manager for a local export firm. He had chosen to retire in the area, more for his wife who wanted to be near her children and grandchildren. The interview was conducted at Albert’s home. Like nearly all the members of the straight tennis club, Albert lived within walking distance of the grounds. This contrasts to the other clubs, where many members lived several miles from the club.

Clive (53)

Clive was another more recent member of the tennis club, although he had played football for the works team for many years. Clive was similar to many other members of the tennis
club who had taken part in football in their early adult life and had continued to play as long as they could. Tennis was taken up as an alternative sporting practice as injuries had restricted Clive's participation in football. In this case, knee surgery.

Clive had moved to the area from London with his wife after they married. He had been employed ever since for a local packing firm where he had risen to a middle management position. Clive had two grown up children who had both left home. Sport was considered an important personal leisure space for Clive.

David (43)

David was born locally and had spent all his life in the area apart from brief periods at University and early employment. At the time of the research he lived in a rural area just outside of the town with his long-term partner and two sons (aged 7 and 5) and worked for a computer company.

Sport had played an important part in his life, but not in any serious, competitive nature, rather that of pleasure associated with leisure time.

In later life, David has attempted to maintain his fitness and specifically his body weight. This was a conscious decision about his body. David had not been playing as much sport as he would have liked to in recent months owing to a hip injury which had been restricting his mobility. As such he had not taken part in many recent matches. The interview was conducted while he re-strung my racquet. David had his own stringing machine and was the main (only) racquet stringer at the club.

Gary (39)

I have known Gary for quite some time and, although he had not been an active member at the straight club, he played tennis there on many occasions. As a child he had access to the
facilities at the sports club through his father who had worked for the mill for most of his working life. Gary was only a member of the club for a short period and I was interested to find out his reasons for not remaining. Gary was also gay, but had remained ‘outside’ of the gay scene. He lived for a period in London, but did not particularly like city living. He had also not wanted to become involved in a gay tennis club. Gary left school without any formal qualifications and had a succession of different jobs. In recent years he had set up his own business which had been successful. He told me about his hatred of his school experiences and how his strategy to ‘survive’ there was by maintaining an illicit relationship with one of the school ‘hard nuts’. School sport was seen as a time when the school thugs were able to be even more aggressive in a legitimate setting.

Simon (38)

Simon had been involved with the mill for most of his adult life. Directly through his work (he had a manual job on the factory floor since for over twenty five years) and through his father’s association with the club.

He had lived locally all of his life. He married in his early twenties and had two children. The marriage ended several years ago and he now subsequently married a woman who was a regular player at the tennis club. They shared their house with her two children by her previous marriage. Simon’s two children remained with their mother.

Sport had played a big part in Simon’s life. Apart from tennis, until his mid-thirties he played football for local teams, including the mill team. Until he stopped playing competitively, football tended to take priority over tennis, although for most of the time the two sports were seasonal. (Football occupying autumn, winter and spring and Tennis the summer) More recently, though, tennis has become his main focus.
Simon’s position in the club has remained that of the ‘golden boy’ of the club. Throughout my association with the club he had always been referred to as the ‘best’ in the club. Not only through his sporting ability as the ‘best player’ but in his position in the club as captain of the men’s first team. His physical appearance (blond and athletic) had also played a contributing factor. He was a popular figure with the men as well as the women. Having also established links initially through his father and then through work and the various sports teams, Simon had managed to develop a wide social network based around the club and the local area.

Andrew (35)

Andrew lived locally with his wife and two daughters. He had participated at the club on and off for many years. As a full time tennis coach and fitness instructor, Andrew also worked in a number of sporting clubs in the area. With the nature of tennis coaching work in the area, he often had to move round to where the work was. This meant occasional work outside of tennis, such as the odd spell working as a taxi driver.

I had known Andrew previously, mainly through his associations with various tennis clubs. I had played against him before, but never considered that I knew him well.

Shaun (32)

Shaun had lived in the area for all his life apart from one brief period spent in Australia as part of a year travelling in his early twenties. Both his parents were hairdressers and he spent his childhood with them and his younger sister (by three years). His childhood was considered relatively uneventful. School was not a problem, although he did not consider himself academic and left school as soon as he was able. He had the choice of hairdressing or catering, but opted for hairdressing as it did not entail any further study. School, for
him, was something which had to be done but was managed in the easiest way possible. Distractions and strategies for alleviating the boredom at school were daydreaming and playing sport (mainly football) at any opportunity.

He had been introduced to tennis by his mother, who was a keen spectator, but not a player. Playing for him had been at a modest standard generally with other friends. Only in more recent years had he joined an organized club. He considered himself average as a player but not good. He was also reluctant to take part in club league matches as he felt he would not like a lot of the things associated with them, particularly aspects related to ability and class. His only previous experience appeared to have fulfilled his expectations. Recently Shaun had also taken up visiting a local gym on a regular basis and acknowledged a greater awareness of his body.

Toby (19)

Toby had recently joined the club along with his father and older brother (20). He had only just moved to the area after spending all of his childhood in another county where his father worked.

Toby took a more active role in the club as he continued to study at a Further Education college in the local area. His brother was away at University for much of the time. Toby had shown an interest in playing in team matches and had played a lot as a junior in Essex. Toby was the only member of the tennis club within the 18 – 25 age range.

Gay Tennis Club

Fraser (52)

Fraser was brought up with his younger brother and sister by his father and mother in Scotland. His father was a doctor while his mother was a housewife. His background could
be described as prosperous and upper middle-class. He attended private schools for all his education. His father was head of the household in every respect and occupied a dominant role. Family life appeared to adopt an almost Victorian muscular Christian ethos.

According to Frasier, his father was rugged and dogmatic while his mother took a background role in the household. Outdoor pursuits, sport and physical activity were promoted as the norm. The children were expected to take part. Fraser was introduced to sport at a young age. They were all successful in their pursuits. His sister won a gold medal at the Commonwealth games for Scotland and even represented the UK at the Olympic Games. Fraser was tall as a youngster and because of this was pushed into rugby, although he did not particularly like the game. Because of his height and ability at sport, he had no ‘problems’ at school.

At the time of the research, he held a senior position in a local authority personnel directorate.

Keith (46)

Keith was born in the north of England and lived there with his father and mother and two brothers (one older, the other younger). He had stayed there until he finished secondary schooling. After University, Keith had a period spent in Egypt and then returned to England where he obtained employment in London and settled. I interviewed Keith at his flat in London. Keith had been a member of the gay tennis club since the mid eighties and had joined the gay club used in this research when it was first set up. Keith continued to maintain links with both clubs. As one of the established members of the club he had been affectionately given the nicknames of ‘Ann Jones’ and the ‘Duchess of Kent’, the latter being used to good effect when he presented the prizes at an internal tournament.

At the time of the interview, Keith was working as a civil servant.
Rob (40)

Rob was raised in the Midlands and lived with his parents and five other siblings. He was the eldest of the children. His father was English and his mother was Sicilian. Sport was a major activity for him during his early life and at school. His father played a lot of football and at one stage his parents had rented a house from the local football team. His father continued his participation in football until he was about forty. Rob took part in football and rugby at school and occasionally played tennis with his brothers. He told me that he was aware of his sexuality at an early age which, combined with an early onset of puberty, contributed to an early awareness of his body. He consciously masked his sexuality and was able to do so through his abilities at sport, particularly in rugby where he played in the position of winger. Sport had remained an important aspect in his life, and was more recently seen as a means to maintain his body and to also present it in a favourable light to other men.

Matthew (38)

Matthew was born in southern England and lived with his father, mother and two younger brothers. They lived there until Matthew's early teens when they moved to Manchester. Matthew had a stormy relationship with his father, who was an actor. He resented that he was constantly away from home and felt embarrassed by his theatrical behaviour which was in direct contrast to the fathers of his school friends.

He was competitive with his brothers and consciously made an effort to carve out his own identity. Even to the extent of joining a different tennis club to his mother and brothers.
Matthew dropped out of University before completing the course and had a number of jobs in varying forms of junior management. He was currently working for a recruitment agency, but had also taken up tennis umpiring on a part-time basis. His mother introduced him to tennis as a child and it has been his main sport throughout. He was aware of his sexuality at an early age, but this did not cause any problems at school as he was physically tall and strong and part of the ‘popular’ group at school. He managed his sexuality by passing as ‘straight’ (playing sports and having girlfriends) until he left for University, where he immediately came out as gay. In later years he reconciled with his father, whom it emerged had also been gay.

Tony (37)

Tony was raised in Scotland and was one of six children. He had spent his childhood on a large estate and attended a local comprehensive. Home and school life had not been particularly enjoyable and he had made an effort to leave home soon after leaving school. Sport had not played a major part in his childhood. It was associated with school and rough competitive behaviour and also allegiances to specific football teams. He had taken up tennis when he moved to London and discovered the Sunday morning gay tennis group. He initially took part in the larger gay tennis group, but did not find that as enjoyable and had more recently attended rarely. Tony was a school teacher.

Paul (34)

Paul had been brought up in London by his parents who worked locally. He had and elder brother who he considered to be a bit of a ‘lad’ whereas he felt that he was more sensitive as a child. He claimed that he had been aware of his sexuality as a child and had struggled
to keep it hidden, especially in the face of potentially adverse reactions from his family, notably his brother.

He had enjoyed sporting activities with his friends, but had not experienced school life and organized sport favourably. Tennis was taken up in adult life and previously his only experience of organized tennis had been through the gay tennis club. It was here that he met his current partner (Peter below). Paul worked for a local government planning department.

Peter (33)

Peter was raised in the South of England. His father was a market trader and his mother a housewife. His father was, according to Peter, ‘attractive’ and physically strong. He was a member of the city swimming team and a football coach. Peter had a brother who was a couple of years younger. Sport accounted for a large part of their lives as children and was encouraged by their parents. Peter swam as a youngster and his brother took part in football. He told me that he was aware of presenting masculinity as a child and was able to ‘pass’ in the expected way without any problem because of his strong physique and sporting ability. He did not like football as much, preferring swimming and later tennis. He was also aware of his body at an early age and the need to spend time perfecting it. This became even more important when he moved to London as a teenager for university. During this period of his life he started regular gym training from then on. He felt a need to be seen to be attractive, equating that with being interesting to others and desirable. Peter took up tennis again in his twenties, joining the gay tennis club for social reasons and eventually met his partner there. They joined a straight tennis club together in order to play more tennis. Peter liked the social side of the gay tennis club, but was also aware that his
ability to move within these social circles with ease because of his physical attractiveness and playing ability. Peter had worked for several years for a non government organisation.

Marco (32)
Marco was born in Italy but was brought to England at an early age where he has lived ever since. His father is Italian and his mother is English. He has one older brother by two years. Marco attended a private school in South London where he remembers being confident and taking part in many activities. Although he considered himself 'fat' as a boy, he was heavily involved in school sports, particularly swimming. He remembered being teased in terms of his weight, but did not consider it as serious. The negative sides of teasing were displaced by the esteem gained from successes in the swim team. Marco’s brother was also at the school and was also gay. He was quite open about it in comparison to Marco, who did not come out until he went to University. Marco played competitive tennis whilst at school, but did not take it up again seriously until his late twenties when he joined the gay tennis club. Since then he has taken an active role in the club and become part of the committee. Marco was working at the time of the interview as a freelance business consultant.

Gareth 29
The interview with Gareth was conducted after we had played a tennis ladder match. Gareth had been quite keen to play as he did not usually get the chance to play me. There was a relaxed atmosphere during the match and afterwards we returned to Gareth’s home where the interview was conducted. Gareth was brought up in working class area in Wales with his mother, father and one older brother. Sport was a big part of the household and school. His brother was more successful in sport (particularly rugby) and had represented
Wales at junior level. Gareth was aware of himself as 'slightly camp' and although he considered himself 'unmanly' in comparison to his brother he had always enjoyed sport, particularly athletics, and remained an active participant. His own understanding of masculinity was related to decisiveness, which he felt applied to him. His interest in aerobics and tennis was developed after school and was an area where he felt more comfortable in comparison to other team sports such as football. At the time of the interview, Gareth was working for a TV listings magazine where he did sub-editing.

Jamie (26)
Jamie had been raised in the West Country in an isolated rural community. He had been adopted at an early age and was the only child of his adoptive parents. He had had to amuse and entertain himself and had few close friends. School had been an ordeal for him in that he had middle-class parents who could not afford to send him to private school, so he had to attend the local schools where he was subjected to ridicule for being 'different' in terms of his accent and manners. He was also quite effeminate, which he readily admitted to, and hated any group or team activities. Secondary school was even worse for the same reasons. He suffered severe bouts of depression and needed periods of psychiatric counselling. Sixth form life was more tolerable and a place where he could felt he could adapt better. He was able to pursue English, which he enjoyed and continued this at university where he found himself becoming popular because he was considered trendy as a result of his interest in fashion. He had hated sport during his childhood and not felt a part of it, although he was a keen follower of tennis and ice-skating. At the time of the interview, Jamie was working as a sales assistant.
To overcome the initial obstacles encountered by the general perception of research amongst the population at large, I 'legitimated' my research in the minds of my sample in a number of ways. I already had some claim to the field I was exploring and I exploited the contacts that I had made over several years. Skeggs (1997) drew upon her working class background and associations with other women she was teaching over a period of time. I had become a familiar face, or may have been known through association with others, such as friends, relatives or team-mates. I did not have the problem of being an 'outsider' as I had some 'claim' on the local area through relations, friends, being a resident or having local knowledge. All of these provided a way of overcoming the initial problems in gaining the confidence of the members of the clubs, particularly in introductions and arranging interviews.

There are limitations in terms of the scale of research sample, mainly the geographical area from which the sample is drawn and a potential criticism that I am not specifically targeting ethnicity and class. However, I feel I overcome these by highlighting the way in which the everyday bodily practices of the men are influenced more by the contemporary and historical location of the individual and that a general social approach to the body and masculinity is available to all members of contemporary western society. My aim was to be ethnographic in as much as it purports to be a method of recording accounts, or life histories in the manner of Connell (1995), of people within their own communities.
Data collection and management

I wanted a sense of purpose and structure to the interviews and observations. I did not want to have to record endless conversations in the hope that relevant material would emerge at some stage. Strauss (1987) suggests that grounded theory is

- detailed grounding by systematically and intensively analysing data, often sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase of the field note, interview or other document; by constant comparison, data are extensively collected and coded.

(Strauss 1987 page 22)

However, I was not obsessed with the idea of classifying and coding everything in sight. I wanted to be selective about the information I gathered by specifically focusing on the main aims of the research. As Strauss suggests

- The focus of analysis is not merely collecting or ordering a mass of data, but organising many ideas which have emerged from analysis of the data.

(Strauss 1987 page 22)

I initially set out to raise ‘generative questions’ (Strauss 1987) and through the collection of data, I attempted to uncover theories within the material and then sought to verify them. This was, however, not to forsake the rich material which could be gained from dramaturgical approaches, such as that of Goffman (1968, 1972). To an extent, my observations incorporated these methods more and informed the interview process. By examining the accounts of a variety of men and observing them in aspects of their everyday lives, I expected them to tell me stories about their worlds and reveal the explicit
meanings which they formulate about themselves. Comparison and verification of accounts of men with other men provided the opportunity to assess whether their understandings of the body presented similar or contrasting themes and whether there was in fact a range of masculinities available to them.

During the whole research period at the tennis clubs and the health club, I made notes and kept a research diary. I wanted the diary to record not only observations made during the fieldwork but also my own feelings during the research period. Hammersley and Atkinson suggest two reasons for including personal experiences

In the first place, our feelings enter into and colour the social relationships we engage in during the fieldwork. Second, such personal and subjective responses will inevitably influence one's choice of what is noteworthy, what is regarded as strange and problematic, and what appears to be mundane and obvious.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 page 192)

In my research diary I was able to record feelings which I had not considered or expected at the start of the research. For example, I had not taken fully into account the competitive nature of the tennis clubs. During one period, at the end of the first year of the research, I had taken part in a series of league matches, singles ladder matches and gay tennis tournaments and found that the experience had been exhausting, both physically and emotionally. In my diary, I described how I felt that I had become more competitive myself and this in turn had taken away much of the enjoyment of taking part. These reflections could be seen to influence the direction of the research in that it made me consider the nature of competitiveness as a factor in the performance of hegemonic
masculinity and the relationship of homosexuality and mainstream sport within the context of a gay tennis club.

The interviews were taped and transcribed. In general, the interviews lasted between an hour and a half and two hours, although several did last longer. Where I had arranged to play a game of tennis with the men prior to the interview, the time spent with the men was on many occasions was more in the region of five to six hours. I would record notes of our meetings in my diary which would include observations of the events during the game, conversations and any comments about the interview. For the actual interviews, I did not feel the need to adopt the detailed and rigorous approaches used in discourse analysis as they were conducted as part of a broader ethnographic process where observations, conversations, reflections and experiences shaped the research. Methodical discourse analysis is more suited to research where the text or interview is the only source within the research. However, I needed to adopt a consistent approach to the transcription and adopted the guidelines used by Poland (1999) which are more in line with active research. The guidelines are as follows:

**Pauses**
- Indicated by a series of dots (…) Each dot representing half a second. Pauses of between 2-3 seconds are denoted by (pause) and breaks of more than 4 seconds by (long pause)

**Laughing**
- Indicated in parenthesis

**Coughing, etc.**
- Indicated in parenthesis, for example, (coughs),
Interruptions
When speech is broken off in mid-sentence, a
hyphen is used to indicate where interruption
occurred.

Overlapping
speech
Hyphen is used when one speaker interjects into the
speech of another. 'Overlapping' in parenthesis is
included to indicate where it occurs.

For example:
(A) He said that I should-
(B) (overlapping) Who, your brother?
(A) No, my dad

Unclear speech
Words or sentences that have not been understood,
but a guess has been made are indicated by square
brackets, with the word followed by a ? For
example, He managed to [bluff? fluff?] it
‘x’ s are used to denote words that cannot be
deciphered.
Groups of ‘x’ s indicate the number of words in the
sentence that cannot be deciphered, for example,

xxxxx xxx xxxxxx
Ethical Considerations

In their chapter on ethics, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that there are four contrasting positions which relate to ethical issues evident in ethnographic research. They range from those which argue that many forms of research strategy are illegitimate to those who consider ethical considerations irrelevant. Hammersley and Atkinson adopt a position which takes a middle ground in this debate and it is one which I support. What is important is the context of the research and, consequently, assessing the requirements of the research should be made whilst remaining alert to the dignity of those being studied.

Although I am making claims that I was an insider, in as much as I considered myself to have had similar shared social experiences to the other men, I still had to maintain ethical standards in the same way that any researcher would. To a certain extent, I could be accused of misrepresentation in that most of the men in the study considered me to be another member of the club. On most occasions they demonstrated little awareness of my research intentions and showed no apparent concern that I may have had ulterior motives for taking part in many of the social situations which we shared. However, in the three tennis clubs, I made no conscious effort to hide the fact that I was in the process of conducting research. Often, conversations would include discussions relating to the nature of employment and I would always make it known that I was a full time researcher. At the
start of the research, in each club, I attached a brief description of my research on notice boards in the club houses and in the case of the gay tennis club even included an item in the newsletter. Interestingly, I received little reaction to the notices and throughout the study my research activities were never considered problematic for the other members. There was more reaction from members of the gay tennis club whenever the research was mentioned in conversations which may reflect their greater awareness of issues relating to sexuality. As such I was able to provide feedback in a more productive way at the gay tennis club. For example, at one stage the gay tennis club committee was attempting to draft a mission statement and I offered to write an article for the club’s newsletter and provide a summary of some of my observations. Consequently, I was able to contribute in a productive way to some aspects of the club. In this case, I was able to highlight some of the issues at stake when establishing a gay tennis club, particularly the contrasting and sometimes conflicting experiences of the members who take part.

When I conducted the interviews, I made time to explain not only the intentions of the research but also describe the interview process. I assured each interviewee that I would maintain confidentiality by changing names and locations and also would not divulge anything which I felt could be considered incriminating in any way.

The health club provided different ethical issues to contend with as I intentionally remained anonymous to the other members. Because of this, there was the possibility that I could transcend the line of ethical integrity. However, I did make contact with the manager at the beginning of the research so that I could outline my intentions. At the same time, the health club was a public sphere and open to anyone who paid a membership fee which meant that it was a site that I could have attended even without the premise of research.
So, to a certain degree, I was not entirely in the same situation as a researcher infiltrating a site where there were more restrictive or formal barriers to contend with. During the observations, I consciously did not enter into conversations with the other members. As the club was large, this was not problematic and many other members would attend on their own, do their workout and leave. Although, during the time spent at the health club, I became aware of familiar faces and would occasionally acknowledge some of these with greetings, I did not know anyone by name or, subsequently, gain any information about their personal identities. The research conducted at the health club was intended for generalised observations and analysis only.

It could be claimed that I exploited the trust of those I came into contact with during the research. In terms of the health club, there was little possibility of trust being breached as I had not established relationships where trust could be considered as being breached. However, in the tennis clubs and particularly in the context of the interviews it is possible to suggest that I did exploit the men’s trust to a certain extent. This may be more so in the straight club where there was an element of deception in terms of my lack of declaration of issues in relation to sexuality. Apart from the aims of the research, my own personal reluctance to divulge my sexuality reflects the problematic nature of sexuality within society in general and in particular the setting of sport. However, this in turn, relates to broader political concerns which inform the research, namely that the prevailing social climate continues to differentiate between forms of sexuality. In this particular instance, I felt that the aims of the research justified my failure to be entirely open about all aspects of the study to the men in the straight club. As Hammersley and Atkinson suggest
Values often conflict, and their implications for what is legitimate and illegitimate in particular situations is, potentially at least, always a matter for reasonable dispute. There is also the problem of the uncertain validity of our factual knowledge about what the consequences of difference courses of action will and will not be, and thus about whether particular actions are likely to have undesirable effects.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 page 280)

In this particular case, I felt that disclosure of my own sexuality or revelations that sexuality was a theme in the research would have undesirable effects upon my subsequent interactions with the men and this would ultimately damage the whole research process.

In summary, I have attempted in this chapter to provide an indication of the processes through which this research was developed and put into practice. I described how I adopted what can be considered a broad realist position which incorporates aspects of feminist methodology, grounded theory and reflexive ethnography. This eclectic methodological approach was considered most appropriate for the pursuit of information and data which could be applied to the research aims.

I described how I located a research site and was then able to identify cases and samples for observation and interviews. This process entailed extensive participant observation and, consequently, provided access to a range of men for interviewing. The following chapters are, therefore, compiled from an analysis of the material gathered from the ethnography. The research produced a large amount of material and, subsequently, there
has been an editing process in order to remain faithful to the research questions identified at the beginning of this thesis. At the same time, the selection process was made in an attempt to provide a convincing story (Silverman 1989).
Chapter Three

The construction of exclusive masculine performances within the specific context of sport

In this chapter I set out to explore the ways in which sport operates as a significant site where hegemonic masculinity is both made and remade. Hegemonic masculinity is understood as being a contradictory formation of masculinities not all of which are hegemonic in all contexts and times, but which, together, combine ‘exemplary’ masculine qualities. The sporting version of this has currency off the playing field as well as on but obviously has particular value within sport.

I specifically focus on present and contemporary constructions of masculinity and examine this by drawing upon observations made whilst participating in the tennis clubs and the health club, described in chapter two. The observations were made primarily in the early stages of the research and establish the themes for further investigation into the body practices specifically related to masculinity and sexuality in later chapters. The broad social structures found within a site such as a tennis club provide the opportunity to assess the relationship between individual bodily performances and wider social constraints. For the purposes of this thesis, the aim is to explore whether specific body practices operate at the expense of other forms. For instance, in the straight tennis club I was able to observe the social conventions found within an organised sport in order to compare and contrast the social practices found in an alternative site, in this case, a gay tennis club.
I start this chapter by providing observations made at the straight tennis club. These descriptions were taken from field notes compiled throughout the research. The intention is to provide a picture of the social practices which were in operation at the club, specifically in relation to gender and bodily performances. It is here that I identify a range of techniques and practices located within a particular form of masculine performance, one that is clearly part of a wider hegemonic formation but which places particular emphasis on bodily performances, which I examine through specific examples. I then provide observations taken from the gay tennis club in order to investigate further some of the claims proposed. I conclude this chapter with further observations made at the health club as additional support for the arguments presented.

**Gendered performances at the straight tennis club**

The tennis club provided a range of contexts in which different versions of masculinity were enacted. Taking part in a tennis club, like many other sports clubs, entails encountering and accommodating a range of people of different ages, sex and playing ability. These encounters had to be negotiated both on and off the court and at varying levels. For instance, the expectations based upon playing ability were greater in a competitive league match in comparison to friendly games played during a club session. However, there were differing expectations depending upon whether a match or game was men only or mixed pairs. At the same time, off court social encounters had to be managed and practices both specifically related to tennis etiquette and broader social requirements needed to be managed by those who took part. Consequently, the observations at the tennis clubs provided the chance to explore the implications of these social encounters and the extent to which particular versions of masculinity were enacted and whether gender binaries were reinforced.
Throughout the summer season (May to September) the club held social tennis evenings, twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays. The intention was that all levels of players could come together to play each other in a relaxed and friendly setting. Playing games was organised by using a rotational format. Pairs (single sex or mixed) would play seven games and then come off court so that the next four could go on. Only doubles was played during these sessions as it was considered more sociable and allowed for greater use of the courts.

During these social tennis sessions, there was a concerted effort to 'balance' the games so that more able players, in terms of their tennis ability were not matched against weaker players. This was achieved either by selecting mixed sex teams or balancing good players with weaker ones. It was interesting that all members appeared to learn their position within the hierarchy of playing ability and there appeared little dissent. However, the attempts to balance the play on closer observation did not always conform solely to playing ability. In many ways the structure favoured the adult male players who were under the age of fifty. The next in line were the elderly men, followed by women and juniors. The men who played in the A team were considered the highest standard followed by the men's B team (the elderly men formed the mainstay of the B team). The women's A team was next, although there were two women who were able to play at a higher standard than most of the men in the B team. Consequently, most status was afforded to the men in the A team. This was continually acknowledged in the selection process for games when pairs were decided. I often heard, "You're much to good for us", or "You can take the three of us on by yourself" too an extent that some of the weaker players openly expressed embarrassment based on the belief that they would not be able to compete at the
same level and 'let the side down'. Often when there was an uneven balance of men and women, some of the weaker male players assumed the 'female' role in the pair. Often this happened in small internal, social tournaments when there were usually more men. The role was generally adopted without any complaint, but usually accompanied by some form of humour.

There were also 'unwritten' codes of behaviour when playing in these mixed (sex and ability) pairs. There was an expectation that the good male players would not try too hard which meant, for example, not hitting the ball too hard or directly at the woman, or not playing a drop shot or acute angle which would be felt to be too far out of the reach of the female opponent. Significantly, there was still an element of concession when men were playing with women of a high standard. Often, in a match situation, the man was automatically presumed to be the stronger player (although not necessarily the case in many pairings) and would always take the lead. Men were generally expected to play on the backhand side, as there was a belief that women would be less able to control a backhand in comparison to men as this stroke required greater strength in the wrist. Consequently, the woman was generally considered the 'weak link' in a mixed pairing, which meant that they could be exploited by opposing pairs. To cover for this, the man was expected to take most of the balls, run for the ball more and generally be more aggressive. The implication was that, even in the context of an informal tennis game, a gender binary was reproduced in which women were constructed as less able, weaker or less able to lead. I noticed how this understanding of gender roles was rarely questioned and women players would also discuss other female opponents in the same manner.
There was only one noticeable occasion when the gender balance was challenged. This occurred in the early stages of the research, when a female player, Sonia, joined the club for a short period. She was an extremely good player, competitive in her play, but also good-natured. She made a point of adopting an attacking style of play and rushed to the net at any opportunity. She was also extremely fit and had started competitive weight lifting. In terms of the club and the teams, she was an ideal player to have, but she found it difficult to break into the club socially. The other women did not like her aggressive play, whereas many of the men also felt threatened by her play and did not want to include her in their match practice. She eventually left to concentrate on the weight lifting. The example demonstrates how established social codes prevailed which in turn regulated the interactions of the players. These were produced within the context of sporting conventions as well as broader social discourses of gender. At the same time, disruptions to the established practices needed to be regulated. However, it could also be suggested that Sonia's bodily displays did present an opportunity to challenge some of the prevailing social attitudes of normative gender performance. Although they were short-lived, the ability to contest established understandings of normative gender practices which Butler (1993) and Bourdieu (2001) are critical of, is an important aspect and one which I explore further in chapter five.

Within the setting of the straight tennis club it was thus apparent that there was an established gender order and as a result of which much of the social interaction needed to be adapted according to the specific gender context. As I mentioned in chapter two, I made a point of maintaining a diary of my experiences throughout the research. After attending one club social tennis evening, I made the following entry in my diary
The sports club is to an extent smothered by social etiquette. The mixed sex setting promotes the need for the men to curb their behaviour and become aware of the opposite sex and, consequently, curb their bodily behaviour and language.

(Diary entry 13 June 2001)

The observation that the men needed to curb their behaviour in the presence of women was made after comparing their conduct in male only settings, particularly in the men’s league matches. The contrast between the social, mixed sex setting of the tennis club night and a men’s competitive team match was apparent. However, even in the setting of the mixed club sessions, every effort was made to make sure that there would be time when men could play together. The women would acknowledge their position within the club by endorsing such a move. It was almost as if a men’s four was reward for putting up with the women during the evening. Often I heard, ‘you deserve a men’s four’ suggested by one of the women. The implication being that the men needed some form of outlet to let steam off after having to curb their behaviour during the mixed games or a reward for putting up with inferior players. Much of the curbing of behaviour related to moderating bodily actions. Within the setting of an all male game, it was accepted that more excessive physical behaviour would be tolerated in comparison to mixed sex games. I made a point of watching the bodily performances of several men playing in mixed games and then compared their actions with all male games. There was a noticeable contrast. In the all male games, they became more physical and animated. They would chase the ball more, attempt to hit the ball harder and appeared more determined in their approach to the game. Winning appeared more significant than in the mixed game, although the performance in attempting to win was just as important. For instance, a ball hit extremely hard and
produced through great outward exertion by the player, whether a winning shot or not, received admiration from other players.

The contrast between the mixed sessions held during club social nights and all male games was even more noticeable in the context of competitive matches with other clubs in the area. The club took part in a series of league matches, both home and away against teams in their division. There were many clubs in the area with differing levels of membership, facilities and standards. I was able to take part in the men’s A team which played in both a summer and winter league. During these matches it was interesting to note how the focus shifted from the dynamics of internal club relations to that of a united club taking on an opponent. On many occasions, there were tensions between the opposing clubs based upon previous rivalries. Some of the other clubs had large memberships and better facilities. Many were extremely middle-class in terms of both their geographical location and members. This would often create an added air of competition for the fixtures. I noticed on these occasions that the men playing for my team placed great significance on winning convincingly, as if they had something to prove. The extent to which the historical background of the straight tennis club as a working men’s sports club placed greater emphasis upon class divisions is debatable, however, my impression was that it provided an initial sense of rivalry which appeared to be part of the match process. At the same time, many of the observations provided evidence for the contrasting gendered performances, particularly if taking into account whether the match was all male or mixed. The following is an example

Opponents quite aggressive during the game. Although extremely gracious in defeat.

Pleasant atmosphere after game.
During match noticed many times that other men used feminine forms to describe a bad shot. For instance, 'you big girl', 'you woman', 'twat' were all used on more than one occasion.

(Diary entry, 8 May 2001 Men's match against B....)

The all male environment in the matches enabled the men to relax their behaviour in contrast to situations where women were involved. They were able to be more competitive and aggressive during the match and this included being more physical in the game itself. For example, it was acceptable to hit the ball harder or even directly at the opponent. Sometimes the games would become more confrontational, with questioned line calls and arguments. Admonishing oneself was also a regular aspect during the game. It was interesting that if the remarks were not swearwords, they would often be descriptions of the feminine. Therefore, a bad shot was equated with a failed performance and constructed in terms of subordinate gender.

Exclusive Masculinity

In the social arena of sport it is clear that the body plays a central role in determining who the appropriate participants should be. But this is not solely based upon the actual physical ability to perform movements related to the specific sporting event. Bodily performance provides a means of demonstrating other normative social requirements which relate to the prevalent codes of gender and sexual identity. Although I am focusing upon examples taken within a sporting context, it is clear that the men I observed and interviewed also performed gender and sexuality outside the sporting arena. However, by focusing upon the centrality of the body in sporting social practices, I have been able to observe a form of
what I have termed 'exclusive masculinity' which is expressed through bodily displays or performances. These bodily displays signal to the opponent or spectator a particular version of masculinity based upon aggressiveness, competitiveness, power and assertiveness. Body practices also present maleness as a performance which is understood in terms of being diametrically opposite to femininity. These constructed understandings of gender appear even more significant when taking into account the value placed upon bodily presentation on the sports field where social activity is established upon principles such as competition, winning and overcoming opponents. The formulation of normative masculinity as superior to femininity and the practice of sport as a male social space create the (false) need for more obvious outward performances by those who wish to participate. This is particularly evident in the displays of the body which act as a central means through which exclusive masculine identity can be established and maintained.

However, it is important to make it clear that this form of masculinity, located as it is in body practices, is not based solely upon physical build or biological sex. Exclusive masculinity can be understood as a version of hegemonic masculinity in that it involves the subordination of competing forms of masculinity as well as femininities. However, what distinguishes it from versions of masculinity hegemonic in other constructs, for example the patriarch or the corporate leader, is the strong emphasis placed on bodily performance. Exclusive masculinity is expressed through particular types of bodily performance which derive from traditional forms of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, especially where investment in the male physical body has been valued. This is particularly evident in sport, where the body becomes even more significant and specific displays are considered important. Greater value is placed upon displays of strength, skill and often aggression. In consequence, bodily performances which equate with weakness or
inability are considered inferior. However, it is the performance of the body which is exclusive, not necessarily the social category, such as gender or age. Although these play a role, it is the bodily performance which provides the central focus. For example, in an elite sport such as professional tennis, two current highly ranked players in the men’s and women’s events, (Lleyton Hewitt and Serena Williams) although being physically small (Hewitt) and female (Williams), both display exaggerated versions of aggressive masculinity through their on court manner. They strut about the court, pump their clenched fists and act aggressively towards their opponents. In the same way, a wheelchair user, although disadvantaged in comparison to an able bodied athlete can still perform exclusive masculinity in the same manner and, consequently, reinforce the discriminatory practices found in organised sport, in particular those which constantly position hegemonic male bodily performances as exemplary. However, at the same time, evidence which supports the presence of exclusive masculinity, raises interesting questions about the extent to which masculinity is threatened or subverted when it is performed by women, gay men, lesbians or the disabled.

With this in mind, I have provided some examples from the research in order to explore exclusive masculinity and assess the relationship of the body to performances of masculinity. Exclusive masculinity is not all about excessive displays of physical aggression. It is sometimes expressed in more subtle forms and can be understood in terms of a form of masculine ‘character’ displayed through bodily performance. The following examples are taken from the field-notes written during my participation at the straight tennis club. The first example is Toby, a younger and more recent member of the club. I had initially selected Toby as a potential interviewee mainly because of his age (eighteen) and because there were few others of his age at the club. I have noticed in many tennis
clubs that there is often a shortage of players aged between eighteen and twenty five.
There may be several reasons for this. The most likely is related to the fact that players often take part as juniors but then lose interest when they begin employment or university. In the case of the straight tennis club, many of the younger men either took part in football or gave up organized sports in favour of drinking and clubbing. There were also many instances of older juniors (those aged between 13 and 16) facing resistance from senior members when they attempted to take part in general adult social tennis activities.

The second example is based on observations of two older men (in their fifties) which specifically explores their physical performances at play. I chose these men to provide a contrast in age but also to demonstrate how exclusive masculinity occurs, not only in men of contrasting ages but at differing social and competitive levels.

Performances of exclusive masculinity
I had arranged to play Toby and conduct an interview afterwards. He had joined the tennis club in the previous year with his father and older brother. They had moved to the area from another part of the country. Toby was currently taking a sports science course at a Further Education college and his brother was away at university for most of the year. Toby had taken a more active part in the club as he was still residing and studying in the area and had expressed an interest in becoming involved with one of the teams and playing competitive matches.

I had approached him initially to play a friendly game as a way of breaking the ice. As I had taken over running one of the teams, I knew he would be fairly keen to get in my 'good books' and was quite willing to take part in an interview when I suggested it. I was
aware that I had a ‘status’ within the club, not only as an active member with a moderate amount of power in the sense that I could choose other team players, but also I was recognised as having tennis ability or sporting capital, which was seen as an ‘asset’ to the club.

When I initially met Toby, he was extremely quiet. Often he would attend the club with his father and brother and they would play on their own. I thought it would be useful to have a few ‘friendly’ games with him before I attempted an interview. The first time we played, I asked if he would be willing to take part in my research. I explained the research in terms of an investigation into sport and participation. It appeared that Toby seemed to understand my research as more of an extended project similar to one that an ‘A’ level or undergraduate student would conduct. This was highlighted when we played tennis the following week, with the intention to conduct the interview after the game. We were just about to go into the tennis hut and do the interview when his mother appeared, earlier than expected, to give him a lift home. He was apologetic, but I said we could do it another time, as I did not want him to feel rushed. At this he suggested that he could take the questions home and fill them in there. I often experienced this response from my ‘A’ level students when I was teaching. They were accustomed to interviews and questionnaires as a regular part of their everyday lives, but in the form of consumer led market or opinion surveys. Because of this it appeared that Toby was doing the interview for me as a favour, but also with the knowledge that he did have something to gain from it.

The relationship I developed with Toby also highlighted the nature of co-construction within the research process. I was more aware of this during my interactions with Toby which, I think, related more to my awareness of our age differences, along with the
disparity in other forms of cultural capital in contrast to the relationships with the other men in both clubs. I was also aware, more than any of the other interviews, of the possibility that I could potentially exploit this position. Therefore, in terms of the research process, during my conversations with Toby, I felt a greater need to diffuse some of the more apparent differences. The status which I held at the club also extended to the initial relationship I had with Toby, in that there was also a pressure on him to impress me. In this social environment, I was considered an established ‘player’ and an accepted member of the club whereas Toby needed to acquire some status among the other members. At the same time there was a need for Toby to ‘prove’ himself to me as a ‘sporting’ male. His performance on the tennis court would not only provide evidence to me that he was a good player, but more importantly, his performance would also demonstrate his ‘worth’ in the club to others and at the same time affirm his masculinity to himself as well as me. This was also not to ignore the status I had to maintain within this particular social setting. I was aware that I had to prove myself to Toby in a number of ways as my understanding of my position within our relationship needed to be demonstrated in some way. The initial circumstance of our social relationship was built on common ground, based upon being male and taking part in sport. Diffusing or downplaying the other more contrasting areas of our lives created a greater emphasis upon sport and masculinity. To an extent, then, in my performances to Toby, I was aware of my own contribution to the reproduction of exclusive masculinity as I was attempting to engage socially with him through existing understandings of ‘appropriate’ masculine behaviour within the arena of sport.

Playing a game of tennis, as well as providing a useful method to observe at first hand bodily performance and expressions of masculinities, also helped diffuse some social
barriers mentioned above. However, two men meeting for the first time to engage in a competitive situation presented other potential social problems to negotiate. The very fact that the encounter would result in a winner or loser was problematic for each player and there were 'learnt' or expected ways to display winning or losing. At the same time there was also the possibility of risking some form of devaluation of personal masculine identity. Winning is constructed as an indication of being athletic, successful, and proficient in sport; which in turn signals, within hegemonic masculine discourses, the mark of a 'real' man. There is also greater social status associated with physical prowess in men, particularly in sport and it has been my experience that these displays are demonstrated early, but in a range of ways.

In my initial games with Toby there were many times when he was quite concerned about displaying particular characteristics which would prove to me his 'worth' as a potential team member and, importantly, his ability to be one of the 'men'. During the initial 'knock-up' Toby would often apologise when he failed to return the ball to me at an appropriate length or if he hit the ball out. In this situation it was not only playing ability that was on the line, but also general 'masculine' performance on the court which would provide evidence of 'character'. In our game, although I was a stronger player, Toby was keen to run down every ball, to the extent that he fell over on several occasions. He would shout to himself and berate himself loudly if he did not get to a ball he felt he should have. For Toby, losing the match was not as important as providing evidence to me that he possessed the characteristics to be included in the realm of male sport. As I mentioned before, I was aware of being, to an extent, part of the established male sport arena and how Toby was keen to display the characteristics necessary to become a bona fide member of this club.
Tennis may be considered less aggressive than team sports such as football and rugby as it is a non contact sport, but at the same time, I have observed many displays of physical 'masculine posturing' on the tennis court and in the health club. For example, this posturing is often expressed by throwing the racquet or physical gestures such as a clenched fist after hitting a winning shot. It is also something which was in evidence among the men in both the straight and gay clubs, regardless of age. Even with the onset of age, it appeared that it was often difficult for the men to change habits developed through a lifetime of sporting practice. In the straight club the average age of membership was well into middle age.

An example of age in relation to the performance of exclusive masculinity can be seen in two members, Clive and Roger, who were both in their fifties and had taken up tennis later in their lives. Football had been their main sport during their younger days and had continued at various levels until their forties. The physical nature of the sport had taken its toll and as a result Clive had had to stop playing football after undergoing an operation on his damaged knee. Tennis was taken up as he considered it an active sport, but held less risk of incurring further injury to his knee through the continuous barrage of knocks received when tackled by opponents in a game of football. Clive was still extremely fit and was able to play tennis to a reasonable standard to the extent that he was, in a short period of time, playing for the 'B' team. Roger did not take part in the club as much as Clive but for several years had played tennis (with Clive) on a regular basis. They had originally started playing tennis on Thursday nights throughout the year as this was generally football match practice night and both Clive and Roger previously attended this when they were playing for the football team. Playing tennis on Thursday meant that they could have
a drink afterwards in the main clubhouse bar and keep in touch with the other members of the football team.

If asked about their playing standard and their reasons for taking part, both would readily acknowledge their lack of skill in tennis and would see playing the game as a small, but important, social aspect of their lives. It was their time, away from work, their wives and families and a time for pleasure as opposed to duty. Their enthusiasm was demonstrated by their willingness to play in all forms of weather throughout the year. At the straight club, Clive and Roger were not the exception, and from my experiences in other clubs around the country, groups of people would play regularly in all weathers.

The irony was that when it came to actually playing the game, the outward signs that Clive and Roger exhibited suggest that they were not enjoying their experiences. To the observer there was evidence to suggest that the game was more of an ordeal as the men were constantly mumbling, gesturing, grimacing and often swearing. The general malaise was also often expressed physically though the body by the slapping of the thighs, hanging the head and even throwing racquets. Animosity was not usually directed towards the opponent, but appeared to be directed inwardly. During the game there was constant admonishing of their performance and often audible conversations with themselves in the form of reprimanding or goading, presumably in order to spur them back into action.

Apart from the physical act of playing a game of tennis, there was much more at stake, even in the context of a social game between friends, where on the surface there would appear to be little at stake. However, even a game at this level demonstrates the importance placed upon bodily performance as an indication of an individual’s sense of
masculine worth. At the same time it presents an external expression of social character to others. Performing well (whatever the level) is an important part in the construction and presentation of masculine identity. In this case, Clive and Roger provided clear indications that they enjoyed the physical experience of their bodies during sport. Clive told me how he got a 'buzz' from the physical sensation of running around on the tennis court in the same way that he did when he used to play football. This was a reason why he continued to take part in sports. However, the enjoyment of being able to experience the thrill of one's own physicality is displaced by the awareness of one's performance provided a social signification of masculine worth. The discourses operating in sporting competitiveness and hegemonic masculinity locate the physical experience within a social context and produce a need to justify one's performance both during and after the game. During the game, as I have shown, such justifications take the form of an outwardly, physical display whilst, in the bar afterwards, there is a post match analysis of the performance. Post match analysis of sporting performances provides the opportunity to account for any poor showing in terms of an aberration. Mike Emmison (1988) conducted a study of post match accounts of defeat by professional sportsmen and found that part of the social process for justifying a loss was to provide an explanation (or excuse) which would, in turn, create an understanding of the event as an one off occurrence.

I noticed a contrast to the on court performances of the men described above when watching a match between two teenage girls at the same club a few days later. The two girls were playing an organized match as part of a knockout tournament run in conjunction with the county Lawn Tennis Association (LTA). The competitive element was there in the very nature of the organized match where the winner would progress to the next round. However, the relationship between the two players, who had never met before, was
conducted in a spirit of mutual enjoyment and respect. There were no outwardly signs of trying to prove one's sexual identity and status. The girls laughed and joked before and after the game and spoke to each other between points and games. Although this is only a one off observation and detailed study of women who take part in sport was not part of the overall research, I feel that it highlights the importance placed by men on performing masculinity in a specific social context. I am not suggesting the girls behaved in a typical manner. As I have mentioned above, performing exclusive masculinity is not merely confined to men, although I would expect it to be a practice more prevalent for women in professional sport, rather than at an amateur level, where less emphasis is placed upon competitiveness and body performances. The important point is to recognise the role of the body and gender within these social spaces. The two teenage girls did not have to conform to the pressures of hegemonic masculinity in the way the men do when taking part in sport.

As the above examples demonstrate, 'exclusive masculinity' can be understood as a particular assemblage of bodily performances which are located in a formation of hegemonic masculine practices. However, although exclusive masculinity operates within the specific context of sport, it can still be performed both on and off the playing field. As such, I have included observations from the research revealing more subtle ways in which exclusive masculinity is performed.

**Exclusive masculine performances off court**

Hegemonic masculinity prevails at the expense of femininity and other versions of masculinity, which are considered a 'failed masculinity'. Exclusive masculinity operates in the same way in that bodily performances, which do not uphold the characteristics
expected, are also considered a form of failure and in the case of sporting participation, those who fail are literally confined to the sidelines.

Observations at the straight club revealed that, on court, failed masculinity was negotiated through performances of exclusive masculinity. However, off court activities also provided many opportunities for the men to have to negotiate masculinity and this was particularly the case in conversations where there was the possibility for areas outside the remit of sporting practice to emerge.

**Straight men talking together**

On court performances were revealing in terms of the emphasis placed upon bodily based actions. However, a central aspect of the taking part in a tennis match was the social activity taking place before and after the game. Much of this revolved around conversations between team players and opponents on the way to a match or in the bar or clubhouse afterwards. The social context of the match situation and whether the game was single sex or mixed often determined the nature of conversations and the performances the men enacted. Masculinity, therefore, could also be constructed through talk about sport and the bodily performances required in it. On nearly all occasions, post match conversations did not revolve around the game itself and although there may have been a sense of satisfaction in the result by the winning side there was a common courtesy (or sporting etiquette) which dictated that gloating was not acceptable. There was usually a summary of how the teams had been performing in their other matches which provided the opportunity to reassure the losing side that their defeat was not too detrimental to their overall performance in the league. For example

**Competitive match**
Toby's first match in team. He was the youngest and had wanted to prove himself. Conversations in clubhouse afterwards were polite and respectful, although main conversation was football.

There was sense of enjoyment in our team (as a result of winning) When opponents had left, our performances were reflected upon positively in terms of 'team' win.

(Diary entry, Feb 2001 Home match against M.....)

The main topic for conversation was sport in general. The common ground was usually football, although if there had been recent international sporting events, these would be included. On one occasion, there had been a high profile boxing match the night before and the post match conversation immediately started with comments about the fight. For some reason, one of the players from the home club mentioned that the referee in the boxing match was wearing gloves. He thought that it was ridiculous that gloves were worn. Upon hearing this, another player suggested that they were worn as a precaution in case the referee had to remove the gum-shield from a boxer knocked unconscious. The player who made the original comment added that the gloves were hardly likely to protect the referee from a bit of saliva when it was more likely that he would be sprayed by blood and sweat during the course of the bout. The aspersion appeared to be that contemporary boxing had got 'softer'. One of the men agreed and then mentioned that it was a sign of the times, adding that in the clubhouse changing rooms the communal baths for football players had been removed because of the risk of HIV. (The inference was based on ill informed views about potential sources of HIV transmission. One casualty of this paranoia was the suspension of the large communal baths used by footballers because of misplaced fears related to infected bodily fluids, such as blood and saliva, being transmitted in bath

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water.) There was a brief pause followed by what appeared to be a realisation among all the men that the conversation was moving from the safe area of sport towards the potentially awkward area of HIV and AIDS. The conversation quickly returned to a debate about whether Manchester United could continue winning in the next season.

The men appeared aware that issues relating to sexually transmitted diseases could be problematic for them. Their misinformed view that HIV was directly related to homosexuality and their reluctance to accommodate these issues within their conversations demonstrated how discourse created a shared knowledge which positioned heterosexual masculinity as normative. The absence or subordination of women and subordinated forms of masculinity within sport produced a subtle and less obvious form of heterosexual hegemony in comparison to explicit sexist and homophobic behaviour, such as the on-court expressions described above. What became apparent, however, was the requirement for a particular form of masculinity in order to take part in sport and this called upon both bodily and discursive performances.

Although there were different responses during the research process from the gay and straight men in relation to their willingness to freely disclose information about their bodies, there were other times when the men from the straight club were able to discuss more personal aspects of their lives. The research process involved taking an active part of all aspects of club activities. As such, the interviews were not the only means of gaining valuable data during the fieldwork. Being an active participant and member of the tennis club granted me access to many areas where I could observe, take part in conversations or just listen. In the straight tennis club I was included as a named player in the men's first team (or 'A' team) which meant playing in home and away fixtures in summer and winter
leagues. As I was also able to play for the mixed team, this provided great opportunities to compare and contrast my experiences of men only matches as well as mixed gender matches. For example, in relation to the focus upon the extent to which bodily practices were central to the enactment of heterosexual masculinity, one particular example is instructive.

Taking part in away matches meant there were often long periods spent in a car travelling to the opponents ground. On one occasion, four of us drove together to an away match. Jez drove and Simon sat in the front with him while I sat in the back with Toby. A few weeks previously Jez and Simon had been discussing the idea of having a vasectomy. The topic had arisen when the conversation had moved to talking about children. Jez had three children by two partners and Simon had two from a previous marriage and his current partner already had two children. The topic had continued throughout subsequent journeys to away matches and the intimate setting of a car provided the opportunity for regular updates as both men had decided to have the operation. On this particular journey to an away match, Jez had had the operation the previous week and Simon was about to have it the next day. The drive lasted about three quarters of an hour, but nearly all the journey was spent discussing the procedure. Jez was able to inform Simon what had happened to him and, importantly, how long it would be before he could play the next match. The conversation was light hearted in tone and each account was framed around or concluded with a joke, usually sexual in some form. There appeared to be good mileage in the sexual innuendo and both seemed quite keen to continue this as an aspect of the conversation. Seymour-Smith (2002) notes in her study of men with testicular cancer that formulaic responses often have a canonical flavour in that they describe a sense of the true nature of 'men' and play with what is already established.
References were made to the procedure during the actual operation and the embarrassment of having the doctor, whether male or female, and other health workers standing around the operating table while they were effectively powerless and at their mercy. There was a sense of indignity about being made to lie prostrate on a table with, as Jez remarked, one's 'willy out' and being literally exposed to others. Jez spoke of his embarrassment at having to lie on the table exposed whilst the doctor and nurses carried on their conversations. At one stage the nurse was having a conversation with him whilst he was having his groin manipulated. For both of them, there was a great amount of significance placed on being 'exposed' in a situation which they could not really control. The conversations appeared to suggest an anxiety about being powerless in this situation and a perception that this presented a potential threat to their masculine status.

Humour was employed as a means through which the conversation avoided taking on more serious tone or potentially uncomfortable direction. It provided a sense of mutual ironic understanding of the procedure. Their potential vulnerability and fear was diverted by the use of sexual innuendo and humour. Throughout all of this their bodies were a major source through which they recognized and demonstrated their masculinity, both to themselves and others.

The example highlights the way in which the body is incorporated in the construction of masculine identity in that it provides a means of presenting signs of individual social status to others. The example also demonstrates the ways in which the body can present social definitions of normative masculinity. Lying helpless on a table was a direct contrast to the
physical, heroic, exertions which could be presented on court. In both situations, however, it is the body which provides the focus for these definitions. Not only can the body provide the proof of masculinity through valorous performances, but it can betray it in situations where it is constructed as weak. The humorous tone during the conversations alleviated the problematic nature of potential powerlessness by placing emphasis on more light-hearted aspects of the procedure, which in turn presented the event as an aberration, in the same way that a defeat on court was accounted for.

The straight tennis club provided the chance to observe exclusive masculine practices in action within the context of a traditional sporting site. However, I wanted to compare these observations with a site where bodily performances were still a central aspect for participation but the social codes found in traditional sport would not at first impression appear an obvious factor. The relatively recent emergence of health and leisure clubs highlight an area within contemporary society where importance is placed upon the physical body, but not purely in terms of sporting performances. Consequently, a health club was a site where some aspects of masculinity were potentially challenged and provided opportunities to explore, not only further evidence of exclusive masculinity but also observe social situations where failed masculinity might emerge.

**Body performances in the health club**

As I explained in chapter two, I purposefully included observation in a large health club in order to provide additional examples of the centrality of the body in constructing our understanding of individual and social identity. At the same time, a different site provided an additional form of participant observation for methodological integrity and also meant that I could observe as a participant in a more covert way in comparison to my
participation at the tennis clubs. The health club I selected was located in a large town about fifteen miles away from the straight tennis club. I knew that none of the members of the tennis club belonged to the health club and because it was a large health club, with over three thousand members, I felt that I could be relatively anonymous. The health club was also part of a large chain of similar ones located throughout the country and membership entitled free access to all of them. During the course of the fieldwork, I attempted to visit several other locations in order to consolidate the observations made at the main site. As the health club was large, in space and membership, I was able to observe without drawing attention to myself. For example, I was able to use a stepping machine or cycle for sometimes up to half an hour and at the same time view nearly all of the gym floor space. During the first year I attempted to attend at various times throughout the day as I wanted to assess how people behaved in busy or relaxed times. In the second year, I attempted to attend on a regular basis at the same time so that I could observe the same people over a period of time. Throughout, I purposefully never spoke to anyone at length and although, after a period of time there were several people that I saw regularly, I only ventured as far as casual greetings. I did not make notes of the observation at the health club, but recorded them in the form of a research diary at home. I have used these notes to provide a description of some of the observations which I believe are relevant to the aims of the thesis.

On first impression one would think that a health club would be an obvious site where contemplation of the body is foremost in the minds of the participant. But it is through the way the individual performs and presents the body that social understandings of gendered bodily performance become most apparent.
The principal aim of the health club I observed was to establish a facility for both sexes and all ages in an attempt to capitalize on a broad and lucrative leisure market. However, the historical legacy of gym culture and sports has remained that of a male preserve. Indeed, even recent research has tended to focus upon the male bodybuilder (for example Fussell 1992, Klein 1993). Even though all the clubs that I identified as part of the research site were open to both sexes, there was still evidence of gender divisions. As such, there continued to be territorial gendered spaces within the gym. For example, the free weights area was predominantly occupied by men in comparison to areas such as the aerobics studio or beauty salon which tended to be used by women.

One aspect of the health club which revealed the complexities of body presentation and the social requirements for appropriate gendered behaviour was found in the changing room. As Probyn suggests

the locker room is one of the only legitimate spaces in which same-sex naked bodies parade in intimate anonymity. Protected by a welter of codes about how and where to look, nonetheless strangers dress and undress, wash themselves, lathering breasts and bums in close proximity.

(Probyn 2000 page 20)

The changing room, as Probyn points out, is one of the few social spaces where it is considered acceptable for same sexes to be naked together. However, this does not mean that each individual experiences nakedness in a similar way. Even though it is socially acceptable, experience of one’s own body and other bodies causes different forms of reflection and social display. Within the sporting context, a locker room represents a
specific location which occupies an almost mythological status. For instance, a sports commentator builds up a description of the atmosphere in the locker room in order to convey an air of intimacy and connection with the team. It is the preparation room prior to an event and the place where one returns immediately after a match, win or lose. But above all the men's locker room is regarded as a male preserve.

At the health club, there were changing rooms clearly identified by gender. The main difference in the male changing room at the health club I observed was the lavishness of it in comparison to the general facilities often available to amateur sports players. There were carpets on the floors, shower gel was available in the modern showers and laundry bags were provided. The main problem for the men using the changing room at the health club, however, was that they had to undress and, to an extent, display their bodies for other men in a context which was not that of a sports team together before or after a match. It was not a musty, team changing room where a group of men could talk about the events of the match in an environment of exclusive maleness and team camaraderie. At the health club, the member, although attending under the auspices of keeping fit, was also taking part in an individual experience aimed primarily at the narcissistic pursuit of bodily enhancement. Consequently, there was something suspiciously 'feminine' about the health club that had to be countered and this was made all the more threatening by the need to expose the body to the gaze of other men.

In the changing rooms, one way of countering these tensions was the presence of televisions which provided a constant stream of cable sports programmes. Any uneasy silences were displaced by the sound of sports commentary or action in the background. The televisions also provided a focus for the eyes. I noticed that on several occasions there
were live football matches or recordings of recent games on show. This appeared to create a ‘locker room’ atmosphere and also provided a constant background of sound. Most of the men congregated near to the televisions and changed whilst watching the match. Inhibitions were eased and there was often animated conversation about various aspects of the game.

There was no uniform ritual for presenting the body in the space of the health club changing room. The only apparent taboo appeared to be the overt demonstration of (homo) sexuality. Although I did not observe or hear of any such instances, the presence of this taboo seemed to be indicated by the absence of such displays. Those who were more likely to parade naked in the changing room tended to display outward signs of confidence in their bodies and in general possessed muscular builds or were older. These were not strict patterns as it was also apparent that there were many men who did not feel comfortable being completely naked and would go to extreme measures to change without exposing themselves to others. It was noticeable that the younger men were often more self-conscious about public nudity. This contrasted to their more confident bodily presentation in the actual gym. Often pairs or groups of three men would work out together. They tended to be in their late teens or early twenties. They appeared aware of the capital that they possessed in displaying their muscular bodies and would demonstrate this through their confident banter whilst working out and by consciously flexing their muscles. Vests and tight fitting ‘T’shirts were worn to accentuate their bodies, specifically, the shoulders, chest and biceps. In general, more time was spent working on these areas of the body, whereas, below the waist, baggy shorts or track suit bottoms were worn as if not to draw attention to this area. This was in direct contrast to the women, where the tendency was to wear tight fitting pants, regardless of body type. However, the bravado displayed by the
young men on the gym floor was not uniformly evident in the changing room. Whilst changing, often a towel would be draped around the waist in a similar manner to one changing on a public beach and the body would be contorted in order to manipulate the clothing under the safety of the towel. On occasions I saw groups of men working out together but after the session dressing in different areas of the changing room.

There are conflicting understandings of the appropriate bodily presentation needed to be expressed in public spaces. Body practices constructed within the discourse of hegemonic masculinity enable the individual to present a social performance necessary within this space. Experiences of, and reflections upon, one’s own body, the body of others and one’s sexuality determines the way in which the body can be displayed. The physical sensation of being naked has to be negotiated within the context of the social surrounding. The body can be at the same time a potential source of capital or a possible cause of shame. Capital could be achieved through the display of perceived masculine prowess and this could be effectively presented through bodily performance, whether it was through lifting heavy weights, demonstrating strength and endurance on particular machines or through the physical possession and display of muscles. For example, I overheard two men discussing their biceps after a session in the gym. One remarked

I’m twenty three and a quarter inches, you must be twenty six inches.

The greater size of the biceps clearly carried with it a form of social capital which had been developed through an understanding of muscularity equated with masculine prowess. Here the body can be seen as being disciplined and constructed as a way of producing physical capital which can then be converted into other forms of cultural and social capital.
(Bourdieu 1977). However, the body could also be potentially embarrassing. Nudity brought with it the risk of shame through the fear of presenting 'unmasculine' characteristics, such as evidence of homosexuality. An erection whilst changing could be perceived by others as a sign of homosexual arousal and was therefore to be avoided in this environment. Fear of being looked at in addition to unwanted erections is a possible explanation why many of the men chose to dress using a towel to hide their genitals. What this does highlight is the way the body can literally expose an individual to an unwanted social identity and at the same time provide evidence of the role of the body in constructing understandings of appropriate gender performance. Thus, if we read this in terms of Connell’s (1995) concept of body-reflexive practice, the pleasurable experience of an erection is neutralized by a perceived social fear that it could be misconstrued by others as a sign of sexual arousal brought on by homosexual desires. However, this is not to say that an erection in the context of the changing room necessarily implies evidence to others of homosexuality. For example, in my interview with Fraser, he described his experiences of school sport and how the body was considered as a source of humour, in a similar way to Jez and Simon’s accounts of vasectomies.

It was always difficult, cos erm you know, I always remember er boys in the bath with an erection. It was a great thing to get them and they'd be great fun, but I didn't want to do that cos it was just a little too .. too near the knuckle .. I might have enjoyed it too much (laughs)

Fraser’s adult interpretation of his sexuality and his own body provided a different reading of the events in the changing room baths. For the other boys, having an erection was experienced as a physical thrill and a source of humour. It could also be seen as an
indication of potency to the others. The physical experience of an erection required some form of social meaning to be called into play. In this case it was the outward signs of acquired adult masculinity. However, for the men in the gym changing room, there was the additional social awareness of appropriate or ‘correct’ versions of masculinity, where homosexuality was understood in terms of an inferior sexuality or failed masculinity. At the same time, it could also be suggested that within the social context of male sport, sex was not meant to play a part. Bodily exertions were meant to be confined to the sports field. The social discourse of sexual activity located specific spaces for sexual displays or activity. As such, forms of social regulation were brought into play in order to manage these potentially damaging social situations in the most appropriate way.

Interestingly, whereas the changing rooms which Fraser experienced as a child were not conspicuously encumbered by inequalities based on sexuality, there was, however, a different form of division based on the understandings of bodily performance. Fraser described how, during his time at school, there was a separate bath for the good players and another for the weaker players. Bodily performance was again the starting point for the formation of social identities.

Fraser’s recollections of his experiences of sport at school also highlight the complex relationship between exclusive masculinity as a preserve of proper (heterosexual) masculinity and gay as always a ‘failed’ masculinity. In the above examples, bodily performances, within the context of sport, were considered most appropriate if they displayed evidence of strength, assertiveness and skill in comparison to ‘failed’ performances which displayed weakness, inability and, more obviously, femininity rather than homosexuality. Therefore, the inclusion of a gay tennis club in the research provided
an opportunity to explore the extent to which sexuality influences the performance of exclusive masculinity. I argue that, like hegemonic masculinity, exclusive masculinity constructs masculinity as different from and superior to femininity, but places greater emphasis on the bodily performance. As such, for gay men who take part in sport, sexuality becomes less of an issue in comparison to displays of appropriate masculine performances.

**Gay men performing exclusive masculinity**

I draw upon two examples of participant observation which support the claim that exclusive masculinity is prevalent in sporting practices as well as broader settings where reference to sport is associated with cultural capital. The first example highlights competitiveness as an integral part of hegemonic masculinity expressed in orthodox sport. The second observation provides an example of the social status placed upon hegemonic masculinity within the context of subordinated sexuality. Both examples also provide further evidence for the presence of exclusive masculinity within the context of sport.

I had arranged to play a ladder match with Tim and had asked if I could conduct an interview afterwards. Tim was thirty-one and taught science in a secondary school. I had encountered Tim previously only on very superficial terms, mostly during tennis club evenings. I had heard that he was extremely competitive and tended to socialize with a group of similarly competitive players (all red) who often would contrive to play amongst themselves during the club evenings. Tim was extremely slight in his physical appearance, but quite aggressive in his on court play. He would grunt and shout and even during club sessions he would chase down every ball and hate to lose. The singles ladder was a means by which I could meet him in a one to one situation. He was quite keen to play me as I was
positioned above him on the ladder and we had not played before. We arranged to play at my club (sports club 2) and then use the clubhouse afterwards for the interview. On meeting, Tim was extremely talkative and friendly. We talked about tennis in general and some of the tournaments that we played previously. Tim was interested in discussing tactics and provided analysis of his performances against other men at the gay tennis club and how he would approach playing particular people at the club.

I had been thinking about the interview beforehand and had not really considered the game itself. I was a little more nervous about the interview as I did not know Tim as well as some of the other interviewees. I was aware that I was trying to please Tim during our initial conversations and let him choose which surface he wanted to play on. After a three games (which I won) he said that he thought they were a little slippery and would rather play on the artificial grass, which although wet, drained well. Again, I remember thinking about the interview and wanting to keep him in a good mood so I agreed and we changed courts.

When the match started, Tim became really serious and I noticed that the initial friendly chat we maintained during the knock-up was dispelled once the game started. At the change-over between games, Tim kept his head down and remained in deep concentration. During the game, he would shout at himself and admonish himself if he lost a point. He would often, between points, turn his back to me so that he could calm himself down and compose himself for the next point. I was fascinated watching all this and found it hard to concentrate on the game. I lost the first set and was down in the second when I became aware that I was not really enjoying the situation and the person on the other side of the net was so overtly competitive that it appeared he would do anything to win. However, I
also began to feel that I didn’t really want to lose to him. I felt that I had not been concentrating on the game but rather the research process and the interview. I was constantly trying to think how I could approach the subject of his competitiveness in the interview. I was also aware that we were playing as members of the gay tennis club, which meant that there was something else at stake. I knew I could play better and part of me did not want to lose to him, especially as it was the first occasion that we played a match. To an extent, I was being drawn into taking part in the competitive framework of mainstream sport even though I was still aware that the gay tennis club had been created in an attempt to establish more social and inclusive practices. However, the situation at the time resembled an extremely competitive encounter between two men playing mainstream sport. Sexuality was not at stake, but rather hegemonic masculine egos. I decided then to compete in the match. I did not want to lose without a fight. As I started to take control of the match, Tim also started to become aware that he was losing his grip on the game. He started to shout and swear and throw his racquet around. By that stage, my focus was to win and I wanted to get the game over with as quickly as possible.

It was obvious that Tim was really annoyed about losing and found it hard to say anything when we had finished. I could not say to him that I had not really been trying initially, but also did not want to be patronizing and say that he had played well. At the same time I thought that it would be difficult to conduct an interview and suggested that we did it some other time. I was disappointed with myself, for letting the situation become so competitive and losing perspective of the social situation. However, the example highlights a number of factors. In this particular situation I was involved in the social process of performing exclusive masculinity and, at that moment, complying with hegemonic masculine practices. Although we were gay men and aware of the social discrimination which takes
place at the expense of alternative sexuality, within the arena of sport we succumbed to the prevailing exclusive masculine sensibilities which diverted our attention from the original social setting both of us had entered. In this particular case, the practices prevalent in mainstream sport overshadowed the more egalitarian sensibilities which might have been expected to be displayed within the context of the gay and lesbian movement. To that extent, Tim and I conformed more to the mainstream version of sport rather than confronted it. As indicated above, body performances are based upon ideals of traditional heterosexual masculinity and are available and practiced by gay and straight men alike. However, the position of gay men who take part in sport creates a number of ambivalences. The cultural significance of sport brings with it the knowledge that there is capital to be gained from taking part or being able to display evidence of this. Often, the awareness of being gay and occupying subordinate sexuality is displaced by the need to present exclusive masculinity. This is further exaggerated by the perception that gay men should attempt to be as good as ‘real’ men. Consequently, these performances reinforce discriminatory gender practices rather than confront them. Particularly within the context of sport, it could be said that being a gay man creates an oxymoronic identity.

During the second year of the research I had the opportunity to help out with a stall for the gay tennis club as part of the London Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. The club had not been involved before, but had been contacted by the organisers to take part with a number of other groups in order to provide information to those attending. The event was held in a large park immediately after the traditional Gay Pride march through central London. It was expected to attract about 80,000 people and I thought it would be a good opportunity for me to be able to watch, to an extent, from inside and specifically focus on displays of the body. From the stall I could observe the event happening around me. I was also curious
about the reaction a sports presence at the Mardi Gras would create and how both the other members of the tennis club and the visitors presented themselves. The Mardi Gras had developed in recent years as an offspring of the more political Gay Pride march but had become more commercial. It had grown to such an extent that it was able to attract celebrity pop performers eager to perform to large audiences rather than support a political event.

The stall was situated in a circle along with a variety of other clubs, associations and causes. The scene was reminiscent of a "freshers' fair during the first week of university. My role was to hand out leaflets which provided information about the club and respond to any enquiries. The nature of the whole event was geared towards having fun, which meant that the majority of visitors to the event were more concerned with finding a good spot in front of the main stage and maintaining a steady supply of alcohol. As such, any interest in finding out about a tennis club was limited. However, this meant that I had more time to observe people and events. The tennis club was sandwiched between the London Kings Cross Stealers (an all male gay rugby club) and the Gay Bears Group (a social group for hairy or chubby men, or men who were attracted to them). I have included these observations as I was struck by the way the body was used as a primary signification of masculine identity. In this case, the body presented a means of displaying to others hegemonic masculinity even though the social context was in the setting of an organised celebration of subordinated sexuality.

The members of the rugby club congregated in groups at the front of the stall, rather than occupying a position behind the tables. They were all in high spirits and there was a continuous display of physicality in the form of jovial pushing and back slapping. All of
the members had cans or bottles of beer in their hands at all times and several wore only shorts. The stall itself displayed photos of the club members in action playing rugby as well as several large posed photos which made up a calendar depicting the main team in various states of undress. On one occasion, a player who had been photographed for the calendar stood next to his picture whilst the others laughed and joked.

The men attracted a lot of attention from the passing crowds and, at the same time, appeared to thrive on it and play up to it. They seemed keen to present an outwardly ‘macho’ aggressive, heavy-drinking, tough image. The irony was the context of the performances of the men in the setting of the Mardi Gras and its relationship to the ideals of gay pride. However, the men were obviously achieving a great deal of capital through their performances and it appeared that these performances were often exaggerated and contrived. As such the men’s performances were both theatrical in their display to others, but also performative in their enactment of masculinity located within heterosexual hegemonic discourse. Their performances were also presented in the form of exclusive masculinity because even though they were outside of the sports arena, the cultural understanding of masculinity expressed through active sports performance dove-tails with broader interpretations of hegemonic masculinity. In this case, hegemonic masculinity presented itself as more attractive or compelling in comparison with a subordinated sexual identity, particularly if it was associated with a feminised, weaker version of masculinity.

The gay bears group were similar to the rugby players, in that although less attractive, in the conventional sense, they were still keen to display themselves physically. Their bodies were celebrated in terms of their manliness or their distance from feminised understandings of bodily performance by presenting an exaggerated version of orthodox

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masculinity. Most of the men wore leather or denim and proudly displayed their bare hairy chests. In a similar manner to the men from the rugby club, they were putting on a performance of 'hard' or 'butch'.

Rogoff and Van Leer (1993) suggest there are similarities between the drag artist and the butch leather clad man in their extreme presentations of masculinity, while Segal (1997) describes how gay identity has sought to accommodate a 'super-macho style of masculinity.

This 'butch shift' – gay muscle men clad exclusively in leather and denim, or gay 'clones' with short hair, moustache, check shirt, blue jeans and bovver boots – would appear to be a celebration of conventional masculinity, just as the reality of much of the sexuality of gay men seems to be an exaggeration of the more promiscuous, emotionally detached, entirely phallocentric encounters characteristic of male heterosexuality. (Segal 1997 page 149)

The rugby players and the gay bears provide support for the claim that significant value is placed upon the presentation of the body. They appeared to be keen to present to others an expression of their identity based upon traditional understandings of heterosexual masculinity without apparent awareness of their part in the reinforcement of gender and sexual boundaries.

The relationship between sexuality and masculinity found in exclusive masculinity mirrors the complex issues found in hegemonic masculinity where performances of masculinity simultaneously speak heterosexuality whilst femininity, gay and 'weak' masculinities are
unspoken or considered inferior. Within exclusive masculinity, however, it is clear that some gay men (as well as women) are also able to perform this identity successfully. An interesting aspect which emerges from this ambivalent relationship can be seen in my own position within the straight club. Throughout the research I did not make any open declarations about my sexuality but at the same time never made any attempts to mask it in terms of, for example, talking about girlfriends. My identity within the club appeared to be based upon my playing skills and my ability to perform exclusive masculinity, acquired through many years of experience within mainstream sport. To an extent, my tennis skills, if considered in terms of generalised understandings of mainstream sport, could have been read by the other members of the straight club as connoting heterosexuality. As a consequence, I did not have to negotiate ‘failed’ masculinity during the period of the research.

In summary, I found that the tennis clubs and the health club I observed were saturated with gender and in particular they were sites in which masculinity was made and remade. This making and remaking occurred across a range of locations, for instance, on and off court and was in relation to a range of practices and organisational arrangements, both formal and informal.

All the examples can be seen as contemporary constructions of masculinity through the body practices associated with sport, in this case, specifically the sites of tennis and a health club. It became apparent that particular forms of body practice merited greater cultural capital and were in the majority supported and upheld by those who were less likely to achieve such status. The body and bodily practices were a significant aspect
within this formulation of masculinity and contributed to the presence of a specific form of masculinity, which I termed exclusive masculinity. Presenting this form of masculinity to others constituted recognisable signs of eligibility for participation within sport. At the same time, a more complex relationship between masculinity and sexuality emerged where, through exclusive masculine performances, it was possible for gay men to participate in a similar manner to heterosexual men. Consequently, if this version of masculinity can be performed by people other than able-bodied heterosexual men it raises interesting questions about whether such performances subvert it or not. I explore this issue further in chapter five.

The observations above indicate that hegemonic masculinity and exclusive masculinity, with their heterosexual implications, are prevalent within contemporary sport and reflect broader social definitions of normative gender. However, as the example of Fraser’s school experiences demonstrated, it is important to recognise whether these enactments have been constant and the extent to which entering sport requires the learning of specific body practices. As such, it is necessary to investigate further how body practices associated with masculinity, especially exclusive masculinity, have been central in the life course and whether factors such as bodily performance and sexuality create obstacles to participation.
Chapter Four

Exclusive masculine bodily practices explored through sporting life histories

In the previous chapter I described how hegemonic masculinity is made and remade in the context of sport, in this case through my observations at tennis clubs and a health club. I also identified a specific form of masculinity located in sporting bodily performances which I termed 'exclusive masculinity'. The observations were conducted recently and any claims made as a result of them are constituted as enactments of the present. In order to investigate continuities and changes in the performance of exclusive masculinity through the life course I have adopted analyses which enable consideration of social process.

As indicated in chapter one, I have identified Connell’s (1995) approach to body practices as a concept through which the body can be understood as occupying a significant role in the construction of gendered identity. In this chapter, and in a similar manner to Connell, I have incorporated a form of life history technique within the interview process. This particular approach was selected for several reasons, as I explained in chapter two, but a significant factor was that it enabled evidence to be gathered first hand and, I believe, avoided many of the problems faced by more subjective readings found in second hand textual analyses. Also, as the ethnographic material was collected within the context of sport, I adapted the interviews with the sample group of men to take the form of sporting life histories. The accounts from the men enabled me to assess whether the enactments identified in chapter three have always been performed. Thus, recollections of childhood
activities and experiences of school and adult sport could be evaluated in the light of the observations made in the present and in relation to the research questions.

The argument that the material body through its experiences and capacities is implicated in the process of producing meaning about particular interactions and exchanges can clearly be supported within the sporting context. For it is within the sporting arena that emphasis is placed upon specific socially constructed performances of the body. At the same time, the application of the life history approach draws from the respondent more generalised experiences of social practices. Consequently, for the men who took part in the interviews, sport was an initial means through which they were able to disclose many other aspects of their lives. For example

I can remember doing, you know, being really embarrassed having to do drama and things like that... always seemed a bit girly to me.

(Shaun 32)

Shaun's statement demonstrates how the focus upon sport during the interviews presented opportunities for the men to talk about other aspects of their lives. In this case, Shaun was able to describe to me his experiences of primary school sport and how, at an early age, he had developed a sense of his body as significant in the presentation and construction of gender. Additional descriptions, such as his embarrassment at doing drama and finding it 'girly' reveal an early formulation of gendered identity.

In this chapter, I provide a general analysis of experiences of the body within the sports context. I attempt to explore further men's relationship to exclusive masculinity and how it
cannot be read off from prior positions such as class, sexuality or age. As I described in the previous chapter, not all gay men are excluded from performing exclusive masculinity despite the fact that it connotes heterosexuality in our sex/gender formation. Similarly, not all heterosexual men are able to perform exclusive masculinity. One of the key factors mediating men’s relationship to exclusive masculinity is their ability to demonstrate the level of physical prowess demanded by it.

**Constructing a sense of the masculine body**

The importance of bodily performance is learnt at an early age, particularly as a means of presenting a social identity, and is formed through comparison with other bodies. Early experiences of childhood are important in the development of normative forms of gender and bodily behaviour (Walkerdine 1990, Thorne 1993). Versions of bodily performance, predominantly expressed as masculinity or femininity, are learnt, rehearsed and then repeatedly acted out. Physical performances are often associated with gendered experiences so that an understanding of gender is specifically related to the corporeal. With this in mind, I draw upon examples gathered from the field research in order to explore the extent of bodily practices in the construction of masculinities and the shaping of gendered identities.

In the interviews it was clear that a central concern for the men when they were children was establishing themselves as ‘normal’ in terms of their perceived understanding of masculine behaviour. For Connell, body reflexive practices ‘constitute a world which has a bodily dimension, but is not biologically determined.’ (1995 page 65) The body could, therefore, be said to provide a means through which the men, as children, were able to demonstrate (or not) their understanding of normal masculine behaviour. At the same time,
during adolescence, there was awareness that behaviour which was considered socially unorthodox could be potentially problematic and this in turn required some form of management. It was apparent that bodies were perceived in gendered terms and at the same time distinctions were made between the levels of status to be gained from different forms of bodily performance. Without the additional forms of capital available to adults, such as economic capital, the body emerged as even more central to the establishment of a social identity. For the men in the sample, the ability to demonstrate to others signs of accepted masculinity, in contrast to signs of femininity, was required from an early age. Among the gay and the straight men interviewed, this was achieved with varying levels of success. Their understanding of homosexuality was vague during primary school years although there was awareness that the presentation of appropriate masculinity was important as there was a negative association with outward performances of weak or ‘gay’ masculinity. Many of the gay men in the sample demonstrated how bodily performance could be used to mask their alternative sexuality and avoid the risk of becoming a target for bullies. The men who were able to demonstrate appropriate masculinity through bodily performance and particularly through sporting performance were able to navigate childhood, school and youth relatively easily. This was in contrast to the gay men who presented more ‘feminine’ characteristics. In their accounts, the men (gay and straight) who were less able to ‘pass’ as ‘masculine’ reported being the victims of bullying and non-acceptance.

According to Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002), boys learn at an early age the need to demonstrate their difference from girls and at the same time need to confirm their understanding of popular masculinity amongst their peers. The key way to do this is through demonstrating toughness and, in particular, physical or sporting prowess. Frosh et
al incorporate Connell’s (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity in their study of adolescent boys and a central theme throughout the study was the boys’ attempts to present orthodox masculinity, especially through physical and discursive performances of football.

Simon and Gary: two sporting life histories

In order to explore these themes further, I start with the accounts of two men from the straight club. As already mentioned in chapter two, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe the importance of theoretical sampling in order to minimize and maximise the differences between the cases. I decided that it would be interesting to compare and contrast the experiences of two men from the straight tennis club. I selected Simon and Gary as I felt they would provide a useful starting point to explore some of the main themes. Although the main contrast between the two men was in terms of their sexuality, (Simon was heterosexual whereas Gary was gay) I was aware that one of the most noticeable differences between them was their ability to participate in sport as much as they wanted. Even though they both enjoyed taking part in physical activities, Simon appeared to have greater access to participation and was clearly more confident about his body in comparison to Gary. I wanted to explore whether sexuality was the main factor in their ability to take part in sport or whether their understanding of their own masculinity as expressed through their bodies was a greater influence. At the same time, their similar social backgrounds enabled me to explore whether other social factors, such as age and class contributed to their experience of sport in any way.

Gary and Simon were roughly the same age (Gary, thirty nine, and Simon, thirty eight) and had similar economic and social backgrounds. Their fathers were from the same area
and had strong ties with the large mill which provided the core employment for the local town. Gary's father worked nearly all his life at the mill whilst Simon's father, although not employed at the mill, nevertheless, had a long standing involvement with the sports and social club. Simon continued to work on the factory floor at the mill after leaving school and at one stage Gary worked there for three years. However, despite these similarities, their early childhood experiences and subsequent paths through school are marked by their differing constructions of masculine identity related to their bodily presentation. Simon and Gary were interviewed early on in the research and their accounts set the tone for subsequent interviews. An additional reason for selecting Simon and Gary at that stage was not only their familiarity to me but the way I felt they were similar to me. I wanted to establish whether men with similar backgrounds to me had developed similar understandings of their bodies. This would enable me to compare and contrast them with other men of differing ages, sexuality and social backgrounds. I had known both men prior to the research through my association with the tennis club and our shared knowledge of the local area. They were both in the same age group as I am and during the period that I became more involved in the tennis club and the team I developed a close friendship with both men. I think that my relationship with Simon was formed through a mutual respect built upon our shared interest in sport and the way we had benefited from it in the past. At the same time there was a sense that he admired other aspects of my attitude to sport and life in general. He told me on one occasion that he admired the way I appeared to enjoy playing tennis and said he wished he too could be more expressive. I had known Gary prior to the research. We had not been in the same social circles during our schooldays, but I became friendly with him when he developed an interest in tennis and at one stage I helped him by giving him some coaching. Consequently, both men were willing to be interviewed, although there is the possibility that both men had agreed to take part as a
favour to me. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) discuss the importance of recognising the two-way process during the interviews where ‘the resulting narratives are always a product of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000 page 45). For example, in one of the interviews conducted by Hollway, she described how she felt the relationship was like mother and daughter (Hollway and Jefferson 2000 page 47) and the understanding of this relationship needed to be considered during the analysis of the data. In the case of Simon and Gary, our similar ages and familiarity, created the sense that our relationships were understood in terms of a friendship, however, this was not the case in all the subsequent interviews as demonstrated in my aborted attempt at interviewing Tim, described in chapter three. It is also difficult to gauge exactly the extent to which the men understood the research I was conducting. I had explained to them that I was investigating sport, the body and participation, but there was no further enquiry from either of the men. I found this a general occurrence throughout the research. There was often an anxiety on my behalf about maintaining research integrity, but for all the men in the sample there appeared little need for detailed explanations. At the same time, I generally did not offer detailed information about my work. Often, I have found that attempts to explain sociological concepts outside of an academic environment can appear patronising. For my interview with Gary, I had arranged to go to his house and for Simon, at that time as I was living near the tennis club, I suggested that he come round to my place one afternoon on his way back from work. Because of my prior knowledge of both men and the setting in familiar surroundings, the interviews were relaxed and conducted as conversations, which I had initially hoped for.

An important aspect which emerged during the study was the way that all the men who took part in the research described the enjoyment experienced through their bodies when
they engaged in some form of physical activity. Gary and Simon provided similar
descriptions of the physical thrill of taking part in active pursuits.

Running and swimming, like socially, like running with friends and all that type of
thing, I enjoyed that, but I didn't particularly like organized sport. I used to go cycling
with friends and stuff like that and then we used to go to .. erm just play around really.
Not sporty, just play. (Gary)

I was very keen on going up to the playing fields, just kicking a ball around. (Simon)

The enjoyment of taking part in physical activity experienced by all the men is an
important point and central to the argument that the body is implicated in the construction
of masculinity. However, specific socially prescribed performances dictated the nature of
practices' allows us to understand how new constructions of self identity are formed
through bodily experiences. In this particular case, the 'body-reflexive practice of sport'
(Connell 1995 page 63) created an understanding of normative identity for Simon, whereas
for Gary it established an identity based upon difference.

Gary described how he was aware at an early age of his physical presence by drawing
upon comparisons of his own bodily presentation with the other children

I was probably a little bit camp when I was at school. Cos I wasn't aggressive and stuff
like that and I was in the lower tier at school, so I was in the 'B' stream and it was
more of an aggressive culture and kids didn’t wanna learn and so it was very
difficult….

Sport was pretty atrocious.. because it was all cricket, which I loathed, football which I
was useless at and hockey which I was crap at.

Gary’s use of the term ‘camp’ suggests that his recollections are shaped by an adult
reading of his childhood experiences even if camp was not a concept he would have used
at the time. However, we can assume that Gary is describing a sense of being different
from other boys that he did feel at the time. But what is important is that this sense of
difference appears to have derived, to a significant degree, from his experience of his
body. Through the physical experience of his body he developed an understanding of it as
being weak or inadequate, especially in comparison to other boys when having to take part
in organised sport. His awareness of himself as ‘camp’, or different in terms of the other
boy’s bodily presentations, also demonstrates that he had developed an understanding of
appropriate masculine performance which, in turn, did not relate sufficiently to the
experience of his own body. This is similar to Connell’s (1995) example of Adam Singer
who was criticised by his father because of his apparent lack of skill at sports. Connell
argues that Singer developed an understanding of his body as different from normative
masculinity through his inability to throw a ball like a real man

The public gender meanings are instantaneously infused with the bodily activity and
the emotions of the relationship. Even so, there is a split perception. Adam has learned
how to be both in his body (throwing) and outside his body watching its gendered
performance.

(Connell 1995 page 62)
Gary’s understanding of his body as weak had been developed through a similar relationship with his own body and its gendered performance. He was aware that he did not present the expected version of masculinity and in the early years of school he was made aware of his difference from the other boys specifically through his physical bodily presentation, rather than as a result of any awareness of his sexuality. Indeed, it is difficult to make claims that children are fully aware of their sexuality at an early age or understand the social implications attached to it. For Gary, however, it seems possible that the realisation of his difficulty presenting orthodox masculinity in comparison to the other boys was further accentuated by his placement in the lower stream in the secondary school where the emphasis, within the pupils’ culture, was on the presentation of aggressive, physical masculinity rather than the academic. This, again, is similar to Connell’s description of Adam Singer, where the attitudes expressed by his father, like the other boys at Gary’s school, were located in hegemonic masculinity. In this environment the performance of bodily strength attracted the most cultural capital and in the school curriculum sport was considered a prime area to encourage the boys to let off steam. For Gary, though, his body was a major source of humiliation as he felt he was unable to compete physically with the other (in his words) ‘thugs’. Consequently, his experiences of sport as a child were negative

I just hated it all. I wasn’t very good and so I hated it all… I don’t know I just always feel conscious when there’s a massive group of people in sport. I feel kind of conscious about my ability.
Gary ‘wasn’t very good’ at sport, but more tellingly the consequence of this was that he could not perform hegemonic masculinity. His loathing of organised sport continued throughout school and during the latter years of secondary school, when he became increasingly aware of his sexuality, he came to regard sport as something that ‘heterosexual’ men do. The physical experience of sport created a social understanding of how he should present his body within this context to others and, combined with his interpretation of homosexuality, formed a circuit of bodily reflexive practices which ultimately shaped his ability to interact with the other boys. Because of his feeling that he was unable to ‘pass’ successfully within this environment, he continued to avoid it.

I mean I didn’t have any problems coming to terms with my sexuality. But saying that, I thought being gay I wasn’t particularly good at sport so I thought well that’s part of it.

Gary’s account reveals the way that appropriate bodily performance is part of acquiring successful masculine status. Failure in this area signals failure as a ‘real’ man. Consequently, Gary constructed the notion that being gay was, in some sense, a failed masculinity. Gary’s early experiences of his body, particularly in relation to school sport, created awareness as he grew older of the need to present orthodox masculinity. Gary placed great importance on the need to ‘blend in’, particularly in the work setting, and it was his bodily presentation which provided a main way to achieve this. He told me that he was unhappy in the way that he had presented his body as a youth. Not only was he aware of his difference in terms of sexuality, but he was aware of his physical shape.

No I didn’t particularly like it, when I was skinny. I always thought I could put on a bit of weight.
Weight was also an important indicator of masculinity for him. When he was at school, most of the other boys were physically bigger and he related being skinny to being weak. However, as he moved towards middle age and increased his waistline, he had resorted to dieting and taking diet tablets, rather than adopting a physical exercise regime to combat this. In terms of his constructed understanding of normative masculinity, physical exercise, for Gary, was associated with organized male sport which he felt uncomfortable taking part in or gyms which he felt no desire to attend. The social significance his body continued in that the way Gary experienced it continued to be influenced by his understanding of sport which he considered a site where there remained a continued threat that his physical performance would let him down.

As an adult, Gary was introduced to tennis through friends. He enjoyed playing tennis but his past experiences of sport had diminished its appeal and prevented him from wanting to remain an active member of a club. Although he had managed to achieve a reasonable standard, there remained a constant sense of doubt about his own abilities which created a feeling for him that he did not really belong in this social arena. His attempts in the past to take part in tennis clubs were only for short periods.

I find a little bit, kind of to a certain extent intimidating because of some of the people who are there…… cos some people are very good and it can be if you’re not up to standard, you know it’s very difficult. I think it’s different when you’re young because you can learn. I think when you’re kind of like in your late thirties and stuff like that it’s very difficult to kind of progress …and I feel that erm it can be quite intimidating by people what, you know they’re much better than you and I’d hate to be in a
situation, probably, it probably stems from school where you think that I’m only picked
because I’ve slept with someone and basically I’m only, they don’t really want me in
the team and you think am I really playing with people who don’t want to play tennis
against me but think, oh I’ve got to .. in a club environment.

For Gary, there was a marked distinction between sport and play. There was pleasure to be
gained from his body in terms of physical activity but, for him, sport was associated with
negative social expectations and in particular, a pressure to perform hegemonic
masculinity. Pleasure through play was found in other areas, particularly in sexual activity
which was seen as fun and where the social expectations could be managed. Dunne
(1988) describes how young girls are able to take part and enjoy sports as girls, but the
onset of puberty creates problems in terms of the social understanding of their bodies,
which effectively precludes them from taking part in the same manner. Dunne developed
her theory by analysing the representations of girls and women in sport. However, similar
arguments to Dunne’s can be developed in relation to boys and ethnographic studies, like
Connell’s, support these claims. The onset of puberty, if read in terms of bodily practices,
directs the individual to experience his or her body in a particular manner. Consequently,
adolescent women begin to understand and experience their bodies as weak in relation to
men. Gary learnt to experience his body during childhood and adolescence as weak, or
feminine. This understanding of masculine identity was also influenced by his perceptions
of normative femininity and homosexuality. Gary, therefore, constructed a social identity
through an acute awareness of his own body. His bodily performances informed his
perception of masculinity in relation to other men and also provide support for the claim
that the body is central in the presentation of gendered identity to others. Thus, for Gary,
social situations which held the possibility of presenting an inappropriate identity were avoided.

I described in chapter two how Skeggs (1997) found, in her study of working class women, that presenting an identity incorporated aspects of class as well as gender and bodily performance. Like the women in Skegg’s study, Gary’s identity was shaped by class and gender, but there were also ambiguities in relation to his sexuality and body. His understanding of gender was constructed through an early socialisation process located in traditional working class masculinity and gender binaries. For example, the following descriptions of his father provide evidence to support this view

Well kind of like er everything’s black and white. Didn’t particularly like the company of women, apart from my mother.

I asked Gary why his father thought this way

I don’t know, I just think he was kind of like more comfortable in men’s company. He worked in an all male environment and was quite happy in that environment.

Gary’s experiences of home life and school had clearly informed his own understanding of what masculinity should entail. I continued the theme of the conversation by asking Gary what he thought authentic masculinity was.

I’d say masculinity to myself was a very, very ordinary .. ordinary kind of run-of-the-mill person.
Men who displayed feminine characteristics through their bodies were more problematic. As indicated earlier, Gary felt that it was his body that betrayed him, particularly in a social situation such as sport, rather than his sexuality. Consequently, Gary identified with normative versions of masculinity but felt excluded from them because of his physical presence. However, his understanding of gay masculinity was built upon a stereotype of camp effeminacy.

Yeah I have very good relationships with women because they are women. I don’t feel comfortable in the environment of camp people. I wouldn’t want to walk down the town with people screaming and squawking, it’s not my scene, it’s not what I want, I just want to blend in.

Simon, in contrast to Gary, experienced his body and his abilities in sport as natural. Physical sensations and pleasurable experiences gained from physical activity were seen as positive and normal. Simon’s experience of his body enabled him to construct an identity based upon normative masculinity. For example, when he was at primary school, his recollections demonstrate that he was already aware of the performances required. Being active was considered an essential part of his world and was often hampered at school.

(S) It was mostly games, I mean they did sort of the human movement studies .. A lot of music in the playground, pretending to be a statue.

(I) How did you find that?
(S) Well for someone who used to like running around in the countryside I suppose it was a little bit pedestrian ... erm, I played for the school football team.

Football was a space where he could be active and this figured heavily in his childhood memories. Playing football was considered a natural activity for boys to take part in and he never had any reason to find participation problematic in the way that Gary did. However, when I asked if he ever used a gym, the response was an emphatic no. This could be explained by his participation many sports, but there was the sense that, for him, using the gym betrayed the 'naturalness' of his ability in sport which in turn carried with it greater cultural capital.

I suppose with the football being on a regular basis it kept me ticking over and I never felt that I had to go down the gym.

For Simon, taking part in sport was deemed more satisfying than the more 'artificial' practice of going to a gym. Simon had learnt that the presentation of effortless, 'natural' ability in sports achieved greater respect from others and related his abilities to an inherited metabolism.

Erm.. I suppose from an early age, I think most of it just comes down to stamina ......I did used to get tired sometimes but that was mostly due to a poor diet .. obviously with my mum out working and me being on my own at home, left to my own devices. I might have eaten the wrong food. From that point of view I might have suffered but er I've always been fairly naturally fit.
In the past the only threat to his ‘natural’ fitness as a child had been from a poor diet, which interestingly was blamed on his mother. In adult life the physical nature of work played an increasing role in how he was able to use his body. Simon’s daily work routine consisted of long periods spent alone working on large machines. The work was physically demanding and also unsociable which may also explain the lack of enthusiasm for additional solitary, physical activity found in the gym. During the research I was able to get to know Simon better and I found that my general impression of him, and to an extent Gary, was one of a conservative man, keen to conform. Obviously, these comments are based on a more subjective reading on behalf of the writer, but they were made by taking into account the lifestyles and opinions of the other men in the sample and also experiences formulated outside of the research. Working out at the gym was, for Simon, considered unnatural and maybe to an extent narcissistic. From his accounts it appeared that he understood his body in terms of ‘other’ where there was the sense that it was a machine or mechanism which enabled him to perform tasks in the way that Synnott (1993) describes. This is also similar to the accounts from the older men in the sample and may be explained by the men’s relationship to class based traditions and understandings of ‘hard work’ and manual work. This offers an interesting comparison to Skeggs’ (1997) investigation of working class women. In her study she found that the women she interviewed were constantly aware of their class position, but were more concerned with how they could differentiate themselves from it. The men in the straight club tended to favour the values associated in particular with traditional working class masculine performance whereas, the women in Skeggs’ study found class was ‘experienced by the women as exclusion’ (Skeggs 1997, page 74).
In contrast to Gary, Simon’s ‘natural’ abilities in sport enabled him to make the transition from primary play to adult sport, although he was also aware that not everyone would be able to make it.

.. because there was such a difference between primary school .. was sort of very friendly and ‘oh, never mind you can do it’, quite encouraging, whereas er secondary school was, I mean not just the teachers, it’s the pupils as well ... those that were quite tough and there was a few shrinking violets as well.

Earning respect from others because of his sporting ability enabled Simon to develop an understanding of sport as a male preserve where certain qualities were required. His accounts of his experiences as a young man entering into the world of adult male sport almost suggest a ‘rite of passage’ to hegemonic masculinity

(S) you sort of see everything there is to see about football. The good side and the bad side. It was er men against boys and er you know they’re licensed to do whatever they want to, but you know it sort of conditioned you to er either fall at the wayside or battle through it

(I) Is that good or bad?

(S) Depends what character you are erm .. it did affect a couple of friends of mine .. but they did see some very nasty injuries .. erm it was particularly scary on a few occasions .. when you’ve got the other team and the supporters you know sort of baying for blood, sort of thing. But all in all it was erm it was just good for me, I just erm .. if I got fouled or whatever, I just got up and got on with it and erm and that seemed to wind the
opposition up even more and it actually helped us get the result we wanted. .. because they totally lost it.

(I) Yeah, whereas they wanted you to.

(S) Yes, so it was erm, from that point if view it set the team up for later on in life. And we had a lot of success later on. That was quite good grounding from that point of view.

Simon was able to make the transition to adult sport successfully and because of this was able to justify the process. Those who ‘fell by the wayside’ were, for Simon, considered unsuitable for participation and the selection process merely sorted them out. Simon learnt that successful participation in adult sport required a performance of exclusive masculinity as a means of demonstrating to others his ability to take part.

During the latter years of primary school and the early years of secondary school, organized sports start to take precedence over play and with it not only more rules based physical activity but a requirement for particular forms of masculine performance. Although bodily prowess can be seen as a factor in primary school play, the introduction of ‘adult’ sport brings with it a greater emphasis on the way certain bodily performances are required in order to enable participation. For Simon, and the other men in the sample, there appeared to be a learning process or transition period, where those who were able to take the knocks and present the appropriate performances would be more successful. As such, violence, competitiveness and aggressiveness were learnt as part of this process and were to be expected. For Simon, as he had managed to negotiate the transition relatively successfully, these experiences were remembered in a positive light and a period where his character was shaped beneficially. For a brief period he had spent some time at a local
comprehensive with a poor academic reputation, but after he had shown proficiency in
sport, he gained additional status in the school.

I mean everything, sport, the academic side, social side seemed to escalate and become
a lot better than what it was. The confidence you get from sport, in my particular case
carried over to the classroom and beyond.

Keeping active remained a priority for Simon, not only as a means to continue playing
sport but as an indication of his masculine status which placed emphasis on the importance
of activity and hard work. The nature of Simon’s heavy daily work routine also provided
the basis for his understanding of his body. Playing sport was enough to maintain his body
and sustain sufficient cultural capital. At the same time Simon recognized the need to
maintain a certain level of physical fitness in order to keep up a particular standard, not
only at work, but in all aspects of his social identity. Realising the importance that Simon
placed upon his active involvement in sport, I thought it would be useful to ask him how
he would cope with not being able to take part as much

(I) So how do you see yourself coping with old age if you can’t play so much football.
Will you consciously try to remain active?
(S) I will try to remain active. Erm I suppose now with the football virtually trailing off
to the occasional game, sort of every couple of months, tennis is going to come to the
fore. Possibility that I might think about doing something else to, just to keep up a
decent level.
'Something else' meant another form of organised sport, not exercise for the sake of it. Keeping active remained a priority, not only as a means to continue playing sport but as part of social expectations based on the importance placed upon activity and the influence of traditional class based work ethic. The importance that Simon placed upon his body was evident in all aspects of his life. He described the physical demands of his job, whilst at the same time he reinforced the notion that physical effort was a sign of character:

I'm on my feet all the time, so literally twelve hours. By the end of my shift my feet are burning and my legs are aching.

Even though the nature of Simon's work was physically demanding, leisure time was spent either playing sport or with his family. Simon distinguished between the physical toil at work and physical enjoyment gained through sport. In contrast to Gary, participation in organised sport had remained an open door to Simon and one where entrance did not need to be negotiated. His ability to present hegemonic masculinity combined with his sporting ability had provided benefits throughout his life and helped during his school years. Simon and Gary had contrasting experiences at school which could at face value be explained in terms of their sexualities. But for Gary, the 'problem' at school was not his sexuality, it was his bodily performance. His lack of competence in presenting hegemonic masculinity, particularly in an environment where sporting prowess carried with it greater levels of capital and his outward presentation of 'campness' made his experiences at school more difficult. In fact, he was able to manage his sexuality more effectively than his physical presentation of accepted masculinity within the school. For instance, during the later years of secondary school Gary was able to conduct a sexual relationship with another boy who was one of the school 'hard nuts'. Significantly, this explicitly gay relationship did not
cause him problems because he was able to keep it hidden. Interestingly, in adult life, Gary rejected the gay community. His ideal partner, in his words, was someone who was 'straight acting' and, over the years, Gary had deliberately attempted to present himself in social settings as 'straight' which entailed working on his bodily performance to others. This meant initially putting on weight and wearing clothing which he thought reflected local men and carrying his body appropriately, for example, walking with a slight swagger. It also meant adopting at appropriate times exaggerated banter or swearing. In essence, learning to 'pass' as a heterosexual male.

Although coming from similar social backgrounds, Simon and Gary had developed differing understandings of their own bodies. However, at the same time, there were similarities between the two men in that their constructions of appropriate masculine performance were located in an understanding of hegemonic masculinity. Simon demonstrated a taken for granted understanding of his body as normal, in the way that Bourdieu (1990) describes as hexas, and had less cause to reflect upon the notion of difference from other men. His experience of his body, particularly in physical activity was related to pleasurable feelings. Taking 'knocks' and enduring physical pain was considered part of the whole 'package' of sport and in turn reflected a constructed understanding of normal masculine behaviour. These characteristics were displayed in his approach to his work, even though they were not considered in the same pleasurable way. Consequently, his understanding of masculinity was based upon the importance of physical, corporeal performances both at work and in play. This view of masculinity can be contrasted to his understanding of femininity which was based upon inactivity and physical weakness. Bodily performance was central in this relationship as a means of demonstrating to others his masculinity. For Gary, his body was experienced and
understood in terms of being unnatural and different from other men. His reluctance to
move to a city to be a part of a gay scene meant that he had not been exposed to the body-
consciousness expressed, for example, through body building which has become an
established part of contemporary male lifestyle (Simpson 1994). He compared his
body with femininity and developed an understanding of his own identity as being weak or
inferior to other men.

What transpires from the accounts of Gary and Simon is the way that exclusive
masculinity is significant throughout the life course. The emphasis upon the body as a
means of presenting ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’ masculinity reinforces the hierarchical
structure of gender relations and simultaneously contributes to the dominance of a
hegemonic masculinity. At the same time it is also important to acknowledge the way in
which both men experienced their bodies and the way this played an integral part in the
construction of their own masculine identities as well as wider social understandings of
other men and women. Gary's attempts to conform to hegemonic masculinity through his
efforts to avoid problematic social situations, such as sport, and in adult life his dislike of
‘camp’ acting men reveals the complex nature of those who are both disadvantaged by
hegemonic masculinity but are also at the same inextricably bound to it.

The interviews provided the opportunity to compare the responses of the gay and straight
men when relating to their own understandings of their bodies. The accounts of Gary and
Simon demonstrate how the two men contemplated their bodies in contrasting ways
because of their perceived understanding of how to perform masculinity. Thus, Gary
demonstrated a greater awareness of his body as a means of performing masculinity as he
was forced to confront issues of gender performance and sexuality. For Simon, as he was
able to conform to an accepted version of masculinity there was a lesser need to reflect upon his body in the way Gary had to. Nevertheless, Simon demonstrated awareness of his body in other ways and constantly reflected upon his bodily performance in relation to other men, women and the ageing process.

These patterns were repeated throughout the interviews. I had conducted the interviews for the gay and straight men in a similar fashion, focusing specifically on sporting life-histories. For the gay men, disclosure of their sexuality was something which emerged unprompted within the interview and was often a means by which they were able to make sense of their own masculine performance. For the straight men, their bodies were constructed more from ‘within’ an arena of masculinity where bodily performance was a means of maintaining status. The reaffirmation of binary distinctions relating to understandings of feminine and non-masculine performances was an accepted consequence of their perception of a ‘natural’ gender order. Active, hard working, physical masculinity based upon traditional understandings of heteronormative masculine and feminine behaviour was considered the authentic version. Because of this, there was a greater sense that I needed to ‘tread more carefully’ in my interviews with the men from the straight tennis club (apart from the one with Gary) when talking about masculinity. I mentioned, in chapter three, about my awareness of performing exclusive masculinity to Toby, but this was also a constant factor throughout my experiences in the straight club. My ability to perform exclusive masculinity had meant that during my time at the straight club, I had never had cause to divulge my sexuality. At the same time, I did not want to jeopardize any potential relationships with the men I wanted to interview. I felt that, in this situation, knowledge of my sexuality would transfer the focus more towards me and construct the interviews within a different framework. At the same time, there was also the
possibility that some of the men may not want to do the interviews in the first place. I also wanted them to talk about their lives and found that lack of acknowledgement of any problems in their readings of normative masculine actions equally revealing. Although I was aware that the prior knowledge of my sexuality would provide revealing material in terms of the men’s reaction to me and also the disruptive potential from a queer perspective, the focus of the research prompted my actions.

Needless to say, the subsequent interviews were revealing and in the case of Simon, I was able to draw upon his relationship with sport as a means of directing the conversation to the nature of competitiveness and then towards masculinity. In many of the conversations with the other men in the straight club there was less opportunity to bring direct questions of masculinity into the frame. However, Simon’s responses indicate how masculinity within sporting practice is constructed in relation to broader social understandings. I initially asked Simon about the nature of competitiveness within sport and where he thought he had acquired it.

(S) Yeah, I mean I’ve always been fairly competitive anyway in all sports.
(I) Where does that come from?
(S) I think it does stem from my dad.

Sporting competitiveness, according to Simon, had been learnt and acquired from his father and fitted into a constructed understanding of sporting practice as a masculine arena. In this way Simon had to construct an understanding of what masculinity meant to him. As I have indicated above, the question of masculinity is not a topic which is openly discussed. There is the sense that masculinity is ‘unquestioned’ and this in turn establishes
a greater sense that it is a natural and static phenomenon rather than more fluid. For the men in the straight club, there was little need to question their understanding of masculinity. Within the arena of sport, where hegemonic masculinity is performed within even more restricted limits, (exclusive masculine) bodily actions appear to be performed louder than words. Competitiveness, for Simon, was associated with action and in turn applied to a reading of 'natural' male behaviour.

I used Simon’s explanation of his competitiveness resulting from the influence of his father to ask whether there was some relationship between traditional understandings of sport and masculinity.

(I) Is this traditional? I’ve been reading about this idea of sport as a masculine arena. Where you have these traditional assumptions about sport and it tends to be related to the men .. I have tried to get my head around what is masculine. What do you understand by it? When I say that it is a masculine arena?

(S) I just think of strength and toughness and that sort of thing.

(I) And in a way they are sort of qualities you should strive towards?

(S) But, you know, if you look at ladies tennis. You look at someone like Venus Williams, I mean, is she not aggressive and tough .. But then you think she’s doing so well because she’s adopted masculine traits.. I don’t know .. I mean, you think, years and years and years ago, some one like the Chris Everts and the Evonne Goolagongs, that they were natural players, but they were erm sort of finesse or gracefulness. Gentle, if you like, but effective, whereas now it’s all grunt and groan.

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It was evident from the response that the construction of masculinity was produced from broader social understanding of the nature of normative gender performance. Simon drew upon a heteronormative description of male and female performance and provided examples of idealized feminine characteristics, such as 'gracefulness' and 'gentle' in comparison to the more masculine traits of aggressiveness and strength. Simon used the example of women tennis players to suggest an apparent transformation in gender performance. At the same time hinting that this transformation in the women's game was at the expense of a clearer distinction between the sexes. To an extent, it could be suggested that the on court performances of the Williams sisters present a disruptive moment within the heteronormative discourse of gender definitions, but the radical potential of this disruptive moment is diffused by the reinforcement of exclusive masculinity and the simultaneous performance of normative gender in other ways (such as wearing short dresses, ribbons and jewellery).

Simon's regret for the loss of the 'feminine' characteristics performed by the women tennis players of a previous generation can be read in terms of a broader understanding of gender and gendered behaviour. Normative male sporting performances are understood in terms of more general social understandings of hegemonic masculinity and within sport of exclusive masculinity, whereas female sporting performance is seen as a reflection of a wider understanding of a gender based binary distinction between male and female and a subsequent belief that sport is an 'unnatural' arena for women.

Simon reinforced his understanding of normative gender behaviour later in the conversation when we spoke about how he managed to maintain time for sport after leaving school, starting work and then getting married.
(S) I got married when I was 25 and was keen to carry on the football and the tennis and luckily my, she's my ex-wife now, she understood.

(I) Did she play sport?

(S) No she er. she's a bit like my mum in the sense that she did some dancing. But she was never a sporty person. Chalk and cheese I guess. Opposites attract I guess. But you know, she was happy for me to do the football and the tennis and erm on occasions .. weekends and stuff like that we'd set aside time to go out together, .. but erm primarily you know there was a free reign at the weekends.

Simon provided an account of how a taken for granted world of normative masculinity is formed and within this world an understanding of normative masculine and feminine bodily performances is established. However, there appears little room to consider alternatives with the implication that, for Simon, sport was the territory for 'real' men and an essential component in the doxic world of authentic masculinity. In this light, exclusive masculinity is a bodily based expression of masculinity which is encountered in the social context of normative masculinity.

**Other social factors**

At this point, I think that it is important to account for other social factors. As I have suggested above with the example of Simon and Gary, specific bodily performances were more important as a factor in the construction of masculinity than sexuality. However, I want to explore this further by drawing upon the accounts of other men from the sample. At the straight club there was a wider range of age groups in comparison to the gay club and I wanted to incorporate an element of age into the research in order to assess whether
the onset of age affected the relationship to hegemonic masculinity and the performance of exclusive masculinity. At the same time there was a broader range of class backgrounds among the men at the gay tennis club, so I needed to take into account these aspects within my arguments. I start with an example taken from interviews with some of the elderly men at the straight club and then continue with examples which take into account relations of class before investigating, more specifically, sexuality.

The ageing male body

The elderly men interviewed at the straight club (Albert 73, Edward 74 and Peter 71) demonstrated more ambivalent attitudes to hegemonic masculinity than the younger men in the club. Recollections of their youth provided similar readings, in relation to the other men, of the performance of traditional heterosexual masculinity, but the aging process had diminished the emphasis upon performing hegemonic masculinity. The ageing process also made the men more aware of their bodies in terms of the investment needed for maintaining health. I interviewed Edward and Albert at their own homes and Jim at the tennis clubhouse. Although I had known the men prior to the research through my involvement with the tennis club, in conducting the interviews and, subsequently, in analysing them, I attempted to take into account our relationships and especially how they viewed me, whether this was as a member of the club, a younger man, the son of an acquaintance or a researcher. Their familiarity with me possibly made my task easier in that they were willing to take part and assist me in whatever way they could. What was difficult for me to ascertain was their perception of me and the way that this influenced the research process. Our prior relationship created a more relaxed atmosphere than one conducted between strangers, but at the same time I was aware of the position that I occupied in the club and the possibility that there may have been some pressure on the
men to impress me. However, this can be seen as a positive aspect of the life history approach in that interpretations of what is considered important now may be assessed in terms of other revelations in the interview process and observations in the field. As Peter Berger suggests

As we remember the past, we reconstruct it in accordance with our present ideas of what is important and what is not... we notice only those things that are important for our immediate purposes. (Berger 1970 page 70)

In this case, there may have been attempts by all the men in the sample to recall aspects of their biographies which would present past sporting experiences in a manner which they believed would satisfy me and at the same time promote their own image of sporting and masculine prowess. However, in relation to the focus of the thesis, attempts by the men to present versions of the past in order to impress me would be revealing as performances of masculinity. The interviews were also revealing in that they provided the opportunity for the men to talk indirectly about their relationships with their bodies. For instance, Edward provided an example of bodily practice which conflicted with hegemonic masculinity. Edward described to me how he had been experiencing back pains during his early forties. His wife had during that time been attending yoga classes and had enthused about how it had eased her stiff back. As a working class man living in the 1970s, it could be argued that Edward faced a substantial social expectation to perform a normative version of heterosexual masculinity, However, for Edward, the possibility of alleviating his painful back provided a greater incentive. Although he was the only male in the class, he found that the exercises did relieve his back and he subsequently continued to practice yoga regularly.
It was very noticeable that when coming away from the yoga class I would walk fifteen years younger.

The specific movements performed in yoga, based upon slow, sensuous and often balletic contortions would have been a stark contrast to his experiences of active and aggressive mainstream sport. However, it could be argued that the sensations experienced through his body would have been significant for him to re-think his understanding of normative masculine sporting practice. Thus, for Edward, there was an individual experience of his body, but at the same time the recognition of the social performance of his body which until then had been constructed in a different way. Yoga was initially considered by Edward to be the domain of women. I asked him how he came to go to the class and whether he had thought of going himself.

My wife did in the first instance. She suggested that we should go and er.. having started it I realised how good it was and it really did lead to an increased fitness.

Prior to going to the yoga class, Edward had not considered it as an option and although he did not specifically say to me that he would have been embarrassed to go when he was younger, it was my understanding that he was able to justify going because initially there were health considerations and he was well into middle age.

Edward, along with Albert and Jim, tended to view their bodies more in terms of other in comparison to the younger men in both groups. The younger men (under forty) related more to their bodies and performance in terms of their identity. The older men placed greater significance upon their class background in terms of their identities rather than
relating in a more direct way to their bodies. For the older men, their bodies were given, in that there appeared little apparent consciousness of it being a malleable entity or something which could be transformed to suit different social locations. Bodies were seen as mechanisms which enabled physical activity rather than as a means of constituting identity. Bodies were also understood as being ‘working class bodies’ by the fact that they were more likely to be involved in some form of manual labour. Although there were many similarities between the men at the straight club in terms of their identification with working class issues, it was difficult to envisage Simon being able to justify taking part in yoga in the same manner as Edward. Simon still located himself within normative masculinity, but in the case of Edward, his age positioned him on the borders of normative masculinity because of his inability to physically perform in the same way as other younger men, like Simon. Therefore generational differences were apparent in some cases although it could be claimed that age did play a part in the construction of normative masculinity, but only to the extent that it affected bodily performances. Edward, however, was still able to demonstrate normative masculinity in other ways, whether this was through on court displays or in the interview situation where he could provide accounts of past performances of hegemonic masculinity. For example

I find that for instance when I look at my hands now .. how soft they are. Though in my younger days I would have great calluses all across there (points to palm of hands) really thick ones there and the one on my thumb was the biggest I’d ever seen … it would be at least an inch long and three quarters of an inch wide and sometimes, if I didn’t tape my hands up heavily I really paid for that.. I’d rip my racquet hand to shreds within fifteen, twenty minutes .. they’d be bleeding and I’d have a blood stained racquet .. and they’d be very painful.
Not only does the above quote demonstrate how Edward was able to use past sporting memories to convey to me a particular version of ‘tough’ or ‘hard’ masculinity where he was also able to suffer the ‘knocks’ described by Simon earlier, but it highlights the way in which the body was used, and invested, in displays of masculinity. For Edward, the graphic description of the extent to which he would subject his body, for what was merely a social game of tennis, demonstrated the importance that he placed upon performing in a particular manner within the sporting situation. It was also a means of providing evidence of his enthusiasm for sport and, in turn, his masculine status. This could also be read in light of the interview process which was a social encounter between two men and how masculine social conventions may have influenced Edward to attempt to impress me. I know that my position in the tennis club as a member of the men’s first team clearly carried status among other members, along with the physical style of tennis which I played. I knew that Edward admired this, as he had once remarked upon it and would often come to watch when the first team played in home matches. However, the fact that Edward did feel the need to provide evidence of his own sporting prowess suggests that there is importance placed upon presenting evidence of normative indicators of masculine identity.

The straight working class body

I argued that, for Simon and Gary, their understanding and experience of their bodies proved to be most influential in the construction of masculine identity. This was clearly established in their accounts of their experiences of sport. However, at the same time, other social factors cannot be ignored. Edward, Simon and Gary clearly placed important value upon traditional working-class values and this may also provide an explanation for Gary’s dislike of feminine characteristics in other men in that they were considered less
‘authentic’ than masculinity expressed through evidence of hard work and physical labour. Edward was also aware of his position within the masculine hierarchy in relation to his age, but he was able to recount past experiences where he would have occupied a different position to the present. I want, therefore, to draw upon some further examples from the research in order to qualify some of the claims made above.

The men from the straight club, because of their greater investment in hegemonic masculinity, I found, were less willing initially to disclose information which could cast aspersions on their masculine identity. However, on several occasions, during the course of the interviews, the men opened up to reveal awareness of the importance of their bodies as a means of performing masculinity.

David, for example, began our interviews with a routine description of his childhood experiences of sport. David was forty three and had been a member of the club for nearly twenty years. He had recently suffered from hip problems which meant in the last year he was playing much less sport than he would have like to. I did not know David prior to the research, but became more acquainted through my involvement in the club and by the fact that he had a racquet stringing machine and would provide this service for tennis club members and the squash club he also belonged to. As I knew that he was not fit enough to play a game, I had waited until I needed one of my racquets to be re-strung and suggested that I interview him whilst he was doing it. David was one of the men in the sample for whom I found it difficult to gauge exactly how he thought about me. He did not ask about my research, but at the same time was extremely cooperative. From my general observations, David was generally laid back and enjoyed his work in computing and spending time with his partner and two children. As such, I felt that he simply formed an
opinion of me based upon our mutual membership of the tennis club and that I was someone, like himself, who enjoyed sport.

The conversation had started with recollections of the sports that were provided for in school. He mentioned rugby as one of the sports that was not played at his school and how he had liked the idea of playing it but not had the opportunity. I had said that I would have liked to play also but added that I considered myself too skinny to play anyhow. David responded

(D) Whereas I was always more on the large side. Not fat ... bigger, stockier than most of the other kids.

(I) Were you aware of that?

(D) Oh yeah. You know after a while you sort of get the bullying lot and think sod this I'm not going to put up with this, I'll sort them out.

David revealed that his bodily presentation was a key factor in the construction of his own sense of masculine identity and those of others. Although he did not consider himself as fat, his description of himself being heavy or 'stockier than most of the other kids' reveals an understanding of his own body developed through constant comparison to others. The social understanding of how to perform masculinity shapes the experience of his body. For him, his body was experienced as large or heavy, which implies at a social level it being ungainly or restrictive. This resulted in David experiencing bullying from some of the other school children which he felt he had to deal with in the appropriate manner. Although David did not go into detail, it was implied that he had to 'sort out' the bullies by using aggression.
Shaun provided another example of the way in which awareness of the body was revealed indirectly. Shaun was thirty two and had only recently joined the tennis club. Like David, I had not known him prior to the research and when I approached him to take part in an interview I suggested that we have a friendly ‘knock’ beforehand and then conduct the interview afterwards in the tennis club hut. I knew that he preferred social play to competitive play. He often attended club social sessions but was not of a sufficient playing standard to take part fully in matches. He was generally, within the club and tennis circles, put into the category of a ‘hacker’, someone who could run around and get the ball back, but often in an unorthodox style. Consequently, I think he was keen to take part in the interview as he did not have the opportunity to hit with other team players.

Shaun was a hairdresser by trade, more specifically a barber, in that he had a small men’s salon which tended to be frequented by older men wanting traditional haircuts. Shaun had followed in the footsteps of his father, who had also run his own barbershop. In the same manner as the other interviews, I started by asking him about his experiences of sport as child. All of the men from the straight club, with the exception of Gary, cited football as the main focus for their sporting activities. Shaun had played football at school and still maintained a keen interest as an adult, although this was as a spectator as participation had stopped after leaving school.

In the course of our conversation I had mentioned that I had seen him at the local sports centre gym and used it as a way to ask when he started and why.
(S) Erm... probably about two or three years ago, started going to the gym .. I’d never been in one before in my life. Always perceived them as being, well I spend the day in front of the mirror anyway (laughs) and I just imagined them full of men standing around, you know flexing their muscles and saying how good they looked, you know and I thought I don’t need that .. And when I finally got talked into going by a friend, we were going on holiday in a months time and just wanted to get in shape a bit. And I went in and could not believe that there was all ages, all shapes and sizes and thought this is great. There was no one kind of ...(pause)

(I) Where did you get that initial idea from?

(S) I don’t know really .. don’t know, just imagined it to be full of beef-cakes .. you know ... I suppose because of places like Ted’s gym, used to be a bit ‘chavvy’ and geezers down .. but when I actually went to the council run one.

Shaun’s construction of normative masculinity was inextricably linked to his own understanding of bodily performance. Men who attended gyms, according to Shaun, were more likely to be anti-social or ‘chavvy’ which was a local term for a dim witted, violent type. Attending a gym was, for him, fraught with a range of disruptive messages relating to accepted understandings of masculinity. Even during the interview, after having spent several years attending the gym, Shaun still felt the need to shift responsibility for making the decision to go in the first place upon his friend. For Shaun, gyms were considered places of narcissistic bodily pursuits which did not rest easily with his own understanding of masculinity based upon traditional working class values.

However, applying only working class sensibilities as a factor in accounting for the way Shaun and David constructed their identities is insufficient. I have suggested that the body
is more central in explanations of the way these men formulate an understanding of their social identity and, at the same time, I believe that Bourdieu's concept of the doxa, the taken for granted aspects of the social world, is relevant here. Everyday social practice is based on a relationship where the body is experienced and contemplated as central to the recognized normative practices at large in the social world. Shaun and David were typical of the sample taken from the straight club in that their bodies were pivotal in their ability to perform exclusive masculinity but, at the same time, their social world was also informed by the taken for granted codes expressed in hegemonic masculinity. This was particularly evident within the sporting context. The examples used above demonstrate how, within this hegemonic male environment, the accreditation of cultural capital was based upon bodily performances. In a scale of cultural capital based upon performances of exclusive masculinity, Gary would be positioned at the bottom. This position would be attributed directly to his inability to perform, through his body, hegemonic masculinity.

As I mentioned in chapter two, I had originally intended to incorporate the class aspect within the research by establishing a research site at an affluent and predominantly middle-class tennis club (sports club two). The intention was to take into consideration the significance of class as an influence in the construction of masculine identity. However, as the research developed, it became apparent that class was less important as a factor in the performance of exclusive masculinity. Although many aspects of exclusive masculinity can be traced to traditional hegemonic understandings of working class masculinity, class background itself appears less of an obstacle in terms of the actual performance. However, through the example of Gary, sexuality appeared more significant because of its direct relatedness to gender binaries within heterosexual hegemonic discourse. The association of homosexuality with effeminacy and 'failed' masculinity was more problematic within
mainstream sporting practices as it was considered a barrier to participation, in comparison to class which could be overcome by exclusive masculine performances. However, the fact that Gary was able to conduct a sexual relationship with another boy who was successful at performing exclusive masculinity suggests that homosexuality is less problematic if it can be masked through bodily performances. This is an area which needs to be explored further.

The gay sporting body

While Connell (1995) has identified the need to address the issue of conflicting masculinities, it is important to recognise that there has also emerged an understanding of a variety of gay masculinities. I described the accounts of Simon and Gary and how experiences of their bodies directly shaped social relations in later life. Even though their experiences were different, both men displayed similar readings of masculine identity and it is relevant that although Simon was able to fully participate in hegemonic masculinity, Gary did not consider himself part of either a heterosexual or gay community. The term gay 'community' is also problematic, but one that is often used, particularly within the media, to express a shared social identity amongst gay men and women. The term implies some form of homogeneous social institution which in reality does not exist. Several points emerge from this.

When attempting to account for gay sexuality and masculinity theoretically it is apparent that the social structures which created meaning for Gary and Simon shaped their understanding of what masculinity entailed. However, theory which focuses specifically on structure or discourse, such as structuralism or post-structuralism, does not always offer sufficient explanation for the way Gary learnt to experience his body as weak, or less able
in terms of sport, in relation to other men. Sexuality may be considered a relevant factor in accounting for Gary's adult life, but in childhood it does not fully account for his understanding of his body in relation to the other boys.

There is often the suggestion that the experience of being gay is intrinsically linked to an identity based upon a stereotypical image of the urban based, young, affluent gay male who frequents a gay club scene. The gay (male) identity is repeatedly positioned as sharing greater affinity with narcissistic, consumer fixated characteristics often associated with women in heterosexual hegemonic discourse. Gay men are positioned in a gender based binary alongside women and in opposition to (heterosexual) men. More recent focus upon the range of masculinities presented in heterosexual masculinity has acknowledged the conflicting versions but failed to take into account the range of contrasting gay masculinities with the result that the experience of being gay is, more often than not, characterized by a homogenous gay lifestyle. At the same time, this misconception may also arise from the discourse of 'homosexuality' which is based upon the notion that gay men are a species defined by their sexuality.

There are also methodological implications to consider. Being open about one's sexuality is still socially problematic. It is more likely that those who are able to live as 'out' gay men or women in relative safety often do so within larger metropolitan environments. The experiences of those who do not participate in the gay 'community' for whatever reasons, whether it is related to the social, economic or geographical, are not as widely acknowledged. I was only able to interview Gary as I had known him prior to the research. In our conversations, he informed me of many men in similar situations to him that he had met in the past (usually for brief sexual encounters). These were often men who were
unwilling to come out as gay and lived as ‘straight’ men, sometimes with wives and children, or they were gay, but found it difficult to meet other men and were not comfortable with the gay scene. At the same time, it cannot be implied that all of the men who participated in the gay tennis club were open about their sexuality in all aspects of their lives, or were gay in the sense that they felt they were part of a gay ‘community’.

I am suggesting that focusing solely upon sexuality does not fully explain the many contrasting lifestyles and practices experienced in contemporary masculinities. However, a general aspect of what is relevant in the lives of men is a shared understanding of what is considered to be appropriate bodily performance. Status is continually ascribed to the active, able-bodied, athletic male body which in turn subordinates other bodies, particularly those which are associated with physical weakness. Heterosexual masculinity is culturally signalled by specific bodily practices with, for example, lack of prowess providing an indication of ‘failed’ gender to the extent that, regardless of sexual orientation, this is articulated as homosexual behaviour or feminine behaviour. For example, Redman (2000) in his study of teenage schoolboys notes how ‘unmasculine’ physical performances were cited as a key indication of ‘queerness’ by the boys rather than explicit knowledge of sexuality and Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) in their interviews with teenage boys also found that accusations of homosexuality (and often subsequent bullying) were initially based upon outward physical signs which expressed a deviation from the limited margins of hegemonic masculine performances.
Paul (34), for example, was one of many men in the gay tennis club who had experienced taunts during his schooldays and, occasionally, hostility because of his inability to present a particular version of masculinity based upon the body.

I remember the first, when I joined junior school and er they wanted me to play football. I cried and cried and cried and tried to get my mother to write me a letter so I didn’t have to play .. Erm, cos I knew I was going to get picked on. It was going to put me in the spotlight, I couldn’t kick a ball, therefore I was going to be called a poof and, you know, I’d get all the aggression from the other boys...

I kind of .. I suppose was fed up with it .. fed up with all the bullshit you get from the sports teachers, you know they were quite bolshy and they gave boys nicknames, er and you just wanted to get away from characters like that, you know, they, a friend of mine, they called ‘Doris’, one kid they called ‘stickweed’. It was kind of like subtle, or just humiliating the kids...

Paul told me that he was not aware of his sexuality at that stage, but aware of his body presentation as different in comparison to the other boys. In this way, his understanding of his bodily performance shaped the perception of his identity in the form of ‘failed’ masculinity. It is also interesting the way nicknames are located in descriptions of the feminine, such as ‘Doris’, or a body type ‘stickweed’. These nicknames establish meaning in terms of their opposition to orthodox understandings of normative masculinity. Many of the men in the sample, especially those who experienced school sport unfavourably, mentioned their teachers and in particular the male PE teachers who would often instigate
bullying through name calling and encourage specific behaviour which was associated with male sporting performance, for example, 'get stuck in', or 'stop acting like a girl'.

Paul developed an understanding of his subordinated masculinity through the reactions of other boys and men and it was in sporting contexts that his inability to perform exclusive masculinity was highlighted. This compares with the accounts of Gary and several others in the sample. Sport, therefore, can be seen as a prime site for illustrating the way conventional masculinity is reproduced through heteronormative understandings of bodily performance. At the same time, however, it is important to recognise that some gay men are more able to invest in socially accepted heteronormative versions of masculine body practices, depending upon their ability to perform hegemonic masculinity.

At this stage, I want to include an example which highlights the contrasting experiences of gay men in orthodox sport and provide support for the claim made earlier that sexuality is easier to 'hide' than an inability to perform physical versions of masculinity. I draw upon the examples of Peter and Jamie as they provide contrasting examples of how corporeal practices shaped their social relations more than an awareness of alternative sexuality.

I selected Peter and Jamie after observing them at the club on several occasions. Peter was thirty three and Jamie was twenty seven. They were regular members of the gay tennis club at the time of the research and both men had been attending for roughly the same time. As I did not know them in any other capacity than being members of the gay tennis club, I initially noticed their physical performances on court and the contrasting reactions they received from other members. Peter and Jamie were both extremely competitive on court, although in terms of their outward appearances, Peter presented a conventional
'sporting' performance in terms of his body build and his sporting techniques. He gave the impression that he had taken part in many sporting activities during his life. Jamie, however, at first impression appeared to be more unorthodox in his techniques. He was also quite noticeably effeminate in his outward physical demeanour.

I was able to initiate each interview by arranging to play a game of tennis with them. Both men were quite keen to play, as they considered that I was a good player and, I think, were flattered that I wanted to interview them. The games were played at sports club two. In both cases we were able to play for about an hour and a half and then use the clubhouse for the interview afterwards. In the case of Jamie, I met him in at a mutually central location, where we took the train to the club. The conversations, before and after the taped interview were also valuable as a means of developing a social encounter rather than a formal interview. In all, including the game, conversations before and after, and the interview, I spent about five hours with the men on each occasion. This also does not include many other times when I was able to observe and talk to the men during the research period.

Peter told me that during his childhood he was aware of his sexuality at an early age and especially during his adolescence. There are problems in being precise about awareness of one's sexuality in the past. Peter was obviously describing his childhood from the perspective of an adult and it is difficult to make specific claims about his exact understanding of a complex social identity. However, what is significant and more reliable is that Peter was able to recollect how he could manage any potential areas of conflict, particularly within the environment of school sports, through his bodily presentation.
I think I was more concerned about being caught out. That was the fear. I didn’t really think oh no I’m gay, I just better not get caught.

The main concern for Peter was being able to present a normative version of masculinity. The fear he held was based on being seen by others as presenting ‘gay’ rather than the broader understanding of his sexuality. Probyn (2000) talks of the importance of ‘shame’ in constructing self identity, particularly in sport. It is based on an understanding of the body as incompetent, which for many needs to be concealed at all times. The sense of shame in relation to bodily performance was a central theme among all the respondents. Shame related to the presentation of ‘unmanly’ behaviour and a subsequent threat of ridicule. The notion that Peter needed to avoid being caught suggests that ‘gayness’ presents itself in some physical form which is manifested through the social presentation of the masculine body. For Peter, this meant learning about ways to present his body in a ‘non-gay’ manner and become more aware of what being a ‘normal’ young male involved. Peter was able to adopt strategies for this

Well you just don’t look (at other men) longer than you should look .. I didn’t actually physically do anything .. quite secretive .. and because I was quite sporty anyway and quite good academically, I wasn’t gonna get picked on. I’m a fairly big .. you know I was OK.. I was quite keen to fit in.

Learning how to act within an environment heavily laden with conventions of hegemonic masculinity was important. Peter’s accounts of how he maintained a furtive approach to containing his sexuality corresponds with the observations I made in the health club and mentioned in chapter three. Rules of masculine bodily conduct are constructed without
reference to explicit texts. They are learnt within the context of a 'natural men's world'.

In this case, Bourdieu's (1990) concept of the taken for granted social world (doxa) is more relevant within the context of the boy's lives. The concept of hegemony implies an awareness of alternatives, but these are overlooked because of continued acceptance of prevailing social practices. From all the men's accounts, it would appear that awareness of alternative sexuality was limited in comparison to the awareness of a need to demonstrate appropriate masculine bodily performances. Peter's physical presentation was, therefore, a primary means through which he could maintain an outward appearance of normative masculinity. He was physically strong and 'sporty' so his outward physical performance did not conform to stereotypes of the feminised gay body. This is not to say that the problems Peter had to negotiate in order to keep his sexuality hidden are confined only to gay men. Homophobia is often used to police a range of subordinated masculinities (Redman 1996). Boys learn from an early age how to present their bodies to others, particularly in more intimate settings which arise in sport. Peter's example highlights the way forms of masculinity are learnt and then acted upon. In Peter's case his physicality and ability in sport enabled him to 'pass' as a 'normal' young male without conflict. Probyn (2000) uses the example of the Australian rugby player, Ian Roberts, who came out in public as gay and notes how his body

functioned as a 'beard' for his gayness, and for a while it was used to hide the possible shame of being gay (Probyn 2000: p. 17)

Peter was able to use sport and his body as a similar 'beard' to mask his gayness. At the same time, Peter also recognised the cultural capital to be achieved from his bodily displays. Even within the context of an interview with another gay man, where sexuality
was not problematic in the way that it may be within a heterosexual sporting environment, Peter was still keen to demonstrate to me how sport had been a large part of his life and importantly that he had been good at the ones he took part in. Sport was not just fun and games, but was an activity to be taken seriously. This often meant a more disciplined approach which invariably made the sport less enjoyable.

I also used to do swim training. So, er, that was like twice a week, serious stuff till I just grew sick of it in the end.

Consequently, in the context of the interview, Peter was concerned with presenting himself as a ‘legitimate’ gay male, but much of this entailed identifying with heterosexual masculinity and presenting himself as ‘manly’ in an orthodox fashion. There were numerous ways in which he was able to do this, but his body and sporting deeds provided the main sources. At the same time, it appeared that Peter recognised the significance of sporting capital and was keen to provide evidence of this in his conversations with me. Thus, the reference to swimming training and the serious nature of the participation was included more as an indication of Peter’s legitimate place within sport and, to an extent, his ability to be a ‘real man’. Peter’s general confidence in his own body, his ability to participate in mainstream sport and his enjoyable experiences of school read more like those of Simon, described above.

In contrast, Jamie recognised the problematic nature of his physical presentation at an early age, even though sexuality was not an issue at the time.
I was a very effeminate child, very effeminate and they were quite, it was quite a rough area ... I was kind of, you know well spoken. So I was a prime target for ridicule and I remember when I was young they started to call me 'posho' ‘posho’ and ‘posho’ and I hated it.

Being softly spoken and ‘posh’ was interpreted by the other boys as an additional factor to being effeminate. It did not coincide with their version of masculine performance which had been constructed through a reading of working class masculinity based on displays of strength. Jamie became aware of himself as physically different from other boys at an early age. Constant comparison with other boys produced a focus upon his body as a central means through which he gained an understanding of his position within orthodox masculinity. In contrast to Peter, who was able to present a ‘masculine’ image and did not have to negotiate ‘difference’ in terms of his sexuality until a much later stage, Jamie was aware that he presented bodily performances which in comparison to the other boys did not represent normative understandings of masculinity. He was aware of more subtle forms of performance, such as the way he was softly spoken, but was mainly aware of how his physical stature drew attention.

I was a very small child, I mean it’s unbelievable now cos I’m six foot two (laughs) ... I grew like a foot in a year, but I mean I was five foot up until the age of sixteen. I didn’t develop until I was very late .. So, you know, a tiny little creature who was really camp.

Jamie’s adult reading of his childhood focused on his physical attributes and this provided a main way to interpret the difficulties he experienced during that period of his life.
Although the initial problems in his ability to adjust to life in the school could be read in terms of class differences, most of the problems faced by Jamie throughout this period were the result of his physical inability to present hegemonic masculinity to the other boys and girls. Like Paul, mentioned earlier in this chapter, Jamie also became the focus of bullying and taunting from the other children. Awareness of his distance from the orthodox understanding of masculinity meant that Jamie attempted to avoid most sports and did not participate in activities which could cause potential conflict. For example, it was not until university that he took up any form of fitness related activity and this was in the more individualistic and female dominated pursuit of aerobics. There was a sense of regret when he described his lack of achievement in other sports.

It was the first time in any sport I had been good at something, apart from tap dancing which I associated, I ditched because it was slightly associated with being gay and I wanted to break all associations with that ... So I ditched tap dancing which is my biggest regret in my life cos it was something I was very talented.

Competence in terms of being able to present the body in an appropriate fashion was an important aspect for all the men, not only during school sports, but in their later adult involvement in sports clubs. Bourdieu's (1977) concept of bodily hexis is particularly relevant here. He describes how within the habitus, the body is a central means through which actors conduct themselves in terms of, for example, bodily stance or gait. For Bourdieu, in bodily hexis the personal combines with the social where

The body is a mnemonic device upon and in which the very basics of culture, the practical taxonomies of the habitus, are imprinted and encoded in a socialising process
which commences during early childhood. This differentiation between learning and socialisation is important: the habitus is inculcated as much, if not more, by experience as by explicit teaching.

(Jenkins 1992 page 76)

Although Bourdieu acknowledges that experience of the body is central in any theoretical debate, Connell’s (1995) concept of the circuit of bodily reflexive practices is particularly useful in this case as he is able to account more explicitly for the individual experiences of the body as a factor in the construction of masculine identity. For instance, Connell’s example of Adam Singer who developed an understanding of his masculinity through his inability to play sport like other men and his father’s taunts that he ‘threw like a girl’ (Connell 1995 page 62) can be applied as an explanation for the way Jamie developed a sense of his own masculine identity. Awareness of his own presentation of masculinity at an early age caused Jamie to consider his body practices and how these actions would be interpreted by others. For Jamie it was even more important as the outcome of his actions could lead to further incidents of ridicule or bullying. The initial awareness of his own body as ‘unmanly’ caused Jamie, in a similar manner to Gary, to reject sport in general and formulate ‘gayness’ in terms of weakness in relation to the normative versions of masculinity presented. School sport was associated with team activities which meant being with other boys and potentially more ridicule. Any interest in sport or physical activity as a child was confined to the sidelines.

I remember watching Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova. It was my mother that got me into it. She would sit me down and watch the final and I loved watching it.
It is significant that although Jamie’s experiences of participation in sport were restricted by the negative attitudes of his peers (and teachers) he still maintained an interest in sport, but it was constructed through a reading of his own identity situated within the heteronormative location of feminine body practices. As such, he had to make do with being a spectator rather than participating. However, it is also important to recognise that being ‘camp’ or effeminate are not bodily performances which necessarily confine the perpetrators to subordinated experiences of sport. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, exclusive masculinity is not necessarily restricted to a specific gender or sexuality. For instance, Fraser (52) and Gareth (29) acknowledged in their interviews with me that they were considered camp or effeminate by other boys during their schooldays to the extent that, in Fraser’s case, the other boys gave him the nickname ‘Effi’. They also had contrasting social backgrounds, Fraser experiencing an affluent private school education whereas Gareth grew up in a working class council estate and attended a local comprehensive. However, they were sufficiently able to demonstrate sporting ability and exclusive masculine body practices. Consequently they recalled more positive experiences of school sport and schooldays in general. As such, they could be considered camp but tough, where tough equated with aggressive, competitive and proficient performances on the sports field.

In summary, the recollections of Simon, Gary, David, Edward and Shaun (from the straight tennis club) and Peter, Jamie, Paul, Fraser and Gareth (from the gay tennis club) highlight several of the issues which emerged during the research, particularly in relation to the making and remaking of hegemonic masculinity. They are examples which provide evidence to support the claim for recognising the importance of the body in creating an
individual sense of social and masculine identity. In addition, what emerges as a significant factor is that even though all the men were united in their enthusiasm for tennis, their bodily performances dictated the way in which they could participate within it and other sports. At the same time, the centrality of bodily experience in the shaping of their identities also reveals wider held social understandings of normative masculinity. Within this formulation, both Simon and Peter could be considered to have been successful within the straight and gay tennis clubs respectively, especially taking into account the fact that Gary and Jamie subsequently left the clubs. Because of this, I feel that it is important to remain alert to the nature of bodily performances within the sporting context in order to ascertain whether terms such as hegemonic heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity are relevant when applied to gender and broader understandings of the body. The examples of the men who shared similar interests in physical sporting pursuits but contrasting experiences of participation, highlights the need to incorporate the body in the theorisation of social and gendered identity.

Consequently, I found that Connell's (1995) descriptions of body practices were supported by the material when taking into consideration the importance placed upon the physical experience of the body as well as its relationship to social constructions of gender, sexuality and sporting performance. The material also supported the argument that sexuality was only problematic for the men if it accompanied an unorthodox presentation of masculinity. However, I did find that, for the gay men, the increased awareness of sexuality created a greater sense of the body in everyday lived practices. This was in contrast to the straight men, who were less outwardly concerned about their bodies unless it related to their sporting performance or gave them cause to reflect upon failed masculinity. Most of the time, the impression given by the straight men was that their
masculinity was not in doubt. Although, within the context of sport, the men appeared aware of the need to constantly perform exclusive masculinity, not only for themselves, but for other men and women.

For the men in the straight tennis club, bodies were seen more as tools for action where activity was a central part of their lives (work, play, sex and sport) in comparison to the expectation that women experienced more sedentary lives. This supports the claim made by Butler (1990) that binary distinctions construct misplaced social understandings of gender. For example, on the sports field women were not expected to be active (or as active as men in the case of mixed doubles in tennis). The notion of reiterative performances also emerges as an important theme which introduces the relationship of power within these social bodily acts rather than merely descriptive theatrical acts. However, in terms of the arguments explored in this thesis, I support the position taken by Connell that there is interplay between existing social discourses and bodily practices. Consequently, the main point which emerges from the above is that, although social factors such as class and sexuality play a contributory role in the construction of masculine identities, these identities cannot be ‘read off’ from them. What is important to recognise is that an individual’s ability to perform an identity is, in part, shaped by his ability to achieve an appropriate level of competence in the necessary body practices and modes of comportment. The result of this is that some gay men can perform exclusive masculinity.

At this stage, I feel that it is important to explore further the role of sexuality in the construction of masculine identity and specifically, masculine performances within the context of sport. If it is the case that some gay men are able to perform exclusive masculinity there is the possibility that these men have the ability to subvert some of the
established gendered practice. As such, the inclusion in the research of a tennis club established as an alternative space for gay men and women provides the opportunity to explore the relationship of bodily performance to sexuality and the extent to which a sports club created within the context of alternative sexuality has the potential to challenge existing discriminatory bodily practices.
Chapter 5

Resisting or consolidating the hegemonic practices of mainstream sport: The case of a gay tennis club

In chapters three and four, I described how body practices play an integral part in shaping the way in which we define ourselves and determine the way others view us. It became apparent that this is particularly the case when looking at masculinities and how a specific version of masculinity is presented through bodily performance especially within the context of sporting practices. I described how this version of masculinity, exclusive masculinity, prevails in organised sport and is available to both straight and gay men and women. Consequently, attempts to challenge the discriminatory practices evident within mainstream sport, where there is the assumption that it is a heterosexual male space, are problematic particularly when taking into account the varying experiences of the individual and the differing ways in which they either benefit or are disadvantaged from established practices.

There is also a continued understanding of sport within contemporary western society in which it is viewed an activity where some are more 'able' to take part than others. There is a tendency for mainstream sport to present exclusive masculinity as a model. For example, within the media, heterosexual male professional sport is considered superior to other forms and given the most coverage. However, outside of elite sport, there are many men and women who, although initially willing to take part, are considered less able, or are unwilling, to adopt the performances considered appropriate and, consequently, are forced
on to the sidelines. This occurs in the context of wider social power relations where heterosexual masculinity is advantageously positioned in comparison to women and gays.

Feminist theory has rightly challenged the privileged status of men in contemporary society, but in many cases has unwittingly reinforced a gender binary by positioning women as 'different' from men. More recent work by, for example, Segal (1997) has recognized the problematic nature of focusing upon gender distinctions and the need to acknowledge broader categories of male and female which incorporate subordinated sexualities as well as bodily performances. Butler (1990 and 1993) has also attempted to re-direct thinking about gender away from the limitations of binary distinctions. I should also point out that I am applying the term 'queer' in the original description of it as a means to disassemble common beliefs about gender and sexuality. Although the activity of queer is seen as a ‘queering’ of culture through the reinterpretation of characters in novels and films, if applied to bodily practices located in sport, Butler’s concept of performativity may provide the opportunity to assess the radical potential of disruptive 'queer acts' which could challenge orthodox thinking about the gendered body. Indeed, the notion of gays taking part in sport suggests one such example of a queer act. Gay men and women participating in an activity considered an essential part of heterosexual masculine identity, on first impression, would appear to challenge orthodox thinking. However, as I demonstrated in the previous two chapters, the contrasting experience of the gay men in the study tends to suggest that they can just as easily be complicit with hegemonic masculinity.

In this chapter, I focus specifically upon the example of the gay tennis club in order to demonstrate how a sports club which initially aims to create an identity as an alternative
space to orthodox sport based upon hegemonic masculine values can in due course end up reinforcing the same practices. Mainstream sporting practice reflects an accepted social understanding of sport as a site for heterosexual male participation and competitiveness. At the same time, body-based exclusive masculinity has become so entrenched in contemporary sports thinking that any alternative versions tend to reproduce the same principles because they seek to emulate and comply with established mainstream sports practices.

**Background to the gay tennis club**

I have included a 'life-history' of the gay tennis club as I feel that it is important to be aware of its historical location. The relatively short period in which the gay tennis club has been in existence contrasts with the established presence of the other, straight tennis clubs and its short life is significant if considered in these terms. At the same time, the continued need for the provision of a 'separate space' for gay men and women suggests that there are still problems within mainstream sport. Consequently, the implication is that within the wider political arena discriminatory practices relating to gender and sexuality are still rife.

The gay tennis club had its origins in a smaller gay tennis group which had formed at the start of the eighties. This group was informally established by a few gay men who wanted to play tennis together on a regular basis. A venue was found where an ongoing booking (three courts for two hours every Sunday morning) could be arranged and adverts were placed in the gay press for other interested players to join in. As it was set up in an informal manner and had no affiliations with organised sports bodies (such as the Lawn Tennis Association) it was very much intended for social play. After each session there was usually the opportunity for lunch and drinks at a local pub. The sessions were based
on doubles games and were intended for all levels of playing ability. At roughly the same
time a group of men in another part of London had set up a similar group. This led to
regular friendly fixtures between the two groups where teams from one group would visit
the other for doubles matches and then some form of social activity afterwards, usually in
the form of a tea-party. The group tended to be predominantly male although there were at
times a few gay women who would attend regularly. At one stage in the late eighties there
was a concerted drive to get more women players, but this backfired as a sudden influx of
new players meant that there was less time for everyone on court. Consequently, after
several weeks, many of the newly recruited women started to drift away.

In the nineties the Sunday morning tennis group continued to play and attract new
members. Many of the new players would meet at the tennis session in the morning and
then arrange to play with others from the group in the afternoon at various public parks.
There were also some newer members who played at a high level and had played
competitively in straight clubs throughout their lives. Several continued to play for their
mainstream clubs in local leagues and competitions. This eventually led to a group of these
players setting up another session in the afternoon at a different location which meant that
there could be tennis played all day on Sunday. These players were generally younger than
the hardcore group of original members and tended to take part in the nightclub aspect of
the gay scene which had become more established during the end of the eighties and early
nineties. The Sunday morning session meant that many were finding it increasingly
difficult to get up after late nights out the previous evening. Also, so that a regular session
could be established for the whole year, an indoor venue was found which meant play was
guaranteed regardless of the weather. Initially, in 1995, three courts were booked for three
hours every Sunday evening and this formed the focus for a new gay tennis club.
Consequently, the club grew to the stage where, at the time of the research, it had a regular booking of six courts for four hours on the Sunday evening and a membership of about 150 players who paid an annual subscription fee. At the same time, the competitive nature of the players who formed the new group meant that there was a demand for more orthodox competitive play. There was also a number of players who were flight attendants and some of these had taken part in competitive gay tennis tournaments in America. These were gay tennis tournaments held throughout the year in various cities organised by a governing body called the Gay and Lesbian Tennis Alliance (GLTA). At that stage there was only one other gay tournament outside America and that was in Amsterdam. In 1996, the Sunday evening group decided to hold a tournament in the UK and became affiliated to the GLTA. This led to a need for greater organisation and the formation of a tennis club committee with additional sub committees for running the tournament and other matters.

A straight acting gay tennis club

Although no formal mission statement was drafted when the club was first established, the aim was to provide a setting for gay men and women to play tennis in a safe non-threatening environment, without the fear of harassment from heterosexual men (and women) and also free from the prejudices prevalent in traditional sports not only to gays, but women in general. Ironically, although initially aiming to provide an alternative environment for gay and lesbian sports players, the more successful it became the more it began to adopt traditionally established sporting codes. Playing sessions were based on competitive doubles games and in order to accommodate differing abilities players were divided into categories according to playing standards. As such, there were four groups: red, blue, green and yellow with red the more advanced. The grading is similar to the ranking systems used by the Lawn Tennis Association in their national ratings scheme.
Members were given appropriately coloured cards with their name on and these were placed on a board. The player at the top of the list could choose three others from below to make up a doubles four with the idea being that the person could choose other players to make up a 'balanced' four, for example, two red and two blue players so that each red could partner a blue. There was, however, still a problem of addressing a form of 'school P.E.' selection process when arranging the games. The method used tended to encourage players to either select friends or those they thought would make up a good game. The outcome was that the better players or more popular players tended to be selected more. Additional status was clearly evident in those who were able to demonstrate sporting prowess and this in turn created (not always transparent) divisions. For instance, on several occasions I observed some members complain that particular players were always choosing the same people for games.

The levels of competitiveness found in the gay tennis club were also similar to those found in the other mainstream tennis clubs I took part in. The structure of social play in clubs where the tennis was based around competitive matches placed greater emphasis upon playing ability. In these situations, social identity was based mainly on playing performance and capital was gained from demonstrating this to others. For example, as I described in chapter three, in the straight clubs where I participated there was a 'pecking order' in terms of the priority given to those who were deemed good players even though, with the exception of juniors, membership rates were equal. In the straight clubs greater prestige or rank was awarded to the men who played in the first or 'A' team and similar prestige was granted to those who held a red card in the gay tennis club.
The failure of the gay tennis club to acknowledge the problems of traditional competitive sporting practices, particularly in terms of the focus on ability, meant that forms of discrimination based on bodily performance were often repeated. Probyn (2000) describes how the organisers of the Gay Games faced similar problems when they attempted to ignore the social aspects of competitiveness by focusing on the notion of 'personal best'. The liberating aspects of performing to one's own level within a particular sport and, consequently, only competing with oneself were overshadowed by the structure of competitions which in many cases pitted one individual against another. Medals, in the manner of the Olympic Games, were awarded for winning performances, with little recognition for losing performances. Similar problems were experienced at the gay tennis club where competitive games ultimately produced a focus upon winning performances. They also provide a reason for the lack of women taking part and the prevalence of more able players in comparison to novices.

Any attempts to emphasise personal best were further undermined by the club's introduction of a competitive singles ladder and the affiliation to the American based GLTA so that it could stage an annual tournament. The various tournaments provided for singles and doubles competitions and were divided into playing categories ranging from the highest level of Open, then A, B, C, D and novice divisions. Points were awarded to participants within their category for a win and these were compiled by the GLTA and displayed on its own website. Players could compete in any number of tournaments held throughout the year, with the idea that more wins would mean more points and if a threshold was reached, the player would move up into the next division. Most of the members of the club took part in the tournament which meant that they all had rankings which in turn provided a means of displaying capital. I made the following entry in my
It is just after the tennis tournament. It has been a hectic past couple of months – not in terms of the research but more so in the amount of competitive play that I have experienced. I have used competitive tennis as a means to gain access to the clubs and also become part of the different (but not so different) communities of men. Added to the exposure I’m getting within the clubs and becoming accepted by the other members, I have experienced more competitive play than at any other time (maybe more than when I played rankings tournaments in my youth). It seems that I have had to ‘put myself on the line’ in that I have had to contemplate my body in the physical sense and also take into account the emotional factors involved when playing competitive matches. On occasions, the primary motive for taking part (having fun and in my case, the research) has been forgotten in the pursuit of winning and beating the other person. I did not enjoy the tournament on a personal level and have to try to assess why I did not. For some reason, the competition seemed fierce, not just in playing standard, but in the general approach to the games. Winning did appear to be everything. Maybe this is related to the majority entry of males in higher categories in comparison to other lower categories, although in my observations of these divisions I found them to be equally competitive. Maybe it was also related to the competitive nature of contemporary urban living, but I’m not so sure. It does appear that within a charged atmosphere like this, the original social perspective is often lost.

(diary entry July 2000)
Participation in GLTA tournaments and the focus on competitive play appeared to deflect the initial intentions of the club. On one hand, the GLTA was an organisation established for gay men and women, but on the other it merely replicated the traditional forms of competitive sport and this was probably an influence in the evident gender imbalance. It may also be significant that the GLTA, as an American based organisation, adopted a sporting ethos evident in mainstream American sport where elite male based, heterosexual participation is dominant and aggressive competitiveness is considered an integral aspect of playing. Annamarie Jagose (1996) has pointed out that a problem with queer as a social movement is that in terms of its global aspirations it often combines American ideology with queer with the effect that competitiveness derived from heterosexual male practice is not questioned. For example, this may provide an explanation for why the tournament held by the gay tennis club in its first year had a strong entry of women, but in subsequent years the numbers of women taking part declined significantly.

The success of the club in terms of its ability to establish itself as a legitimate tennis club has meant that any 'alternativeness' or difference from mainstream sports clubs has been downplayed or overlooked. The more informal and social atmosphere found in the original Sunday morning tennis group was overtaken by an emphasis on competitive play. It also meant that traditional, male, heterosexual-based sporting values became more evident. An example of some of these conflicting ideals can be seen in an observation at the club. A new member started attending regularly. He was a reasonable player and extremely competitive. He also had a great liking for the professional tennis player, Monica Seles, in that he had modelled his style of play on hers (double fisted forehand and back-hand and accompanying grunt). The new player was immediately given the nickname 'Monica' with the effect that most people at the club used this name when either addressing him or
referring to him. The association with the real Monica Seles developed to such an extent that he started to wear similar tennis outfits to her during the club sessions. Consequently, this caused some consternation amongst some of the other members and several complained that it made a mockery of the club's efforts to be a 'legitimate' sporting club, whilst others complained that it was not 'manly' or merely looked silly. It was only after discussion by the committee that it was remembered that the original policy of the club was to provide an alternative space for men and women to play tennis free from the prejudice found in traditional heterosexual sports clubs. Therefore, to make an issue out of a player wearing a particular style of clothing and enforce some form of sanction was, in effect, to reinforce some of the oppressive codes found in other mainstream sports clubs. As such, Monica was allowed to continue playing in the way that he wanted. However, shortly afterwards he stopped attending altogether.

Pronger (1990) suggests that part of being gay is the ability to recognise the irony of existing within a heterosexual world. In gay sport there appears to be the possibility to challenge some of the orthodox views of sport as a masculine arena. Some of the members of the Sunday morning tennis group had started staging a mock 'Federation Cup' which was based on the professional women's tournament where different countries would compete against each other. The gay version provided the chance for the players to represent different countries and take part as a female player from that country. The idea was for a camp, fun tournament where the players could dress up as their favourite player and also bring along traditional food from their chosen country. The Fed Cup ran for several years before the competitive gay tennis club formed, but when it was taken over by the club it immediately lost a large part of the camp element and although teams still represented a country, the attraction became that groups of friends could play as a team
with the objective of winning. Dressing up and any other subversive behaviour were eventually 'straightened' out so that it merely became another competitive tennis tournament.

The cultural understanding of sport as expressed through hegemonic heterosexual male practices provided the mainstay of sporting practice within the gay tennis club. The members who were able to display evidence of the established sporting practices were also able to wield the most power. To the extent that their previous experiences of mainstream sport were merely replicated within the environment of the gay tennis club. Consequently, issues relating to gay politics, broader discriminatory gender practices and inclusive participation were overlooked in favour of established mainstream sports practices.

As previously stated, one of the main reasons for establishing the gay tennis club was to escape the prejudices found in many straight clubs where exclusive masculinity is accepted and alternative versions which do not conform to this are ridiculed or excluded. Many men and women, gay or straight, who were unable to perform exclusive masculinity have experienced sport negatively, particularly at school and, subsequently, have had less opportunity to develop the playing skills considered appropriate. As adults this lack of ability is made more apparent when attempting to take part in a mainstream sporting club. In many mainstream tennis clubs there are playing in sessions for new members which are intended to identify a playing ability and this can preclude many from joining. The gay tennis club established similar methods to distinguish its members and those in the red category were accorded greater prestige within the club. Individual performance on the court became the main focus with greater status gained from success on court. Consequently, this process led to the principle aims of an 'alternative' form of sports club
being overshadowed. In terms of sporting participation, the gay tennis club has become, more or less, a version of mainstream heterosexual clubs.

The examples above highlight the problem of attempting to establish a group based on one uniting factor. In this case being gay does not automatically assume a united set of values. A gay sports club involves acknowledging a set of conflicting values which not only brings into question sexuality and gender, but also issues relating to understandings of traditional sport, competition and etiquette which in turn relate to a wider social climate. The social processes apparent in sporting practice eventually altered the original aims or intentions desired during the formation of the club regardless of whether these were formally expressed or unwritten ideals.

Before attempting to suggest ways in which to combat the levels of discrimination which arise from the focus upon exclusive masculinity in sporting practices, I provide some further examples from the research in order to challenge some of the taken for granted aspects found in mainstream sport. During my interviews with the men from the gay tennis club I asked for their reasons for joining a gay club in the first place. I was also able to bring this topic into general conversations on various occasions with other members of the club. Approaching this subject would often result in discussions about the nature of gay sport, but significantly it revealed similarities in the initial reason for joining a gay club which often contrasted to the actual experience once a member.

**Reasons for joining a gay tennis club**

I have included the accounts of four men from the gay tennis club, Keith (forty six), Matthew (thirty eight), Peter (thirty three) and Jamie (twenty seven). Peter and Jamie were
introduced in chapter three where earlier experiences of their bodies and sport were
analysed. Keith and Matthew have been included as they provide further contrasting
experiences of their bodies and participation in sport. I also chose the two men for their
initial outward appearances. Keith and Matthew contrasted in their outward appearances.
Keith did not present a conventional sporting body in that he was slightly overweight and
had what could be considered, in heterosexual discourse, effeminate mannerisms.
Matthew, in contrast, was extremely confident in his sporting abilities and gave the
impression that he had taken part in mainstream sport on a regular basis. Keith was also
interesting in that he (as well as Fraser, mentioned previously) was one of the original
members of the gay tennis club. I had met Keith prior to the research through my initial
acquaintance with the tennis club and had, consequently, become good friends. Keith was
one of the first men I interviewed from the gay tennis club. The interview was conducted
at his house and was one of the longest of the sample at over two and a half hours. I did
not know Matthew as well and used the same approach as I did with Peter and Jamie. That
is, we played a game of tennis and then conducted the interview afterwards. In the case of
Matthew, the initial game of tennis was played as part of a singles ladder which was
operated at the club. Although the game was competitive, it was not as emotionally
charged as the game I described in chapter three with Tim.

Keith was one of the members in the sample who had originally joined the Sunday
morning gay tennis group which had formed in the early eighties. He had continued to
play there and later at the evening tennis group when it started in the mid nineties. Keith
explained how he had initially decided to join a gay tennis club.
Well I didn't want to join a straight club, I wanted more socialising with, because I was gay and I wanted to socialise with other gay people. So that's when I rang up. I can't remember where I found it, maybe I rang the (Gay) switchboard up. So that was as soon as I got back. I was living in London as well. I wanted to continue er socialising, you know, with other people. So I thought well tennis is a game I like.

His decision to seek out a tennis club specifically for gay people was influenced mainly by his desire to socialise with other gay people. However, he also wanted to experience an environment where the constant need to hide one's sexuality was not necessary. This is apparent in the following quote:

Well unless there was a predominantly straight club that was very open about accepting gay people you feel as though you should constantly hide things, constantly worry about what you are going to say or will I be accepted. Or they seem to be accepting me for what I am, but would they be the same if they knew all the things they don't know I am. Er there wasn't the support about coming out at work or (straight) clubs, so you felt as though if you had a gay club you didn't have to worry about what you said. It didn't mean that everybody was as nice as pie just because they were all gay and friendly and happy-clappy. It wasn't like that at all, but er, you felt as though you didn't need to worry about being gay. You didn't need to worry about being gay. It was such a relief, such a relief and also you can also sort of talk about gay issues, even if it's just your life, which pubs and clubs that you go to and talk about it with a gay perspective. You couldn't do that, I was worried about I couldn't say that in that club. So I think it's absolutely vital.
Keith was realistic about the likelihood that a member of the gay tennis club would not necessarily hold the same views and that there would be differences of personality, but at the same time he believed that the club would provide a space where being gay would not be used to judge him in a negative way. Keith had had previous experience of a mainstream tennis club and found it to be unwelcoming and also repressively organised, so was in a position to make comparisons.

Well there didn't seem to be this hierarchy of club secretary. People just seemed to sort of accept you whether you were good or indifferent or bad. Then I sort of started to get into the (gay tennis) club. It was, socially it was much better organized, cos we'd have those tournaments against (another gay group) and then we had those sort of buffets, and the buffets were proper buffets, not limp ... and er we were cooking until we dropped. You know, you felt as if you were part of er. I felt as though I'd arrived, but arrived back, you know where I spent all those years sort of alone, it was all heterosexual. I think I got into the swing of it from 1984, just because the scene wasn't ... before then I used to go out to sort of clubs and pubs and things but it just wasn't as developed. Well there wasn't the social acceptance. And a generation earlier, I do sympathise with them you know, as only from late seventies did you have gay pride, even then it was very rudimentary.

An important aspect of the gay tennis group for Keith when he joined was the social element. Here he felt that he could fit in without being constantly aware of his sexuality as something to feel ashamed of and feeling obliged to conceal this in some way. This is not to say that the gay tennis group was an ideal set up. It had been originally formed by a small group of men and there was one dominant personality who was keen to maintain
some form of control over the group. However, this was managed by the other members by keeping the group more informal and not allowing too much bureaucracy.

Peter, although having a greater and more successful involvement in mainstream sports during his life, described how it was also the social element which prompted him to join the evening gay tennis group.

I think what I started to do is that I'd been 'out' for a while. I'd had one long term relationship and that had ended quite badly and then I think I wanted to go out, but felt that it wasn't really me. I found it quite difficult to pick men up because I didn't really want casual sex and then I found it quite difficult in a (night)club environment cos either I'd get drunk and then not know what I was doing, so I would, I was probably quite, I wasn't very confident about doing it. And then, so I thought, oh well what I'll do, I'll join one of the social groups that I saw at the back of 'Gay Times' .. at least then I'll start playing tennis and you'll start doing it like that .. So I did primarily come to tennis to get a boyfriend. (laughs) It's a sad thing, so I did do it, I tell people that's what I did come to it for.

For Peter, the gay tennis club provided the opportunity to meet other gay men and the possibility of a forming a relationship. Not only did the club provide a venue where there would be other gay men, but it was also an environment where he could be more relaxed. Peter explained that he felt he would be able to instigate conversations in an atmosphere less predatory than that of pubs and nightclubs. Peter had been quite open in declaring that his main reason for joining the gay tennis club was to find a partner, which he had succeeded in doing. One of the main reasons for gay sport is the social factor. Peter
acknowledged the importance of the social aspect in the gay tennis club in comparison to a straight club he belonged to

Well, the gay one is more of a social do and I, you are, you talk about things more to do with your life than you would at the straight club. I mean, the point I'm .. the odd thing about a gay sporting club is you're there because you're gay not because you're sporting. Otherwise if I wanted to be the best tennis player, I'd go to the best tennis place, which is just to go to a straight tennis club. You play straight competitions. This hasn't got that, it's the social element which makes it different erm..

As indicated in chapter four, sport had played a major part in Peter's childhood and most of his social activities had been centred round physical or sporting activities with his family, friends or at school. In early adulthood he was able to continue with his sporting activities at a high level although he chose to keep his sexuality concealed. Peter stated that the main reason for joining the gay tennis club was to find a boyfriend but in sporting terms it was also an environment where he felt he could be relaxed about his sexuality and not have to approach participating as seriously as he did in mainstream heterosexual sport.

Matthew had also experienced mainstream sport to a fairly high level and throughout had concealed his sexuality. One of the attractions of the gay tennis club was the potential to meet a partner.

But the thing about going to the (gay tennis) club was that erm, there was that element of wouldn't it be nice to meet someone who played tennis that I could have a relationship with.
At the same time, a gay tennis club also provided another form of security when seeking potential partners. As Matthew points out, one of the advantages of the tennis club was the chance to meet other men with similar interests but at the same time provide a safety net.

I wondered whether also with me, cos I know the difficulty I have building a relationship with someone. Tennis is a nice easy way to actually keep a distance between the two... So you're there to play tennis and not really get intimate with someone, but that might be a, er knock on result .. It was much easier, and also I felt again I had like a role. It gives you more confidence doing something you know you can do as opposed to putting myself in a situation like in a (night) club, where I don't feel comfortable, cos I don't feel confident in a club environment. I feel most confident when I'm on a tennis court, playing, doing activity and playing sport.

Not only did a gay tennis club provide the opportunity to meet other men, but for Matthew the tennis court provided a literal and metaphorical net which provided a form of barrier where he could either remain on one side or cross over if he wanted to. His experiences in gay pubs and nightclubs had made him cautious about the intentions of other men where the focus was on casual sexual encounters, whereas in the tennis club he felt more in control in that tennis could remain the focus unless he chose to bring potential relations into the equation.

The focus on the social and the potential for a gay tennis group to provide a 'safe' haven or alternative space for gay men and women was a response given by all the gay respondents in the interviews and was a common theme in the many informal conversations I had
throughout the research with other gay men and women. All of the men in the sample had formed their understandings of traditional sport through their wider social experiences gained at school and, to varying degrees, through organized sports clubs. Their experiences were not uniform in that there were some who had participated successfully, whereas others had either found difficulty fitting in or had little opportunity in the first place because of their inability to perform heterosexual masculinity. What is important, though, is the realisation by each of these men that their sexuality was considered a 'problem' in that it was something which either precluded participation or needed to be masked or managed. The initial attraction of a gay tennis club was, therefore, the prospect of attending a social sporting activity where acceptance was not based on one’s sexuality and, in turn, determined by performing a particular version of masculinity. However, these original motivations for going along to a gay tennis club did not always match up to the experiences once there.

**Experiences of a gay tennis club**

Much of the emphasis in mainstream heterosexual sport is on playing skills and the ability to perform in a particular manner. This has led to many men and women (gay and straight) to feel anxious about their own abilities and also be aware of the constant scrutiny of others. Part of the initial appeal of a gay tennis club was to escape this form of discrimination but the structure of the club and the focus on bodily performance made it difficult to achieve this. Keith was able to comment upon this as he had experience of both gay tennis groups. I asked him whether playing standard made any difference to the way a member was treated. In the early days of the Sunday morning group this did not cause so much of a problem.
(K) cos people used to get terribly nervous, especially when they used to come to a club and they were playing in those doubles and wondering how they would match up, because they would say to me, "I don't how I'm going to, you know, everybody seems to be so good", but people were a little bit more relaxed, you know, even though you might, nobody came up to you and said you are lousy and not playing with us, there wasn't that kind of, although at the straight club, you know, there was, I had to do a sort of little knock up so they could see how good I WAS. Which (laughs) made me feel rather uncomfortable.

(I) Yes, most of the straight clubs I've been involved with there's been a 'playing in' session or trials by the coach.

(K) (overlapping) There wasn't that at the (morning) gay tennis, we just went straight on and played and there was always the sense that however good or bad you were, you would play, and mix up. That's always been the ethos, that, that .. it's always annoyed me when they've strayed from that.

I asked whether Keith had noticed any differences between the morning gay tennis group and the evening group.

(K) Oh there are differences, it's a different, it's much more, funnily enough it's much more straight that tennis club.

(I) Why do you think that?

(K) Because of the intensity .. I'm not saying that gay people can't be intense, it's sort of dividing the sheep, what is it? .. The cows from the sheep, the good from the bad .. The judgment, it's the judgmental nature, when you basically come down to it, the judgmental nature .. because we feel maybe we're so super sensitive about being judged
all the time, but it just seems that the judgment is more .. intense at the (evening group) than it is in the other.

I suggested to Keith that a major part of sport in general was the way performance provided a means of judging an individual among others and that the role of a gay tennis club might be to provide an alternative space where those values are rejected. He responded

(K) But they don't, not at (the evening tennis group), no, this is why I say that it's much more like a straight club than a gay club you know if you could call a gay club more rejecting those values .. not .. because it became to me more and more straight ... because also they want to be more and more sort of, I think the other thing is they want to become more and more masculine in their play .. even though some of them sort of have these affectations of playing like some women tennis players erm .. seem to become much more masculine and they felt some way that they would be more attractive that way, the more attractive they become the more socially acceptable, the more partners they might meet, I don't know, it seems as though they're going along that line.

(I) Is this a gay thing?

(K) No, in the straight clubs it's men with women .. it's just replicating the straight er .. ethos.

For Keith, the evening tennis group reflected the heterosexual sensibilities found in mainstream sport. In the gay tennis club, the focus on bodily performance promoted similar forms found in mainstream sport which were directed more at women and those
who manifested feminine characteristics. Peter echoed Keith's comments when I asked him whether being a good player helped.

Oh yeah definitely, Yeah .. I mean that remains a big difference. It shouldn't do, but you know it's the same in any sort of sporting club. The better you are, the more respect, in a way, you get. You know, as long as you're not an idiot.

Playing ability and bodily performances were the indicators of successful participation. The criteria for determining appropriate behaviour were based upon hegemonic heterosexual distinctions between masculine and feminine bodily performances where masculine equated with strength and feats power and feminine equated with weakness and passivity. The discursive binary distinctions between men and women evident within heterosexual hegemony appeared to be reproduced in the gay club between men through bodily performance. As such, Peter was more able to deal with these levels of judgment because he had gained the confidence to compete within mainstream sport and was considered a good player. For Peter the gay tennis club was more social because it was not to be taken as seriously as mainstream sport. The fact that Peter considered the gay club was less serious than mainstream sport suggests that he made a distinction between being gay sport and heterosexual sports practice. He clearly positioned mainstream sport as more valid in comparison with gay sport and considered himself a legitimate sportsman.

Matthew was also in a similar position to Peter in that he continued to take part in mainstream sport. One of the main reasons for attending the gay tennis club was that it would provide the opportunity to display his tennis abilities without the fear of being found out that he experienced in straight sport.
I think now I would say there is a need and I think it's great and I've thoroughly enjoyed that purely gay competitive environment where... cos I'm not, even though I would say I fit in as well as anyone else, one of the main things that stops me being completely myself. I'm thinking about match dinners, after the match. Is that I can act completely safe. If someone said to me, where were you last night, I wouldn't say where I was last night necessarily.

However, Matthew did not appear to grasp fully the conflicting ideals found in mainstream heterosexual sport and a gay tennis club, but related participation to his own needs. The gay club offered, for him, the chance to experience the sport that he was accustomed to without the need to hide his sexuality. He did not appear to consider that having to act in an appropriate way within the environment of a mainstream sports club was problematic. Homosexuality was, therefore, clearly considered an embarrassment within the confines of mainstream sport and something which needed to be hidden. As he was able to operate successfully in both settings, he had failed to take into account the importance of an alternative space for those excluded from mainstream sport and the reasons for the discrimination.

For Jamie, the discovery of gay sport and in particular a gay tennis club did not provide the smooth path to participation which he may have expected. Peter and Matthew were able to negotiate sport during their childhood successfully which had created an association of sporting activity as enjoyable. In contrast, Jamie's experiences of sport as a child were similar to Keith's and had created a more cautious approach to it. Sport, for Jamie, had involved a constant struggle based on his own sense of inappropriate masculine
performance and although the gay tennis club was initially regarded as a means to escape these fears, there was a sense that he was constantly trying to prove himself.

You go to (the evening gay tennis club) and you're feeling paranoid, I think, you know heterosexual interpretation of gay people is that we're all happy together, having a great time and it's not true. I mean we're not one big happy family living in a gay ghetto. We are vile to each other. We are all each other's enemies.

When questioned why he had such an opinion, Jamie related it to the negative experiences gay people have in their childhood and the development of defence mechanisms developed to deal with these.

Well I think it's because we have such an awkward upbringing and we have such difficulties coming to terms with ourselves that we see most people to be enemies, even other gay people and we can't always open up to them and we're instantly on the defensive, and I know I was.

For Jamie, it was not only sexuality which was an issue but other factors which related more to outward bodily performance.

How they look, how they play, what they're wearing, what they're saying, who's shagging who.

Jamie's previous experiences of sport where he had been constantly judged on his own physical performance had made him acutely sensitive to how others saw him. His initial
expectation of the gay tennis club was that it would focus less upon sporting performance as an indication of worth. However, the contrasting experiences of the other gay members and the focus on traditional competitive forms of sporting practice meant that those with greater sporting capital were generally more able to participate effectively. Although the social aspect was a general reason for joining a gay tennis club, the expectations of how this was to be achieved varied depending upon the previous experiences of sport. The research revealed that those who were previously able to take part successfully in mainstream heterosexual sport unconsciously (or consciously) continued the same practices. Competition and sporting performance remained the central factors for participation and there was often little realisation by those who took part that the forms of discrimination resulting from these performances were more likely to be experienced by those without the appropriate sporting capital. Therefore the members of the gay tennis club who were less able to perform exclusive masculinity shared similar experiences to women, elderly and the disabled in mainstream heterosexual sport.
Conclusions

The material gathered in this research enabled me to address the questions raised at the outset and attempt to provide responses to them. At the same time, the material revealed not only expected outcomes but also unexpected themes which I was able to reflect upon.

The following is an evaluation of the research in relation to the questions posed in the introduction. I also consider how successful the methodological approach adopted was in addressing the aims of the research. I conclude with some thoughts about possible ways forward and further research.

The making and remaking of hegemonic masculinity through body practices associated with sport

The research revealed that within the social arena of sport there are versions of masculinity which carry greater cultural capital (or kudos). These are located in bodily performance and are learnt at an early age, particularly through comparison and evaluation of the individual body and others. The evaluation of bodily performances helps construct an understanding for the individual of his or her position within the social world, in this case the social space of sport. However, this position is not necessarily fixed and there are ways in which the individual can move within this formulation.

The prevalent form of masculinity (which carries the greater kudos) is based on bodily performance where masculinity is presented as diametrically opposed to the feminine. This supports Butler’s (1993) and Segal’s (1997) reading of gender binaries where performing gender becomes central to the establishment of an identity. In the interviews it was clear
that a central concern for the men when they were children was to establish an identity as ‘normal’ in terms of their perceived understanding of masculine behaviour. The ability to demonstrate to others signs of accepted masculinity, in contrast to signs of femininity, was an essential requirement. Among the gay and the straight men interviewed, this was achieved to varying levels of success.

Homosexuality was not a threat to the presentation of ‘popular’ masculinity unless it was presented overtly in a ‘non-masculine’ way. Many of the gay men in the sample provided examples of how hegemonic masculine bodily performances could be used to mask their alternative sexuality and the possible risk of alienation, not only within mainstream sport, but in other social spaces, such as school. Consequently, the men who were able to demonstrate hegemonic masculinity through their bodies, and particularly through sporting performances, were able to navigate childhood, school and youth relatively easily compared with the gay men who presented ‘feminine’ characteristics. In their accounts, many of the men who were less able to ‘pass’ as ‘masculine’ reported being victims of bullying and discrimination.

Body practices and hegemonic masculinity in the specific context of sport

There is a dominant form of masculinity in organised sport which has managed to continue relatively unchallenged in contrast to other versions of masculinity in wider society. I developed the term ‘exclusive masculinity’ to describe a form of masculinity revealed during the research which is based on bodily performances (in this case, on court, but which applies generally to performances in sport, for example, on the field or in the ring.). The characteristic and desired qualities are those of being hard, a fighter, powerful, dominant, muscular, strong, fit, athletic, and, ultimately, a winner. All of these
characteristics are seen as necessary qualities for the successful participation in sport. They are generally considered (heterosexual) 'male' traits, but are also available to gay men and women who enter sport. Participation in sport often depends upon evidence of these qualities, particularly for women and gay men who want to actively participate in mainstream organised sport rather than remain on the sidelines in passive, 'supportive' roles.

Exclusive masculinity may be evident in other areas of society, but is more problematic. In fashion and popular music, versions of this form of masculinity are clearly popular and carry cultural capital, but there does not appear to be the same overriding status which is ascribed to 'exclusive masculinity' within organised sport. For example, the 'nerd' or effeminate male can be successful in fashion circles through wearing clothes considered fashionable but the boundaries remain more rigid in sport where specific bodily performances are required whilst others are excluded.

Body practices prevalent in sport operate at the expense of other forms of masculinity, femininity and sexuality

One of the themes which emerged during the research was the marked contrast in the men's accounts between the more inclusive primary school world of fun and games where all body types and both genders could, to a greater extent, enjoy their bodies safely, without fear of discrimination or resentment in comparison to the world of adult, male, serious sport where rigid boundaries are created and entrance requirements are set. Although there was no clear cut stage where the enjoyment of games by all, regardless of gender and ability, finished and exclusive or divisive organised 'serious' sport began, the later stages of primary school and early years at secondary school were generally seen as
times when participation increased or virtually stopped. For many of the men in the sample, the aggressive, competitive nature of secondary school sport was a negative factor. During this time, the fun and enjoyment previously experienced at primary school was overtaken by the constant demand to display exclusive masculinity which led many to opt out completely or only to return at a much later stage. There was evidence to suggest that hegemonic masculine bodily performances were significant during this period in terms of shaping masculine identities. The accounts from the gay men highlighted how sexuality was less problematic for those who were able to perform appropriate masculinity (particularly in sport). However, those who displayed marked physical differences in their bodily presentation found the experience of adolescence problematic. The men who were effeminate in their bodily displays experienced greater conflict throughout their schooldays, not only from other children but from teachers as well. Consequently, it is suggested that bodily performances are a central factor in the construction of and understanding of masculine identities.

There was also evidence from the men in the sample (gay and straight) who were good at sport that they were not always comfortable with their ‘roles’ but felt constrained within them as the alternative was the possibility of being subjected to ridicule faced by other boys. As such, within hegemonic masculine discourse, ‘gayness’ was constructed in terms of performances of weakness, and, subsequently, associated with femininity. Within mainstream sport, heterosexuality was taken as ‘given’ unless there was evidence to suggest otherwise. Evidence of ‘failed masculinity’ was generally found in bodily displays which ‘betrayed’ the performance of exclusive masculinity.
How do these body practices intersect with relations of class, race age and (dis)ability?

I described in chapter two how I had originally intended to focus upon three tennis clubs. There were two ‘straight’ tennis clubs, one a working class tennis club which was part of a works based sports facility provided by a large employer and a middle class tennis club situated in an affluent area. The third was a gay tennis club in the centre of a large city. Although, at face value, the class location of the clubs did appear significant, it was not as encompassing as I had envisaged at the start of the research. The focus on bodily performance, through displays of gender and physicality emerged as the primary source for acceptance within the clubs. There were varying levels of economic capital on display at all the clubs. Although the works based sports club was located historically within a working class subtext, it was not a factor which caused apparent distinction or divisions. The same applied to the middle class tennis club. In the gay tennis club, there was a variety of class backgrounds, but, again, this could not be considered a factor in their ability or inability to take part successfully. For example, Peter’s father was a market trader, whereas Matthew’s was an actor and Fraser’s was a doctor. Each could be seen as having differing class backgrounds, but it was their ability to perform exclusive masculinity which provided a greater sense of their masculine identities.

The gay tennis club and the middle class tennis club also had a broad membership in terms of ethnic origin in comparison to the works based club which was predominantly white. This relationship could be more easily explained by the geographical location of the gay and middle class tennis clubs in a large cosmopolitan city and the works based club in a small suburban town. In a similar manner to class, taking into account race as a factor in the construction of exclusive masculinity was considered less important as the research
progressed. I observed similar bodily displays within the context of sport among men from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

I was unable to consider disability as a factor in the research as there were no disabled members in any of the clubs. Although this may be considered a limitation of the research, the wider implications of continued dominance of exclusive masculinity, with its emphasis upon bodily performance, not only effects gays and women but all groups considered subordinate to hegemonic masculinity.

To what extent does tennis, as played in an alternative site, (such as a gay and lesbian tennis club) subvert or reproduce hegemonic masculinity?

From the observations and accounts described above, it appears difficult to create an alternative space to mainstream sport. The emphasis within gay sports, such as a gay tennis club, is generally placed upon activities and practices established within the context of traditional sport. The location of sport within the discourse of gendered and heterosexual practices means that it is often difficult to confront or replace the forms of social conduct which predominate. One of the central insights of queer theory is that the privileging of heterosexual intercourse gives rise to a binary division of gender and is a social construction (Ostenfeld, Woodgate and Wafer 2002). Also, the binary of heterosexual/homosexual implies that queer is a political and cultural strategy aiming to destabilise contemporary configurations of gender, sexuality and sex, thereby allowing something more capacious (and less occupied with sex as an indication of identity) to emerge. A main exercise of queer theory is to expose 'queer acts' (Butler 1993) which may disrupt the formulation of normative gender. If this is the case, then the question arises to what extent can gay sport be seen to adopt the principles of queer? It could be claimed
that the initial establishment of a group set up for gay men and women to play sport could be considered a queer act. However, according to Butler (1993), queer acts need to make people renegotiate the way in which they read public signs. The notion of an 'alternative' gay and lesbian space is initially problematic since it reinforces the heterosexual/homosexual binary rather than exposing the constructed character. In addition, the evidence collected during the research would suggest that the gay tennis club produced more signs of 'straight acts' rather than queer ones.

The complex range of differing experiences in relation to sexuality, masculinity and sport means that it is difficult to identify clearly unifying factors in gay sport practice. In terms of a collective identity, the gay sports club has conflicting ideals. On the one hand, it has been set up to provide an environment away from the often oppressive heterosexuality found in mainstream sports clubs, whilst, on the other hand, the club is based around competitive sport and adopts traditional sporting procedures. My observations at the gay tennis club and comments from the men in the sample group tend to support the claims made by Pronger (2000) when he suggests that the emancipatory power that appeared initially within the Gay and Lesbian community, particularly in its approach to sport, has been quelled in recent years through the attempts to 'normalise' and become part of mainstream sport. This is not to say that the gay tennis club has 'failed' as it has been successful in providing the opportunity for some gay men to play tennis in a relatively safe environment and that similar to the wider achievements of the Lesbian and Gay movement, it has contributed to making gay sport more visible. However, those who have greater opportunities to participate in gay sport are more likely to have had less traumatic experiences of mainstream sport as children. The evidence in this research suggests that
amateur sporting practices in gay sport continue to reinforce discriminatory practices based on bodily performance and heterosexual understandings of gender.

In the research I found that consciousness of gayness as a political issue was more often than not displaced by a combination of orthodox understandings of how sport 'should' be played and attempts to achieve playing time solely for oneself. Gay sport in general has adopted a liberal approach which seeks to provide access for lesbians and gays to the mainstream rather than confront or challenge the core ideals. Pronger (2000) cites the Gay Games as a prime example of an 'inclusion' approach. Consequently, it is a very popular form of mainstream gay culture and expresses dominant gay liberal philosophy that lesbians and gays are just like anybody else. Gay sports, it follows from this line of reasoning, proves normality in the same way that being a successful business person or doctor proves gay normality. Because of this many gay sports organizations seek legitimisation from traditional sports authorities. For example the gay tennis group in my sample adhered to the rules of conduct laid down by the British Lawn Tennis Association.

On several occasions during the course of the fieldwork, there were comments from members of the gay tennis club about how similar the club was to other 'straight' clubs. This was not, however, a criticism, but meant as praise and an affirmation that the club was successful in terms of its ability to be the same as other straight clubs. There was often a sense of pride displayed when there was evidence to suggest that the club was just like any other (straight) tennis club. On one occasion, I was with a group of other members waiting for the next available court and watching the players on court finishing their game. One of the men commented, 'you'd never know it was a gay tennis club.' The remark was made as a compliment and demonstrated how the gay club, and gay sports, was considered
as inferior to mainstream (heterosexual) sport. Therefore, a mark of success was the ability to appear like mainstream sport rather than contest it.

The liberal approach apparent within the gay tennis club overshadowed any potential destabilising effects found in more radical gay politics to an extent that I detected the impression among many of the club members that they did not want sexuality, or gayness, to rear its ugly head in the context of a sporting environment. Affiliation to the Gay and Lesbian Tennis Alliance could also be seen as another factor in negating the opportunity to be alternative. The focus on competition deflected many of the original concerns for establishing a gay sport group in the first place and placed gay consciousness on the sidelines. The focus on winning, ranking points and tournaments also prioritised a more individual based mentality rather than that of the group as a collective.

Practical issues in the club also contributed to the focus on playing and performances on court. The club's social play session was limited to once a week which made the allocated court time more precious. As court space was restricted, there was little opportunity to experiment with forms of play. Courts were allocated for competitive doubles games which meant there was little time for non-competitive 'knocking' and practice, and subsequently more emphasis was placed on the prior possession of playing skills.

In the interviews, I asked the men how they would tackle the problem of addressing discriminatory practices. Keith was the most vocal in the sample.

Well it's very difficult not to be, not to replicate some of the straight .. ways of organising things, you know like having different levels of players and er, I think it's
good that they actually mix different levels of players together, but you've got to stick to that because it causes an awful lot of upset and embarrassment and bad feeling if you don't, because you realise that people just drift into their cliques and don't want to play with you because you're not good enough. This is another social rejection as well. If you had two good players and maybe structured it so you could have .. but it has to be highly structured, highly organised. And also you've got to have somebody to tell people not to do things .. but it's difficult to organise, I think the only way is through mixing people up, but that's got to be very well controlled and it's difficult to control. It's much better if the person doing that is not playing. But that's a burden and you've got to have more than one person doing that .. erm .. I think also you've got to have opportunities for er training er .. coaching .. but there again that puts another burden on the structure of the club.

Keith's response was to apply more rigid monitoring of the play, but he found it difficult to escape the restraints of competitive sport. This reflected the conflicting themes of discriminatory practices, gay consciousness and how sport should be played which occurred throughout the research. Many of the gay men in the sample found it difficult to align their understandings of sport with those of gay discriminatory practices, choosing either to ignore or separate the two. This may also reflect more generalised understandings of sport where politics are often considered external to, and not part of, sporting practice.

As previously mentioned, Pronger (1990) suggests that gay sport irony is a step towards challenging heterosexual sensibilities. There was evidence of this within the gay tennis club, but it was not acted upon or emphasised to any noticeable extent. I mentioned above
the attempts to stage a mock Federation Cup, based upon the women's professional tennis circuit and how it had gradually toned down its alterntiveness. There was a general following among many of the members of the gay tennis club for women's tennis, although this aspect was more confined to off court activities. Off court aspects of the gay tennis club appeared to provide more opportunities for gay sport irony or queer acts. The identification with women's tennis presented further evidence to suggest that issues of sexuality were not completely forgotten. However, the practice of sport and the on court performances of the men where greater capital was conferred upon hegemonic masculine displays appeared to negate any apparent 'queer' potential during the off court activities. Consequently, if it the case that much of gay sport operates in similar ways to mainstream (heterosexual) sport, then it poses the question

What should a gay sport look like?

Rather than being a gay sports club, the gay tennis club in the research could more realistically be described as a tennis club which has members who are gay. What this highlights is the dominance of mainstream sporting values and how the hegemonic aspects of sporting practice are more compelling than the experiences of subordination which created the original reason for establishing a gay tennis club in the first place. Consequently, attempting to establish gay sport is problematic in that those who are more likely to take part enter with pre-established understandings of how sport should played. Regardless of their experiences, the men who attended the gay tennis club tended to base their understanding of sporting practice upon the values which gay politics attempts to resist. Therefore, the initial political aims of the gay and lesbian movement relating to countering discriminatory practices in mainstream sport and wider social acceptance of alternative sexualities are in conflict with established formulations of what sport should be
and how it should be played. It could be suggested that the gay tennis club derives from a quintessentially gay liberation cultural intervention which has been overtaken by liberal politics, inherent not only in gay sports but mainstream sport in general.

Although Pronger believes that gay sports has provided lesbian and gay people the opportunity to enjoy sports in an inclusive and safe environment, ultimately it has made these people conform to the established norms, particularly those based on oppressive male heterosexual codes. In terms of theorising gay sport, applying a concept such as queer is also problematic as there needs to be recognition of the social and cultural processes which have shaped the sport as it is played today as well as the issue of sexuality. As Kirsch (2000) points out, a problem with queer theory is the lack of recognition of the social and historical factors which have influenced the realities of everyday life.

Mainstream sport, as I have suggested, is riddled with exclusive masculinity based upon bodily performance. It may be that highlighting 'queer' bodily acts in sport would provide one focus whereby present understandings of sport practice could be renegotiated. Factors which have excluded gay men and women in mainstream sport should be emphasised. In the case of the gay tennis club, it was revealed that sexuality was not the sole reason for the men's exclusion from mainstream sport, rather the bodily performances which signified failed masculinity. As I also mentioned earlier, some of the members of the gay tennis club were able to successfully take part in mainstream (heterosexual) sports clubs. Thus, bodily performances considered as expressions of being gay, such as weakness, acting 'camp' or being 'girly' need to be evaluated in terms of sport practice and how they are addressed in mainstream sport. Accommodating acts which are considered queer
within the context of mainstream sport could provide the opportunity to challenge
assumptions about gender and sexuality, as well as other social factors relating to age,
race, class and disability.

Applying 'queer' to gay sport could be useful if the positive potential to be found in
oppressed groups such as gays and the women's movement in general was harnessed to
highlight subversive practices which disrupt existing practices and consequently activities
which are not be regulated by exclusive masculine bodily performances could be
encouraged. By challenging existing practices there is a greater possibility for introducing
alternative ideas which are based on acceptance and accommodating difference. At the
same time, it is important to promote the idea that sport does not necessarily have to be
based entirely on winning and losing, or dominating an opponent. The continued focus on
competing detracts from many other more positive aspects to be found in physical bodily
pursuits. This is an area which gay liberal politics fails to address. Heikkala (1993),
drawing upon Foucault's use of disciplinary practices, goes further in suggesting that the
blind pursuit of competition without careful reflection can lead to a fascism based on a
love of power.

Reflection upon contemporary sporting practices is the key and it is among those who
have the opportunity to initiate reflection that the potential is to be found. Creative ways to
enjoy the physical thrill of sport need not be solely based on orthodox practices. It needs to
be established whether there are forms of competition which can escape the problems
discussed above or whether the way ahead lies in developing new sporting practices which
incorporate an inclusive, non-competitive framework. Groups which have been established
as an alternative to orthodox sporting practices should, therefore, be aiming to seek out
inclusive forms of play. If these become popular, they have the opportunity to challenge the established framework, not only in relation to sport but to established discriminatory practices. The liberal agenda of 'personal best' need not have to be located within a framework where judging one's personal best means comparing it to another and adopting exclusive masculine practices.

The potential to be found within subordinated groups is endorsed by Bourdieu when he calls for a much needed challenge to accepted heterosexual masculine dominance;

The objective of every movement committed to symbolic subversion is to perform a labour of symbolic destruction and construction aimed at imposing new categories of perception and appreciation, so as to construct a group or, more radically, to destroy the very principle of division through which the stigmatizing group and the stigmatized group are produced.

(Bourdieu, 2001 page 123)

These forms of symbolic destruction could be expressed through queer bodily acts which highlight the divisiveness of mainstream sport practices. Change does not necessarily occur overnight, but it does not mean that it cannot happen at all. Those involved gay sports, and particularly an influential organisation such as the gay games, have many opportunities to initiate change. It involves taking risks, re-thinking the orthodox and re-writing the rule books. Loland (2002) calls for a return to 'fair play' in mainstream sport in order to counter the influence of over zealous professional sport. However, he fails to address the discriminatory practices evident within an already tarnished and unequal system. From the evidence gained during the research it was clear that the primary reason
for belonging to a gay sports group was to experience an inclusive social event. If queer can be applied to gay sport, it should either adopt existing sports and adapt them to its own requirements and alter the rule books to accommodate inclusive social elements or it should develop its own forms of sport. If this means rejecting orthodox heterosexual versions of sports, then so be it. The Gay Games, for example, has valiantly attempted to make participation as inclusive as possible, but for many gay men and women the opportunity to participate in such an event is still not an option. Gay sport which aims to be queer, or, at least, 'gay' in that it is able to contest the discriminatory practices found in mainstream sport, should promote activities which have the potential to cater for those with a variety of bodies and not place specific bodily performance as the prerequisite for participation. For example, if traditional sports are to be continued as part of the gay games, then only those which cater to mixed teams in all senses should be included. There is no reason that a track relay event should have a man, a woman and a person in a wheelchair as part of its team. There are other newer forms of sports, such as Korfball (a non contact, mixed sex sport based upon basketball and netball), which could be adapted to the requirements of a queer sport. It also needs to be determined whether there are forms of competition which are more inclusive and, if not, other ideas which incorporate physical expression without the risk of humiliation or shame should be tested. There are many forms of sport and play which could be adapted to fit these criteria.

**Reflections on methods**

The utilisation of qualitative methods has been justified on several accounts and I feel the approaches employed have uncovered revealing material in a number of ways which were not predicted at the outset.
I found that the observations worked well in conjunction with the interviews. Observing in the tennis clubs as a participant also provided a useful contrast to observing covertly in the health club. I was drawn into the activities of the tennis clubs to a much greater extent than I originally envisaged which meant that I was constantly observing a range of activities, both on and off court, and paying attention in closer detail than if I was merely there to record an interview and then leave. However, it did mean that the research was mentally exhausting and was also more physically exhausting than I had imagined. At one stage I was taking an active part in three tennis clubs and a health club. Although demanding, it created a greater range of observations and sources for conversations and interviews.

The strategy of playing a game of tennis with a respondent prior to an interview worked extremely well, particularly with the men that I did not know so well. It created a space before the interview where many barriers could be broken down. It meant that there was an initial period meeting up, going to the club, playing a game, talking after the game and then having the interview. Consequently, by the time we reached the interview stage and started recording, both of us were relaxed and it became easier for the interview to adopt the form of an extended conversation. In effect, this process not only made the interviewee feel more relaxed, but also helped me concentrate upon the interview itself and not worry unduly about other factors, such as the atmosphere or initially establishing a relationship with the interviewee. Therefore, I was able to adopt active and reflective methodologies more successfully. This highlights the strengths of qualitative research when applied to an appropriate situation. However, the approach was time consuming in that the recorded interview itself would also require several hours beforehand talking to and playing tennis with the interviewee. Like other ethnographic investigations, it meant spending an extended period taking part at the research sites whilst attempting to become familiar with
the other members so that when I did ask someone for an interview, I could be reasonably certain that they would accept.

As I was able to generate a greater level of familiarity with the men in comparison to interviews conducted with total strangers, it meant that the accounts could be considered, to an extent, more honest and less ‘staged’. Sometimes I was surprised by the openness of the revelations made by the men, without apparent prompting. At the same time (and another strength of qualitative research), I was able to empathise more effectively with the men because of the shared experiences gained through participation in the clubs. On many occasions during an interview I thought to myself that an experience described by one of the respondents was remarkably similar to an event in my life. More often than not, this was related to experiences of family life, school and work. These shared experiences created a deeper relationship with the respondents and influenced the research in that I felt I was able to understand the men’s lives in more depth. This was particularly the case for those I initially did not know that well. Qualitative research is often criticised because of its subjectivity, however, my ability to gain access to a range of men and explore many aspects of their lives may provide further justification for this branch of research as a valuable method for making claims about social life.

I suggested in chapter two that I intended to apply active research methods where I would attempt to make the research a constructive experience not only in terms of the research aims but also those who took part in it. This approach shaped the way I formulated the research design in that I wanted to provide the men who took part in the interviews an opportunity to get something in return as well. Apart from playing a social game of tennis, I had hoped that the process of talking about one’s life would be a worthwhile experience.
for the men. Many of the men commented at the end of the interviews that they had enjoyed talking about aspects of their lives as they seldom had the opportunity to do so. At the same time I wanted to be able to feed back some of the information that I gathered during the research to the clubs.

One way that I was able to do this was at the gay tennis club where I assisted in the development of the club’s mission statement. I was able to use some of the comments I had collected as a means of highlighting the conflicting experiences the men had had of mainstream sport in general and whilst a member of the club itself. I detailed this in a small article for the club’s newsletter in order to reveal the problems faced by a gay tennis club (see appendix 2). The information I supplied to the club committee about the research and the article meant that the mission statement included a section on accommodating ‘difference’ and highlighted the significance of ‘gay’ issues within the wider practices of the club.

Ways forward

The focus of the research upon male bodies and masculinities within the context of sport was directed by many factors, both theoretical and practical. I have claimed that exclusive masculinity is a form of hegemonic masculinity based upon bodily performances particularly located in sport and also available to gay men and women. I made these claims by investigating groups of men, gay and straight. From my observations I noted that, similar to women in mainstream sport, gay women were less represented in gay sport which may be a direct result of the replication of these hegemonic masculine practices (by way of exclusive masculinity). Consequently, like most worthwhile research, the findings in this research generate another series of questions. In this case, to what extent do women
experience sport and their bodies and whether there are similar pressures upon them to perform exclusive masculinity within this context?

Further research would be productive if it could evaluate the experiences of gay and straight women in a similar manner to the research I conducted with the men. At the same time it would also be worthwhile to explore those men who do not actively take part in sport in order to take into consideration the significance of bodily performances in other social spaces. I suggest this because, although I focused specifically on sporting practices, it could be suggested that developments in the late twentieth century in relation to youth culture and the dance scene (both gay and straight) have also placed great emphasis upon bodily performances. The social arena of youth and dance culture as another specific social context may appear to be more inclusive, if considered in terms of the discriminatory practices found in sport demonstrated in this research, however exclusive bodily practices may also be a requirement for the display of particular types of ‘cool’ or ‘mad’ performances as opposed to ‘sad’ ones.

Although the research is primarily located within a sociological evaluation of masculinities and body practices, the sport setting provides the opportunity to consider developments within contemporary sport. I described how the men who took part in the study had varying abilities and differing experiences of sport, but almost in every case there was a common sense of enjoyment from the physical experience of taking part in a sporting activity. However, the practice of sport was clearly biased towards specific abilities and bodily performances. These may be appropriate for elite, professional sports, but in the context of amateur participation, where the initial reason for wanting to take part is based on social enjoyment of the body, requirements of sporting excellence become less
relevant. However, as I have indicated in the research, it is the dominance of exclusive masculinity which reinforces these discriminatory requirements.

Another factor in the prevalence of exclusive masculinity is the emphasis upon competition. Probyn (2000) rightly points out that the negative effects of competition are still overlooked. Competitive sport places too much emphasis upon winning, with the consequence that taking part can produce a fear of losing and shame about one's performance. Again, taking into account that the majority take part in sport at an amateur level, the context is distorted and the emphasis upon enjoyment is played down. Although these sentiments are often displayed by liberal approaches to sport, the notion of competition is still considered as an aspect of society that is essentially positive. Consequently, competition in sport reflects broader capitalist values and is believed to be 'character' building. If this is the case, then little has really changed from the early Victorian sporting practices in the nineteenth century.

I was interested in the potential of 'queer' when applied to sport as a means of challenging many of the prevalent attitudes found within it. However, as the research progressed, it did appear that there was a wide gulf between the theoretical claims of academic queer theory and the 'real' or lived practices of those who took part in sport. However, there were instances of performances which could be considered 'queer'. The example of 'Monica' wearing a dress to play tennis with other gay men did cause reflection upon the normative understanding of sport. For a brief period, many of the gay men had to reflect upon their own understanding of masculinity within the context of an alternative social space. Thus, it is here, on a positive note, that I want to conclude. Much of the research chronicled instances of discriminatory practices within the field of sport and the continued dominance
of a heterosexual based hegemonic masculinity. However, given that gay sports are a relatively recent phenomena and that little research has been conducted within this field, I take the more optimistic view that continued investigation will reveal more instances of transformative acts. At the same time, more research which focuses upon bodily experiences and performances of those not considered a part of mainstream sport will highlight the fact that sport does not necessarily have to be the domain of exclusive masculinity. As Keith pertinently reminds us

Because [sport] is not so important ... It's not as important as er not making somebody feel humiliated and excluded .. they might have been excluded all their lives, cos I know, we all know what it feels like to be excluded.
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Appendices

Appendix 1

The following are extracts taken from my interviews with Simon and Keith. Constraints upon space mean that I cannot include all the interviews, but the two selected provide an indication of the format of the interviews and the type of material that was collected.

Interview with Simon (38) Straight tennis club

(I) Describe your family to me, going back to when you were young. Just describe your mum and dad and if you had any brothers and sisters.

(S) My dad worked, used to work up at the research centre, er my mum used to work up at the nursery there. She looked after the children there, the employees children.

(I) What was the research centre? What did your dad do there?

(S) He was a biochemist, er sort of went out in the fields testing the chemicals.. reaction of the chemicals to insects, pesticides what have you. Moved his way round the site up there. He was linked to the sports club up there and they had a swimming pool, tennis courts, squash.. er there was football up there as well.

(I) Did you have brothers and sisters?

(S) I have two sisters. My twin sister is twenty minutes older than me and my other sister is five years older than me. Erm they er. My older sister went to (the girls grammar) .. er then my other sister went to the Secondary school and along side of this was the boy’s section. .. erm, but my mum and dad er ..

(I) Have you always lived in the town.

(S) Yes, my dad lives in the same house where I was born. It’s a small bungalow in a valley.. he’s always lived there. But er my mum and dad split up when I was a bit young. When I was about nine. And er I lived with my mum for a while er and moved to ( a village just outside of the main town) erm stayed there for a few years. She was erm.. flitted from job to job. She was a trained nurse er when she met my dad .. and carried it on for a little while but erm then she decided that she wanted to become a teacher and went to the local college to train to become a teacher. Erm she also had various part time jobs and after she left one of the primary schools er she worked over at (a nearby city) in a department store as the nurse erm and we sort of basically had moved quite often in our lives anyway .. erm sort of every three years, two or three years. Moved about the area quite a bit.

(I) When you were really young. When your mum and dad were still together. What did you do when you went out as a family?
As a family, I don’t recall too much. We were still fairly young then. Various trips to the seaside. I remember we went on a couple of camping holidays, but generally at that sort of age, between about five and nine, I don’t really remember too much about going out other than to the seaside or sight-seeing. It was generally playing in the neighbourhood, as we lived out in the country and my sister and I used to go there, there was a couple of twins next door and we just used to go out in the countryside and play. Sometimes go up to where my mum worked. Up the top of the valley, through the woods. Go round and see my mum and dad in the research centre and see my dad. Erm, so it was generally just playing in the countryside, in the quarry.

Yes, just rummaging around. What about your mum and dad, did they actually play any sports?

My mum didn’t. She was very interested in Scottish country dancing. And she used to do that down the local girl’s grammar school. I remember going down there in the evenings.

Did you take part?

I had a bash, first off, but it was much more fun to hide behind the curtains, play around. My dad was a very keen sportsman, I vaguely remember him telling me that he was not that keen on football, but I do remember him playing.

Why do you think that is?

Erm I think he decided it was a dangerous game. He did play football. He gave the impression that he didn’t like it. Erm when I got older and started kicking around, he gave the impression he didn’t like it, I think he probably decided it was too rough and that there were other sports he could play. He was very keen on swimming, squash and tennis. He started up the tennis and maintained the tennis section up at the research centre for quite a long time and until it sort of dwindled and then he came down to where he is now (the straight tennis club). He’s still playing tennis now and er squash he’s not playing so much now. Just mostly tennis. He likes mountains and is very into finding out the flora and fauna of the world. So he’s up the Himalayas and the Andes and what have you, so he’s quite keen on that.

Did he encourage you to play sport at all?

I do vaguely remember this er father son football match up at (the research centre) when I was small. I did take part in that. It was probably the first and last time we actually played football together. But I was very keen on football and from my primary school days anyway and he got me into tennis and when my mum and dad split up er we used to see my dad, I think it was a Thursday after school and we used to go up to the swimming pool. Up at (the research centre), so er swimming every week. Erm he got me into squash, dabbled in squash, he said it would help my tennis.

What age was that?

Squash came a little bit later. Erm when I was probably just in my teens. But I remember, I first started playing tennis, I think when I was eight. And I used to have a hit up at (the
research centre). Er with my step-mum, until I sort of progressed and then I used to get on the court with the bigger adults, probably about twelve, thirteen and then er..

(I) Can we jump back a bit, to primary school. What did they do at primary school? Was it games or sport as such?

(S) It was mostly games, I mean they did sort of the human movement studies. A lot of music in the playground, pretending to be a statue.

(I) How did you find that?

(S) Well for someone who used to like running around in the countryside I suppose it was a little bit pedestrian...erm, I played for the school football team. Very keen on going up at lunch time to the playing fields, just kicking a ball around...erm I played for the school football team. Very keen on going up at lunch time to the playing fields, just kicking a ball around.

(I) How did you get into the football then, if your dad wasn’t that keen on it?

(S) No it was difficult really because I don’t remember just taking it up, I suppose it’s because er, obviously you’re at school, you’re surrounded by all of your friends. In those days it was basically football, cricket erm just kicking a ball around. It wasn’t, there wasn’t anything like skateboards, computer games, obviously things like that which take the interest of children these days. In those days it was you know being influenced, I guess by what you remember on the telly, er cup finals, sporting teams as a group.

(I) Was there a gang of you as such?

(S) Yes there was. A couple of friends of mine that lived quite close to the school, I used to go round there after school and we’d kick a ball around in the street and just pretend to be somebody famous or whatever. Erm it just carried on from school. So from that point of view, I think its more to do with the group at school that...that made you want to play football or kick around rather.

(I) So what happened when you went on to secondary school? How did it change as such?

(S) Yeah, secondary school it did change a lot because they had the same as most schools now, a house system, you’re put into houses and they sort of generate competition between the houses. You want your particular house to do well and the football, there was hockey there. Which I hadn’t really dabbled with. So that was new and also cross country. If for any reason the ground was too waterlogged or whatever, it was cross country time, regardless. And that sort of toughens you up a bit to the elements as well. You’re out in the wind and rain and erm so it didn’t really matter too much what the weather was doing when you wanted to go out and play football. You got, you got nicely conditioned to the adverse elements. So I suppose from that point of view you learn to be competitive and also the newer sports like cross country and hockey at the time, I sort of got quite interested in that as well.

(I) Were you aware of that at the time?
(S) Yes yeah because there was such a difference between the primary school was sort of very friendly and ‘oh never mind, you can do it’, quite encouraging, whereas er secondary school was, I mean its not just the teachers, its the pupils as well and er you’re getting pupils from all over. Those that were sort of quite tough and there was a few sort of shrinking violets as well.

(I) Why do you think that, why there is a big change? I’ve noticed from talking with others, this big change from fun and games at primary school and in secondary it does become much more...

(S) (overlapping) rigid and

(I) even in a way aggressive

(S) Yes and I think that’s probably what it is, because I would imagine you’ve probably got a wider catchment area for the bigger schools er with the primary schools it’s probably a little bit more local and a bit more of a community whereas with the bigger schools .. cos they come from such a wide area, such a varied type of pupil there that I think the teachers have to become more rigid, more strict. So they treat everybody the same the same and of course you either go along with it or you don’t.

(I) This was an all boys school?

(S) Yes, this was before it changed to a community college.

(I) Were you there the whole period.

(S) I was there for the two years, between 11 and 13, cos they’d just done away with the 11 plus when I left. That was in the days where you did two years in the secondary school and if you were deemed good enough you went to the grammar school. So I was fortunate that er, I did find that despite the fact that I sort of adapted quite easily to the sporting side. I think discipline wise, I think it definitely er you know made me go the wrong way. I was fairly er good from primary school. But the two years I had there sort of, because there was that element there, cos you’d influence as well, you were at that sort of age.

(I) In what way?

(S) (overlapping) bad habits

(I) What sort of bad habits?

(S) Erm, just er work wise. Just becoming, oh it doesn’t really matter and just sort of being a bit apathetic over things to a certain extent and seeing kids get away with a lot and you’d think I’d never do that .. like detentions for not doing your homework and stuff like this. Obviously there were kids there sort of er drinking and smoking. Smoking was the big thing, never appealed to me, but I mean you could see the indiscipline all around. Cos it was so many, if it had been a handful of people it probably wouldn’t have mattered. Because it was, it just seemed part of the norm. er you just sort of think oh well that’s how most people behave, perhaps I’m being too good or whatever, you just sort of.
(I) You don’t want to stick out do you?

(S) No, probably not, I don’t think it would have mattered too much in that respect. I’ve never been one or that’s ever stuck out anyway. I mean that affected me a little bit when I went to the Grammar school, sort of felt that my talents were being missed because I wasn’t in the ‘in’ crowd as it were.

(I) So there were kids already there? That’s a strange situation that you miss out the first couple of years.

(S) Yeah, I mean we went to (the Grammar School) and met up with some friend that I had at (primary school) and even though it was two years erm I always felt it quite sad cos they went to another secondary school from me, even though it was only two years later it was never ever the same as you remember it from school and although you say ‘hello’ and ‘how are you’ .. ‘long time no see’ it’s never quite the same … and er that’s how it turned out to be and er .. sort of a large group, mostly from the other school, anyway cos there was very few of us went to the school I went to .. they mostly went to the other one and erm .. they were all together and all seemed to go round together and er .. especially in the sports and they sort of left on the fringe and when you know you’re as good as or could be better than most of them, because they were such a large group you’re sort of outside looking in. So I felt I got sort of missed or not given a fair crack of the whip as regards er you know being in the school football team and stuff like that because I wasn’t in with the crowd. And I say there was probably a football teams worth of people there anyway .. and then anyway, I suppose it wasn’t until about the 5th form that erm .. then suddenly you know, hang on a minute, where have you suddenly come from, you know .. ‘I’ve been here all the time’. But erm, I thoroughly enjoyed the last few years at the school.

(I) What do you think would have happened if you stayed at the other school?

(S) I think if I’d have stayed on at (the comprehensive), I mean .. I try to think back to that and use my sister as an example, my twin sister, cos she stayed at the girls equivalent. She left at sixteen and got herself a job and since done quite well for herself .. So from that point of view I’m thinking well if I stayed, I’d have left at sixteen and found myself a job and maybe been ok. But then I remember the two years that I had there probably wasn’t the best for me anyway and that er I only ever felt that I got back on the straight and narrow erm .. in my later years at the grammar school. So I think I’m quite happy .. that although two years didn’t do me any good but I ended up back how I was.

(I) It takes different times to get to where you want.

(S) Yes that’s right and er ..

(I) Do you think your abilities in sport actually helped you get through those two years?

(S) Probably did ..

(I) If you turned up there and say had been uncoordinated or .. would it have been more difficult?

(S) Probably yes, I think so and I also believe that erm if you’re quite good at, for example, sport or you might be quite good academically or musically or something .. that it helps you in all aspects of the school like, erm .. I didn’t sort of relate to that until I was, shall we
say, discovered in the fifth form, lower sixth sort of thing and then everything, I mean everything, sport, the academic side, social side seemed to escalate and become a lot better than what it was.

(I) Probably you get a bit more confidence.

(S) Yes, I think that’s what it is. The confidence you get from sport, in my particular case carried over to the classroom and beyond.

(I) So what happened in the fifth form? What started to change then?

(S) Erm .. well I suppose it was really just did start with getting into the football team. You know, it wasn’t the be all and end all.

(I) What was so good about being in the football team then, to other people, not just you?

(S) Just the fact that erm you know you gained the respect of some of the teachers and there was obviously some teachers there that you looked up to and sort of tried to earn their respect I suppose to a certain extent. And er you sort of earned it through that way and it had sort of had a knock on effect you know to other teachers and to your lessons and other lessons and it, all of a sudden it all seemed to fall into place. Everybody was nice, kind, said nice things and you wanted to continue so you worked harder and it sort of had a knock on effect. Erm ..

(I) What were the teachers like then, if say before you were ‘discovered’?

(S) When I first went there, they were er .. very set in their ways. Everything had to be done just so. Very difficult to er because I suppose being at (the comprehensive) there wasn’t much of a rapport with teachers and er like there had been at the primary school. And I think you started to get that back at the grammar school. A bit more erm .. approachable. But it was still sort of hands off approach I suppose, not quite as friendly as primary school, but erm, but then, I don’t know, it seemed to be the fact that I suppose that they sort of recognized you, spoke to you, rather than you talking to them, it just seemed to be more erm it just seemed to be more approachable. Whereas before it was just ‘sir’ I suppose, cos you get older. Not quite on first name terms, there’s something else for them to talk about rather than discipline or the lesson or something. You know they started to talk about sport or what you’d done. So that’s probably the difference.

(I) And it’s a way of them approaching you and breaking down a few barriers.

(S) Yes that’s right and I suppose and they think well this lad’s not quite what I imagined him to be.

(I) So what happened then in terms of the football? What type of things were you doing then? Was it taking up a lot of your time?

(S) It was. With the advent of getting into the school team and with playing twice a week. I was also playing er, that when I started, I was asked by a couple of mates at school to play in their local team . which I said yeah ok I’ll give it a whirl. And that sort of took off in a big way and .. I think that picked me up that some people at school that thought I was good enough to play in their football team although albeit at a fairly sort of latish age, I was
about fifteen then, erm.. that was in the local league playing against sort of grown men. That was quite a good education.

(I) In what way?

(S) Oh just er .. you sort of see everything there is to see about football. The good side and the bad side. It was er men against boys and er you know they’re licensed to do whatever they want to, but you know it sort of conditioned you to er either fell by the wayside or battle through it.

(I) Is that good or bad?

(S) Depends what character you are erm .. it did affect a couple of friends of mine .. but they did see some very nasty injuries .. erm it was particularly scary on a few occasions .. when you’ve got the other team and the supporters you know sort of baying for blood, sort of thing. But all in all it was erm it was just good for me, I just erm .. if I got fouled or whatever, I just got up and got on with it and erm and that seemed to wind the opposition up even more and it actually helped us get the result we wanted .. because they totally lost it.

(I) Yeah, whereas they wanted you to.

(S) Yes, so it was erm, from that point if view it set the team up for later on in life. And we had a lot of success later on. That was quite good grounding from that point of view.

(I) Did it take over? Did that become your main focus when you were that age? Did it blend in well with school work?

(S) Erin, I think that did become sort of a main focus. Er, also at the grammar school I was in the cross-country team. That was going quite well at that particular point. I must have just reached a peak I think. Erm, running against a couple of very good runners that ran for the county. Not er in the same league, but close enough and feeling that I could do more but I couldn’t but er I think I can say I reached my peak then. But er football, was sort of playing three times a week. On a Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday and not feeling any after effects from it.

(I) Did you actually do any fitness training for it? You get a lot of fitness training now, but was there any then?

(S) No, just playing. Once the season starts and you’re playing on a regular basis, that’s enough. And also with the games at school as well. And nine times out of ten it was sort of cross country. It would give you a lot of running and a lot of stamina practice. Just er felt that I could run forever. You know, and er in that I played sport all year round. It was football in the winter and tennis in the summer. When the football season finished, the tennis season started.

(I) I was going to ask about the tennis, where that came in. I suppose there were the seasonal divisions between football and tennis then. In a way quite traditional. Did the tennis take over in the same way that the football did?
(S) Erm, I always preferred playing football to tennis.

(I) Why was that?

(S) I think it was, going back to what we said about primary school and sort of more of your mates and it was more of a social thing whereas the tennis I found, because I guess I was one of the only people at the school, in my year that actually played tennis, all my other mates played cricket, but erm I did like the tennis, so er you know they were playing cricket matches and I was off with my dad playing tennis. I was quite happy doing that. The tennis was going quite well and although .. I thought it was going quite well and used to enter some local tournaments and when I was a bit younger my dad sort of encouraged me to stretch myself a bit further afield and er along with a couple of friends from school entered this tournament. That was a real eye opener .. I was fairly good, but all of a sudden there's these kids that turn up with eight racquets, all the same and they were about two years younger than you and absolutely creamed the ball and looked really good. And you think, hang on a minute you're not such a big fish after all. But that puts things into perspective. I'm quite glad that I had the chance to do that and I think that's a good way of finding out where you are in a way because erm, if you .. sort of erm keep yourself too localized you get a false sense of where you are. You need to get out and see what everybody else is doing. .. From an early age sort of harbouring ambitions. I mean my dad did say to me, he wanted me to go to this tennis college, I think it was (a sports academy) or something in the mid seventies. It was astronomical money. It was only for a fortnight, a tennis holiday. He said he'll pay for it .. I ummed and arghed, but when I came back from this tennis tournament, I thought no way. I just figured at that early age that I was two years behind the times. That if I was gonna go places .. I should have done it when I was about eleven or twelve and I was fourteen and I felt then that I was too old and my dad would probably be wasting his money and I said no. So erm, I think that was, whether I was being too hard on myself, I don't know. But there were a lot of people there that I thought were very good and there must be a hundred thousand more in the country. S erm you know I didn’t think that I had that natural talent to carry on. Even at that age.

(I) Or maybe that real desire.

(S) Possibly, I mean it could just come down to confidence.

(Interview continued with discussions about work, Simon's thoughts on current sport, local tennis provision and some of his ambitions)

Interview with Keith (46)  Gay Tennis Club

(I) I want you to describe your childhood memories, basically starting with what did your father do and what did your mother do and tell me how many brothers and sisters you had.

(K) Erm...well there was my father and my mother and two other brothers.. My older brother and a younger brother. My younger brother was about a year younger than me. My elder brother a couple of years older.. but he always seemed to be a bit more distant than my younger brother. Because erm. he. err signed up for the Navy quite early on when he was about fifteen, so we didn’t see a great deal of him. Erm, my father worked for (a food manufacturer) in their transport division which is basically managing the supply of er
goods, I remember er we used to get a lot of complimentary packets of frozen foods (laughter) fish fingers and things like that.. it certainly got us into convenience food in a big way which was good, for a family. which was a reasonably sized family of three boys.. who ate quite well and had large appetites.. My mother worked, and I can always remember my mother working erm she worked as a nurse.. first of all er in what they used to call the old fever hospitals which were basically sort of er for people who had contagious diseases, although we didn’t speak very much about that errm.. not that it’s just that we didn’t go into great detail about what my mother did, but then she moved onto mental health nursing as well. Which was during the old days I’m afraid during the sixties, the the sixties and seventies when they were still called mental hospitals. But my mum had a great sort of er affinity with people a great, enormous amount of patience. So she used to tell us about her work with Downs Syndrome children. Unfortunately they didn’t have very ‘pc’ labels, they were still called mongols, mongoloid, er which today is not very sort of. But we got I think in my childhood we became much more sort of sympathetic because she was very sort of caring and erm loving with these people, so I think it gave built up a sense of er tolerance and we didn’t go round talking about ‘loonies’, because she explained what her work involved. It was very hard work, but we didn’t see very much of our parents when we were young really.

(I) When you did actually see them, what did you do, what can you remember of your early childhood, special events or going out.

(K) Well the the BIG thing, occasionally, very occasionally, because obviously they worked very hard, was going out to day trips to Bolton Abbey.. you know if you’ve got to be very specific, Bolton Abbey

(I) Doing what?

(K)...well obviously we were young children and we wanted to play cricket and football and things and our parents to be involved, this was a standard thing, we wanted our parents to be involved as well, but they wanted to REST. They wanted to have a BREAK. They didn’t have a break from us, but at least they had a break from their physical surroundings which tended to be very close because we didn’t have a big house, so I understand now why they would want, you know, just to relax in the open air, the fresh air, but we didn’t, we wanted to play football and cricket, we wanted to have more action we still had the energy of, you know, young boys. But we used to go up to Ilkley Moor as well. So it was Bolton Abbey, sort of Ilkley Moor, just sort of out into the country side... and erm.. there was always this tension between us (laughing) of us wanting to let off steam and them wanting to relax.. But I can always remember we used to take the primer stove with us, cos its funny how the sense of childhood is more than memories, its also smells and textures and taste and things like that, so I can always remember spending what seemed like HOURS trying to get the primer stove going because the basic thing was that if you got the primer stove going you always had your cup of tea (laughter). Which was always the BASIC THING. If you didn’t have your cup of tea already set up, the day was, erm, particularly for the adults, you know, was a bit, erm.. unsuccessful.. So they wanted to sit down, drink their tea and we wanted them to come an play with us, but that’s what most kids even nowadays..

(I) Did you...
(K) (overlapping) we went away on holiday, the funny thing is that we very infrequently went away on holiday. This is why I can remember in 1963 we went to Blackpool because foreign holidays, even in the 60’s were not, were just too expensive, but just seemed a luxury for well off people... and ermm... so, this is why I particularly remember that holiday to Blackpool... and when I look back at the photographs of the styles, the crew cuts we had, it brings back lots of childhood memories... but that’s very rare that we were actually on a holiday together as opposed to a day trip.

(I) What about the everyday then, just at home.

(K) At home, it was very much centred around my parents work.

(I) What about their leisure time. What did your dad do to relax, did he take part in any sports?

(K) He just didn’t have the time, he tried to do a little bit of DIY but that wasn’t very successful because he blamed the fact that he didn’t have any tools (laughs)... no... gardening, we always had big plans for the garden, but he just never got round to that as well... erm... instead of painting a picture of the as... er... I wouldn’t call them lazy, they were just so intent on domestic, basic sort of domestic things, like, I think going to the supermarket, was like, sort of a weekly highspot.

(I) Like shopping is now

(K) Yes, precisely.

(Break in interview. The interview continued for about ten minutes before I noticed that the batteries had run out. When the interview restarted I tried to cover some of the material that we had just talked about.)

(I) Rather than going back all over it again, could we just go back to basic school memories. Tell me about sport at school, things that really stick in your memory.

(K) Well in junior school, erm because I was... physically fit, fitter than I was in senior school... I think I enjoyed sport more because I was conscious of the fact that I was overweight... so I played sports, we had a regular PE spot, erm and I played quite a lot of rounders. I was quite good at that, erm school sports days, I was involved in sprints and we had a junior school sports day and I erm was included in the trials of the sprint. I think I got to the final of one particular...

(I) Can you remember whether sport was a particular part of the school. In terms of the curriculum, was it a big part?

(K) No it wasn’t a big part, it was like fun and games really. We didn’t in junior school treat it like sport as such, they treated it as... er, a break... we went swimming. There was a swimming pool near the, as part of the junior school as a matter of fact, er it was one of those old nineteenth century schools, school buildings... that had a swimming pool as well. But it was considered in junior school, which I think was a good thing, it was considered as just games. That’s what it was, you just went out to enjoy yourself and have a good
time. But it was more structured because the teachers went out with you and it was part of the school day as well, rather than play time.

(I) How does that compare to the secondary school? Did you go to, was it a mixed school?

(K) Yes, yes it was a comp, they started sort of comprehensives in the mid-sixties and erm... oh it was a bit more serious then. I wouldn’t say it was a huge part of the curriculum, but a set hour. Or I think it was an hour a week. But they were keen on sort of more physical activities, like cross country, which I hated, cos I was fat...

(I) Did that affect your relationship with the other boys in the school?

(K) Because of my illness, I was let off sport, quite a bit... so obviously they participated and I wasn’t participating... but I can remember they were very keen on the standard of your gym equipment. I can remember getting hit with the gym shoes that weren’t hadn’t been er...

(I) What you got hit?

(K) yes I did

(I) by the teachers?

(K) Oh yes. They would bend you over and hit you on the bottom in front of the class... I didn’t mind being hit (laughs) so much as the public humiliation... Your gym shoes weren’t white, because in those days they were plimsolls and you had to use, sort of, rather messy whitening and never seemed to actually get back to the state they were in the beginning. There was no trainers or anything that was disposable. Gym shoes had to last years (laughs)... and it was very difficult keeping up to them erm... so it was all centred around the cross country... I can’t remember so much football, I can remember that in junior school and didn’t like that because it was too muddy...erm but in secondary school it was, the sports were more varied, it was more sport than fun and games.. So we had sports days and there was a wider range of sports and a wider range of equipment as well. Such as javelins, shot putts. There was long jump. There was quite a big playing field. It must have been quite a few acres actually. It was an enormous place. We also had netball courts and a couple of grass courts, which I never saw anybody play on.

(I) Did you ever play on them

(K) No I didn’t (laughs) No I couldn’t, but on the rare occasion they got tournaments put together erm... I think they were used because my younger brother played on them. But I never saw anybody else around. I can’t remember actually seeing anyone play on them.

(I) Did you ever attempt to try and play on them, because you said you liked tennis to start with?

(K) They were always out of bounds.. Beautifully manicured and kept. They weren’t used in the normal course of sport (pause) tennis wasn’t a big thing, but fortunately because I’d been watching Wimbledon on TV and we got very enthusiastic about it. But tennis wasn’t considered you know (pause)
(I) Who did you admire in tennis, which players?

(K) Well it's basically from Wimbledon, er, my earliest memories was of Emerson. Matches between Emerson and Fred Stolle. Cos they always used er. Wimbledon was the major tennis tournament. We didn't get very much very much news about any other tennis tournaments so, er, I can remember the matches between those two players. Emmerson always seemed to win, which always seemed to frustrate me, cos you take sides... and the biggest, er, the player with the biggest impact was Billie Jean Moffat, because she was so startling to look at... you know with those sort of winged glasses of hers (laughter). So, she always used to be so pugnacious and she always seemed to sort of WIN. I don't think I've ever seen anybody who was so tenacious, that's what I admired cos I tried to be sort of tenacious myself... so I think I didn't LIKE her because she, I didn't like her in some ways because she always used to win, there seemed to be no human frailty at all, but I admired her...erm...but I used to like Maria Bueno...

(I) Why her?

(K) Oh... she was so er, didn't seem to break sweat... You can never understand how she had any strength to get the ball over the net... but she seemed to do it so effortlessly whereas Billie Jean King you could see the blood, sweat and tears. Those were my earliest... and quite honestly we er you know, when the Wimbledon matches were on, if we were out playing, we would come in, with my friends, and it wasn't a sort of sexist thing at all. Boys would sit down and watch the, the any tennis that was on... I think that possibly the women's tennis, apart from the Stolle and Emerson matches, that was during the early sixties, had the biggest impact... and that's what got me playing tennis, I think.

(I) Why?

(K) But I can remember the first, it was again 1963 (laughs). The first Wimbledon one that I can remember and that was when erm Chuck McKinley won... because I can always remember the name... the name had an attraction and that was the first

(I) What about other people that you admired?

(K) I don't know whether I admired, you don't at that age sort of have that sense of admiration, you don't have a great deal of experience... the ones that registered, the ones that I took notice of, er... were... Kennedy... because I started to get interested in politics... which when I look back maybe a bit unusual, cos when Kennedy was assassinated I was only about eight or nine. But I was reading all the newspapers. Then I got very interested in politics. I can remember the day he was shot. And I think that's my, probably my earliest political memory... was Kennedy. I don't say I admired, because I didn't. I only had a child's understanding... erm... but I'd registered the, the SHOCK, you know the international shock the assassination registered with me. Cos I'd actually
followed, I'd been reading in the newspapers because he was quite a big celebrity at the
time (pause) er who else?

(I) Were there any sporting role models?

(K) Tennis role models?

(I) Or general

(K) Also, no no no not just the tennis. There was motor racing. People like Jack Brabhan.

(I) Right

(K) Stirling Moss and John Surtees. During the late fifties, early sixties .. I think that was
mainly because my dad and one of my uncles were interested in car racing and motorcycle
racing. My dad was interested in motorcycle racing as well .. erm I think that was a bit,
picked up on their interest as well

(I) (overlapping) because you had it around you

(K) like kids do .. But I always used to, still follow it as well .. Always followed the er motor
racing as well .. but I still had a little interest myself as well you know in the Paddy
Hopkirk .. The er, because it was exciting, also it was abroad which was such a
mysterious thing, you know .. a country like the United States seemed mysterious and erm ..
mystical in some way, for a child like that . Cos all I’d been to was Blackpool .. (laughs) I
didn’t go out of the country until 1969 .. It wasn’t unusual in those days. Foreign countries
just used to .. my Aunty used to go out, cos she had you know, family. She’d go to Spain,
eyearly on in the 1950’s, which was unusual really. So er, she used to go to go to places like
Switzerland ... My parents just didn’t have any conception .. I didn’t have any conception
of going there. Blackpool was as far as we got so it was a bit exotic really .. Especially
when she bought us back Swiss chocolate, which we didn’t like because it was so bitter ..
(laughs) (pause)

(I) So what happened after you left school?

(K) Oh I went to, I didn’t know what to do, so I sort of, erm, drifted a bit .. and I went into
Public Libraries .. Which was a good experience cos you actually dealt with a lot of people..
.. it brought you, gave you much more experience ... You had o deal with a VAST range
of people, from children to pensioners, right through to some nutters. You got some right
nutters who used to come in as well .. but it was good experience .. I lidn't know what to
do. I didn’t know whether to, you know, I wanted to do that or I wanted to go on to further
education or what. So I just used it as a .. just to earn some money. Basically I earned it to
use it to send me to colleg .. Because I think that was the basic thing. Cos I always had this
sense that money was always, sort of, short .. I didn’t want to rely on my parents so I saved
the money up .. But I didn’t (laughs) earn a vast amount of money. I think my first wage
was about £782 a year. Which seems incredible nowadays .. but actually the money that I
saved up got me through the three years at college (pause)

(I) What about, going back to tennis

(K) (overlapping) Yes
When we were talking about tennis. When did you actually take it up. Can you remember when you took it up seriously?

Well when I got a racquet.

When you were young?

Yeah, my first wooden racquet.

What age was that?

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How often did you play after that?

As often as I could. It was a problem because. It was a problem (laughs) to get anybody to play with me. Cos not everybody had a racquet or could afford to get a racquet ... and at school, you know, the affluence of families was varied, not msny were well off.

What happened when you went to university. Did to keep it up then?

No

Why was that?

Cos I er. spent every hour of the day on, every bit of spare time on the work. I was keen to do well. But I must digress a bit and say the er do you want to know anything about the cubs and scouts?

Sure, yes

Cos that was quite a big part you see

And you skipped over that before (laughter)

I know, but you were talking about sport.

Yes sure

But sport was in some way in that, just quickly I joined the cubs but it was a bit

(overlapping) when was that?

When was that?

Yes

That was in the early sixties as well about that time, when you sort of because a bit more socially aware. and er so I joined the cubs and also I think my brother, you always tend to do it when your brothers are there as well. I wasn’t all that sure, I just went for the er games. basically, so it just shows you I was still interested in the games and British Bulldog and er, I, everything was centred around the church because the club was always allied to the church and we went to Sunday school. My parents sent us to Sunday school.
So the church was still, had a part in my life cos erm, but it still had a social part in my life, because the cubs and the scouts .. But my brother was so much more into that cos he had to have all the uniform and the badges .. I took it a lot more superficially, I was just interested in the social side of it, but the church did play a part in my life. And at school as well, I think it did much more than then, because you had morning assembly and the ritual of saying hymns. Impresses upon you know I still remember the words and hymns and tunes and things. They have a deep, deep sort of impact on you, you might not be listening to the words

(I) (overlapping) If you’re saying them everyday

(K) Yes, it’s like a chant .. like a, we didn’t go into the sort of Christian teaching, except at Sunday school where we had bible stories .. My parents weren’t terribly religious, they didn’t go to church themselves, but packed us off (laughs) to Sunday school ... I think one of the reasons, just because, the peace, which I didn’t blame them for and also it was just very good for us socially .. you know, cos we met other different kids .. It was also a good social club, there was also this sort of youth club we went to .. I enjoyed them, cos I was a social kind of child .. you know, I think the illness made me more solitary. It drew me back much more on my own devices, because I was off school for about a year and I was left on my own for that .. So you become very self-sufficient about things like that.

(I) Mmm, it’s interesting then if you relate that to tennis as being a more individual sport.

(K) Yes, I wasn’t very keen on, I was very much more interested .. I wanted to take the responsibility, I didn’t like team sports, because I thought they set up, were more antagonistic, more ..

(I) In what way?

(K) Well more, I didn’t like the sort of messing around, which you tend to get in groups of boys. I didn’t like that (laughter) ... I didn’t say I was prim, I just didn’t like it, I’m not prim and proper (laughs) ..maybe I was .. I don’t know (pause)

(I) It’s interesting to try and identify what aspects that didn’t appeal to you, cos I try to do that myself sometimes

(K) (overlapping) I think it was just the, everything seemed to be so muddy and dirty and messy and .. quite physical .. I didn’t like that and you were sort of drawn into that .. I always thought for myself and did things that took a contrary view.

(I) It’s interesting though, what you say and what I know about you from the tennis where you’re quite a physical player

(K) Yes, but I didn’t like physical contact .. erm.. because it just sort of impeded things.. cut short the physical momentum of everything and also .. it just seemed to be associated with cold and rain and mud, whereas tennis was associated with the summer and warm days and you know seemed to be much more of a laugh .. you could associate with the other people much more.

(I) When you think of it, football, it’s in the winter, it’s a team, there’s discipline and rigour and then, maybe, like tennis where it’s more, it’s summer and it’s individual
Yes, because it's much more seasonal, but we just didn't play that much tennis.

And that makes it more exotic.

It was, and it just had good associations socially. It had better associations. I felt more relaxed with the people and get to know them.

Do you think sexuality came into that at all? Were you aware of your sexuality then?

What, do you mean physical contact with boys?

Yeah, or just in terms of attraction to tennis.

I think aesthetically, but I don't think I thought about it in those terms, but I think aesthetically I was more attracted, it seemed to be much freer, you know the white shorts and the er, summer sun and everything. No I don't think it did because I don't think we just thought along those terms. I don't think anybody did in those days. Certainly in an isolated community. I can remember getting sort of attached to friends and sort of bringing them home and things, and having me mum feed them and doing things like that...getting very attached...but nothing sexual about it.

Some people say that they were aware of their sexuality at a really early age and there are others.

Well that's, that's talking about sport, it must be, there must be other ways, you know, you're just talking about sport, there are other ways...from the age of three I felt...I felt sort of aware, maybe not sexually, but sensuously. You know, my body and sort of stimulating (laughs) my body. I mean to say when we used to, sort of, er climb ropes in the gym and obviously our legs were wrapped around them, I think I can remember getting a frisson of excitement, because I was sort of stimulating my genital area...but I didn't know what it was, I just got the, you know, the very sort of warm feeling about. We all do that when we were children, by accident in some ways, something you found a new area of sensation. I think I did that. It's funny how it's sort of associated with climbing ropes, gym work and things like that, sport actually does make you much more aware of that.

The physical nature of sport?

It's not sexual because that's sort of related to the body, having desires for other people...having awareness about my own sensual...realising my own body, but maybe the other thing was in junior school, particularly, was, you know I was talking about the glamour of other boys, but maybe the girls as well, maybe because I admired their sort of, they always had long hair (laughs) and I wanted long hair as well...

Why did you want long hair?

I don't know, it seemed more...sigh...it's hard to...I think long hair had a fascination for me and...er...

Was it maybe, more clear cut then that boys had short hair?
(K) Well we had CREW cuts then.. It seemed more glamorous, more stylish, more. maybe it was because I was aware of my clothes and things.. but I must admit the boys at junior school, some of them seemed.. they had more attractive names, like Jay. I can remember them more than I do the ones at secondary school really. I can’t remember, just one or two of my friends, but they (laughs) weren’t at all attractive. But it was always, sort of the fit boys, at junior school particularly ... To cut a long story short, I think I was erm more attracted to physical attractiveness, you know to the same sex in junior school. I think when I put on weight, I lost a bit of that sort of sensuality about my own body, because I was, you know, overweight and I didn’t feel good about my body .. I keep thinking well I would have been taken down different tracks if I’d, you know, stayed at normal weight and everything.

(I) In what way, what do mean there?

(K) Maybe I would have taken it further, maybe I would have become much more sensual, whereas it just seemed to become suppressed because I just wasn’t, felt good about my body .. God knows where it might have ended (laughs)

(I) When did it change, or did it change?

(K) Although I was still aware about boys, I think I was aware about sexuality, boy sexuality with the opposite sex .. you know at junior school they were getting interested in girls and things. Some of the things that used to go on, especially during our school trip to Rome, that was in 1967 .. and I was terribly prim and proper about what was going on.

(I) How old were you then?

(K) 13, 14 .. but lots of the boys were sort of, you know it was a mixed group and everything.

(I) Why do you say you were prim and proper? What makes you identify with that?

(K) I think because I was overweight, I wasn’t .. I was quite moral .. you know I was a bit sort of priggish, maybe it because I couldn’t participate, maybe I was just suppressing things .. but because of that I was always called names like ‘poof’ and things because I wouldn’t participate in their sort of games, you know, which were sexual games with those girls.

(I) How did you deal with that?

(K) Well I just avoided it (pause) erm .. but they picked up on it on the bus, because it seemed to be confined in those awkward situations and er also I was taking exams and things, so I was a bit different from the rest and then I always thought it was false trying to be other than I was .. (laughs) but I don’t think I was terribly nice (laughs) because I was quite moral and stuck up. But that was a way of self protection. School work became, because I was I was quite good at that, it was a way of protecting myself, but it didn’t do very good for socialising .. So that was a big change, I became much more isolated. Apart from one or two of my peers who seemed to be taking all the exams and things ..

(I) Did that continue after school, when you went to University?

(K) Yes, I think so, I sort of kept myself to myself. Just did the work .. The other thing was that I wanted to, so desperate to succeed as well. So I didn’t spend a great deal of time.
felt as if I’d been dragged into something which wasn’t me. So YES, I suspect that I sort of didn’t play sport or anything, just concentrated on academic work, which was a shame.

(I) So when can you actually remember making a conscious effort to take up tennis or sport of some sort again?

(K) Well I still did it when I was at college as well, but there again it was finding people to play.

(I) When did you join a club then?

(K) What, tennis club?

(I) Yes

(K) Ooh that wasn’t until about 1980

(I) Really, what was that one?

(K) There just wasn’t the clubs to join. They were in different parts of town.. Did I join the University? I don’t think I even joined that as well. That was when I came to London. I came to London in 1978 and joined the club in 1980. So that was the first tennis club I joined.

(I) What made you join then?

(K) (pause) Why did I join the club? .. I think I wanted to improve my tennis … It didn’t work out that well (laughs) because the chap who was in charge was totally neurotic . and seemed to take a dislike to me. Maybe I was neurotic as well (laughs). He kept foot-faulting me and saying I wasn’t doing this right or that right and er..

(I) This was a straight club?

(K) Oh yes, but I got on well with one or two of the younger girls who were, sort of playing tennis there .. but the wife of the chap said he was a bit neurotic as well. She took my side .. but I had a big argument with him.

(I) Was it a big club?

(K) No, not at all, but still run along sort of what they thought a tennis club should be, i.e., a little bit exclusive, you know, don’t let the riff-raff in.

(I) Well why did you join there the, because you think in London there must have been a number of clubs. Was it just the nearest?

(K) Yes, just down the road, and . er I just wanted a bit of exercise. That’s when I also started to go to the gym, 1981.

(I) Right, so what made you do the gym as well?

(K) I’d always been interested in physical fitness and getting my body and that’s when I sort of started .. I thought I needed to do something.
How old were you then?

(K) (laughs) I was quite old, my mid twenties. It was incredible, but I decided I needed to do something about my body. I wanted to meet people as well. Obviously the gay scene was still very sort of, because at university, I was in a small town and er in the mid seventies there wasn’t a gay society or anything. Even in places like Glasgow. Even today Glasgow’s not er a gay centre.

(I) Was maybe London more of a reason?

(K) (overlapping) Well I met somebody at university. I was more attracted to the foreign students, cos they didn’t have all the social baggage. So I got quite emotionally attached to this chap from Korea (laughs) and er they don’t have the social baggage and they don’t see you in the same way as those of your own nationality do.

(I) What, they don’t categorise or pigeon-hole you as much

(K) That’s right and erm, but coming to London was obviously because you had the gay scene..

(I) What was it about that, what did you notice about that in terms of yourself?

(K) Well I needed to do something (laughs) about my fitness. That’s why I started to..er..

(I) Was it that apparent then, when you came down to London that you became much more aware of your body?

(K) Yes I think so .. I needed to get fitter .. I er. I’d always been interested in, you know, I think it was like picking up from my early childhood again .. I started to sort of think, well I need to be ..It had always been in the back of my mind that I’d, because I’d been overweight and everything for all that time. Then I lost an enormous amount of weight when I was about 16 or 17 and that gave me, but there again academic work cut in and I tended to devote time to that and apart from playing tennis, I still kept it up, I never lost interest, I was always interested, but I started to get back to my body and my body awareness in 1980, 81 and that’s funnily enough, that’s when the gyms started to open up. It wasn’t until then …

(I) That’s pretty early to join a gym in a way that twenty years ago it’s more recently that more people have been joining gyms.

(K) Well I bought some weights. I started to do the, I bought some dumb-bells. I started to do it in my little bed-sit. Started that off and then I joined the gym at Lilley Road. It was all very basic during those days. It was just like, but the thing is it was more accessible, there were more of those places opening up, whereas before you would’ve had to box to be in a gym..

(I) So what did you think about when you bought the dumb-bells? Were you thinking about transforming your body or the fitness?

(K) Yes Yes because I’ve always been attracted to the people who have had muscular bodies and everything and I thought, foolishly maybe I could have a body like that (laughs) … but er .. I think also I wanted to improve my fitness as well, because of the tennis as well. But
I think mainly, it was very much socially, you know .. I was starting a bit late really. But that's because I'd been in isolated circumstances, you know, I'd just been getting through the academic work, I wanted to get a good degree and when I got a good degree I sort of vindicated myself, but I was out of work for a year, when I left. Cos I didn't even know what I wanted to do then. So I lived at home, and that's not a good way to improve, that was in a small village just outside of Edinburgh. There just weren't the gyms there .. I can't remember. It was only in the eighties when the gyms, when people had access to, er that kind of physical exercise, you know within a gym environment erm .. I regret maybe there was quite a lot of wasted years but at least I got, I did my education. I totally devoted myself to that. So at least I got my education. I also paid for it completely myself. My parents didn't have to put in nothing, apart from when I went back for holidays. They did support me during that year, but I went out and taught, I did some private lessons .. Coming down to London was a big, big break really .. but physically, I only started in 1980, 81.

(I) The first gym you went to, was it predominantly heterosexual?

(K) Well it, there was no classification at the time. You didn't think along sexual lines.

(I) Were you aware of other gay men in there, though?

(K) No, it was very early on. There was no such thing as gay gyms er .. and also the gyms had only just started up. They were very basic as well .. but I wasn't very aware ..no, no I don't know whether gay people were sort of attracted towards gyms as social, cos they were so new as areas of sort of socialising you know in the sense of sort of meeting someone. No I don't think that was very because they were so new then .. I can't remember, if I think back, I can't remember anybody's face or anybody I sort of thought of, it was all new to everybody really. It was, the sort of social etiquette wasn't established.

(I) So you were going there to train?

(K) You were going to train and also learn about these machines, the machines were new. It was incredible, you know, I'd never been on a bike or any of these aerobic machines before .. and er it was all very badly done really and the facilities weren't all that brilliant. They were (laughs) practically in sort of Nissan huts. But it was all so new, you could actually go somewhere and exercise. It's hard to believe nowadays, but that was true then.

(I) And also on your own as well.

(K) Also on your own, yes. It wasn't a gym a gym where you went to a, it wasn't the back of a pub where you beat the hell out of each other, in a boxing ring. Cod that's all you had up til then, well that wasn't really ...

(I) (overlapping) Or team sports.

(K) Yes, or the organised team sports, you couldn't have that independence, that freedom .. You had to join a club or, this is why maybe I didn't join a club .. I was so worried about the sort of social structure as well.

(I) Cos even with tennis, you need someone to play don't you?
(K) Well maybe that was the other thing. I went and joined a club because I was so fed up with not having anybody to play with, at least you had them on tap and I was reasonably ok, I was a reasonable standard.

(I) Did you get involved competitively?
(K) No, it didn’t last long enough cos I fell out with the (laughs) chap who was the club secretary .. His wife took my side, but that’s when I went to Egypt .. I was there for two years. I did play tennis. Tennis seems to have a running theme, however bad or well I played it’s just a running theme you know. I played tennis in Egypt as well .. Not many of the other volunteers played tennis .. Who did I play tennis with?
(phone rings - interview paused for a few minutes)

(I) When you came back from Egypt, did you come back to London?

(K) Oh no, no I didn’t, I went back to my parents. They kept my job open .. so I went up to Scotland and spent a month in Scotland with my parents and then came back to basically take up the threads again. My job at the civil service, so er ..

(I) When did you think about getting involved in the gay tennis club?

(K) That was 1984, that’s when I came back from Egypt .. and I just wanted to pick up the threads.

(I) Why the gay tennis club, had you thought about the reason for joining that?

(K) Well I didn’t wan to join a straight club, I wanted more socialising with, because I was gay and I wanted to socialise with other gay people .. So that’s when I rang Arthur up. I can’t remember where I found it, maybe I rang switchboard up .. So that was as soon as I got back .. I was living in Deptford as well .. I wanted to continue er socialising, you know with other people. So I thought well tennis is a game I like.

(I) How did you find the experiences there? In comparison to your experiences of tennis before then.

(K) Much better.

(I) Why was that?

(K) Well there didn’t seem to be this hierarchy of club secretary and you know the bad experiences of that chap foot faulting me .. People just seemed to sort of accept you whether you were good or indifferent or bad .. I can’t say that Arthur (laughs) was terribly welcoming .. I think I didn’t meet Arthur, maybe it was Geoff or someone like that. It’s the first person you meet colours your experience from there on .. It was possibly Geoff or somebody else who was quite nice to me, you know friendly and er the rest is history really. Then I sort of started to get into the club ..It was, socially it was much better organised, cos we’d have those tournaments against (the other gay tennis group) and then we had those sort of buffets, and the buffets were proper buffets, not limp. Cos I can remember Gerard and I had met and er 1987 we moved to the flat in Uplands Road and er we were cooking until we dropped. You know, you felt as if you were part of er .. I felt as though I’d arrived, but arrived back, you know where I spent all those years sort of alone, it was all heterosexual. I think I got into the swing of it from 1984, just because the scene
wasn't.. before then I used to go out to sort of clubs and pubs and things but it just wasn't as developed. Well there wasn't the social acceptance. And a generation earlier, I do sympathise with them you know, as only from late seventies did you have gay pride, even then it was very rudimentary.

(I) Do you think it's important to have specific gay clubs?

(K) Yes, very, very important.

(I) Why?

(K) Well unless there was a predominantly straight club that was very open about accepting gay people you feel as though you could constantly hide things, constantly worry about what you are going to say or will I be accepted. Or they seem to be accepting me for what I am, but would they be the same if they knew er all the things they don't know I am. Er there wasn't the support about coming out at work or clubs, so you felt as though if you had a gay club you didn't have to worry about what you said. It didn't mean that everybody was as nice as pie just because they were all gay and friendly and happy-clappy. It wasn't like that at all, but, you felt as though you didn't need to worry about being gay. You didn't need to worry about being gay. It was such a relief, such a relief and also you can also sort of talk about gay issues, even if it's just your life, which pubs and clubs that you go to and talk about it with a gay perspective .. you couldn't do that, I was worried about I couldn't say that in that club .. so I think it's absolutely vital.

(I) Were you aware though, thinking about your experiences at school and in team sports were there any of those experiences reproduced in the gay tennis club?

(K) No, there wasn't, I don't think tennis is a, doesn't have that same level of aggression, funnily enough, even though you get aggressive players, it's not a team sport. What I HATED more than anything was to be drawn into a gang of people who thought in the same way, who had a sort of corporate .. set of thoughts that I couldn't diverge from, cos even at school when we had a debating society and I would always take the contrary view.

(I) But isn't there a problem of that in the gay tennis club then. Do you think sometimes with getting a corporate identity of 'we are gay'. Does it not

(K) (overlapping) You mean it excludes .. people who are not gay or

(I) In a way. Are you starting to assume a particular identity?

(K) Well, I never objected to anybody who wanted to join the club who wasn't gay ..erm .. I think there was other people who .. during those early days, I don't think it was possible because people were, we were just building up our identity, but I never felt as though I was part of a corporate body, cos I always felt as though I could (laughs) not to put a fine point, bitching about people, I could be gay within that club and still take part .. I didn't object to, I mean to say there was a lot of people come through the club, there were one or two straight people but they were sort of more uncomfortable, but I would have never objected if a straight person wanted to join the club, it's just they were few and far between.

(I) What about actual performance of sport. Was it a problem if the players weren't of a good playing standard?
(K) Yes, yes cos people used to get terribly nervous, especially when they used to come to a club and they were playing in those doubles and wondering how they would match up, because they would say to me, I don't how I'm going to, you know, everybody seems to be so good, but people were a little bit more relaxed, you know, even though you might, nobody came up to you and said you are lousy and not playing with us, there wasn't that kind of, although at the straight club, you know, there was, I had to do a sort of little knock up so they could see how good I WAS. Which (laughs) made me feel rather uncomfortable.

(I) Yes, most of the straight clubs I’ve been involved with there’s been a ‘playing in’ session or trials by the coach.

(K) (overlapping) There wasn’t that at the gay tennis, we just went straight on and played and there was always the sense that however good or bad you were, you would play, and mix up. That’s always been the ethos, that, that .. it’s always annoyed me when they’ve strayed from that.

(I) Have they, you think of the mid-eighties, compare that to (the gay tennis club). Are there similarities or differences between the

(K) (overlapping) Oh there are differences, it’s a different, it’s much more, funnily enough it’s much more straight that tennis club.

(I) Why do you think that?

(K) Because of the intensity .. I’m not saying that gay people can’t be intense, it’s sort of dividing the sheep, what is it? .. The cows from the sheep, the good from the bad .. The judgement, it’s the judgmental nature, when you basically come down to it, the judgmental nature .. because we feel maybe we’re so super sensitive about being judged all the time, but it just seems that the judgement is more .. intense at (the gay tennis club) than it is in the other.

(I) What’s the criteria for the judgements? Performance?

(K) Not only the tennis standard, but looks .. I did notice that even when Louis was, Louis, you know he was not the best player, I’m not the best player but er .. Funnily enough I think bigger allowances were allowed depending on if you were good looking (laughs) .. but they were much more respectful of Louis, because you felt there were other agendas, which there were, because obviously if they were attracted to them, they wanted to sleep with them.

(I) Isn’t that like in straight clubs where you have an attractive young woman appear who is not very good but she is allowed, greater allowances are made by the other men?

(K) Yes, that didn’t appear, I thought it much more democratic in the morning tennis. Cos they always used to say it’s just social tennis, whereas it’s much more cliquey, groups of people who might be friends of the same standard. Tend to find that they’re more friendly with those of the same standard maybe because they didn’t know each other before and sort of stuck together because they didn’t want the lesser players because they would be frustrated, you know, they knew that they would get a good game and be stretched more. But if you got a nice looking player they seemed to relax more and adopt the morning
tennis mode. They treated it as a social thing, rather than an ego erm. because you get the impression sometimes at (the gay tennis club) that, in some ways the people at (the gay tennis club), I sometimes found that their social validity, their social standing, their social progression is based on how good they are at tennis, they seem to be fixated with the idea that they will lose some kind of social standing.

(I) I’ve noticed with sport in general that your performance is judging you amongst others and the idea in a gay tennis club is that it’s meant to be alternative, be rejecting a lot of that

(K) (overlapping) But they don’t, not at (the gay tennis club), no, this is why I say that it’s much more like a straight club than a gay club you know if you could call a gay club more rejecting those values. not because it became to me more and more straight because also they want to be more and more sort of, I think the other thing is they want to become more and more masculine in their play even though some of them sort of have these affectations of playing like some women tennis players seem to become much more masculine and they felt some way that they would be more attractive that way, the more attractive they become the more socially acceptable, the more partners they might meet, I don’t know, it seems as though they’re going along that line.

(I) Is this a gay thing?

(K) No, in the straight clubs it’s men with women it’s just replicating the straight er ethos.

(I) Were there more women when you first joined the gay club in the mid-eighties?

(K) No, we’ve had a session there was a move, a drive to get more women, but found that was counter-productive, because you only got half a game, because there were just too many players and nobody got a game (laughs) there were 32 people after that drive and you were lucky to get a game in those 3 hours. One or two players stayed on, but after that initial drive they just realised they weren’t getting the games. So they just drifted off.

(I) What do you see as the role of the gay tennis club? How would you want to see it progress?

(K) Which one?

(I) A gay tennis club in general

(K) Well it’s very difficult not to be, not to replicate some of the straight ways of organising things, you know like having different levels of players and er, I think it’s good that they actually mix different levels of players together, but you’ve got to stick to that because it causes an awful lot of upset and embarrassment and bad feeling if you don’t, because you realise that people just drift into their cliques and don’t want to play with you because you’re not good enough. This is another social rejection as well. If you had two good players and maybe structured it so you could have but it has to be highly structured, highly organised. And also you’ve got to have somebody to tell people not to do things but it’s difficult to organise, I think the only way is through mixing people up, but that’s got to be very well controlled and it’s difficult to control. It’s much better if the person doing that is not playing. But that’s a burden and you’ve got to have more than one person doing that. erm. I think also you’ve got to have opportunities for er training er coaching but there again that puts another burden on the structure of the club.
And that's getting into wider issues

(K) (overlapping) but the number that have left the club because they felt excluded, especially women ... I think the club has got to come down heavy on the odd people who are, like they did at (the gay tennis club) with players who were saying nasty things about the women .. it's not as important as er making somebody feel humiliated and excluded .. they might have been excluded all their lives, cos I know, we all know what it feels like to be excluded.
Appendix 2

Article included in newsletter of gay tennis club relating to aims of the club and formulation of a mission statement.

What is our aim?
(The gay tennis club) recently held its annual general meeting where the main topic was the forming of a general constitution for the club. This is important, not only as means of obtaining funding from various sources, but as a chance to reflect upon what is the aim or purpose of the club in the first place. I think on many occasions the initial reasons for forming a club like this are lost and the consequences of ignoring these overlooked.

The forming of a constitution gives us the chance to consider the purpose of a gay tennis club. What is our main concern? Is it solely to be able to play tennis? Or are there other factors?

We need to think about our own reasons for wanting to take part in a gay tennis club. Do we just come for the tennis, or do we want to be in the company of other gay people? We all know what a lot of straight sports clubs are like. They are hardly the most welcoming places for ‘out’ gay people. We all can remember school sports and may have varied experiences of the levels of participation our sexuality allowed us. But what we have to realise is that many gay people have been excluded from participating in sport because of their sexuality from an early age. Some have been more ‘lucky’ if they have been able to pass as straight and take part. However, even those who have been able to take part at an early age must have at some stage felt the unease or fear of being found out.

The existence of a gay tennis club does then hold a special purpose in our lives. For some, it is the chance to take part in and, importantly, enjoy a sport that they have been excluded from, whereas others may enjoy the less oppressive nature of a club geared specifically towards gay people. But what we need to be aware of is the differing levels at which people enter the club. Those who have been discriminated against in the past may have had fewer opportunities to develop their game and have a lower level of playing standard, but it does not mean they should not be welcomed in the same manner as others of a higher level. If we fall into this trap, we are merely reproducing the exclusiveness found in heterosexual sport clubs and reinforcing the idea that only a certain type of ‘male’ is able to play tennis. Think of how long women have had to battle against this attitude.

By the very fact that we have set ourselves up as a ‘gay’ tennis club we are making a political statement that in contemporary society, which is based around heterosexual values, we are being ignored to the extent that we need a group of our own. If society was so tolerant, we wouldn’t need the club in the first place. Think of why we still have gay bars and clubs.

The crux is that we need to remember that the tennis club is based foremost on sexuality. The set up at present may not be ideal in that we have limited time and a large number of people wishing to play. But until we get to the stage where a permanent, regular site can be found, we need to keep reminding ourselves what the main purpose of the club is. It is not just a facility to play tennis with a clique of friends - there are public courts for that. Most players of a high standard belong to other straight clubs and are able to get more competitive play. If a straw poll were conducted among members asking the main reason
for the club, it would be for the social. Sometimes that can be forgotten, but if it gets to the stage where, in the process, we start to discriminate against other gay people, the club has no real future.

Ian Wellard
November 2000