

PERFORMANCE AND MEANING: WOMEN IN SPORT

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PERFORMANCE AND MEANING

A socio-cultural view of women in sport

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## PERFORMANCE AND MEANING - A SOCIO-CULTURAL VIEW OF WOMEN IN SPORT

Sport has attracted more and more attention over recent years as one of the major outlets for energy and ability in non-work situations. It is an important element of the newly discovered 'leisure' field. Though in no way directly related, during the same period there has also been a greatly revived interest in the role of women in society. The intersection of these two important themes, therefore, in the area of women in sport may offer us an unlikely and revealing, concrete manifestation of crucially modern concerns and feelings. We may also find that the particular conjunction of the two lines may help us the better to understand each line even as they lead away from women in sport to more central and abstract concerns. In fact the particular area will lead us to some central beliefs of our society, and particularly to the powerful and pervasive belief in male superiority. On the other hand, an understanding of the general culture of our society based as it is on the axiomatic assumption of male ascendancy, will throw a shaft of light back on to some of the vexing questions within the social sub-region of women in sport.

This area is also, perhaps unexpectedly, important to a student of social thought, because so many of the approaches to women in sport exhibit the most worrying aspects of positivism in contemporary social research. These approaches could be subsumed under the general heading of Pragmatic Linear Determinism. They share an assumed deterministic model, isolated from the general culture, composed of dependant and independant variables. The usual project is to identify and measure the variables in the system, so that causal relations may be uncovered. The system invoked is often the female body, and the aim is to isolate the crucial variables involved in its ability to achieve in sport. Where the system invoked is the body plus its social and cultural location, the uneasy aim is to simply add another few variables on to the chain, and identify, with scientific rigour, that such and such cultural factors are ultimately responsible

for particular levels of sports performance.

This pragmatic linear determinism will not do if we are interested in the social meaning of a phenomenon. I mean, for instance, that to know, more exactly, why it is that women can muster only 90% of a man's strength cannot help us to comprehend, explain, or change the massive feeling in our society that a woman has no business flexing her muscles anyway.

Even if one could identify all the variables at play in a national culture one would end up with such a vast number (millions upon millions) that it would be quite impossible to plot co-variation and determination. Secondly, in dealing with cultural meaning we are crucially concerned with the nature of symbolic systems, social attitudes and cultural values, and there is emphatically no way to quantify this. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, it is impossible to think of cultural processes in a linear way. It is not the case that there is a culture over here that affects sport over there, in a simple one way relationship. The relationship is reciprocal and dialectical: the understanding of interrelationship and interconnection is of the essence if we are even to set the right questions. But it is not even simply a case of insisting that sport is connected to society, and society to sport. For within sport itself, one finds, in micro, a representation of the relationship in society. Sport is influenced by the state of the general society, and reflects that society. Sport, in its turn, influences, for the most part reinforces, that society. Furthermore we cannot conceptualise society as a great monolithic entity, with a protuberance - sport-struck on the outside. The society, itself, is nothing but a layered complex of elements all intricately and dialectically interrelated with each other.

I should like to propose a very different approach to women in sport, that of Analytic Cultural Criticism. This approach is different because it is concerned with meaning, and values, and social explanation, without attempting positivistic rigour. It accepts the obvious difference in sports performance between men and women, accepts that cultural factors

may well enlarge this gap, but is most interested in the manner in which this gap is understood and taken up into the popular consciousness of our society. In this perspective the fact of the gap is incontrovertible, but it is an 'inert' fact, socially speaking, until we have explained the colossal social interest in it. After all there are many factual differences facing us in the social world, some people are short, others tall, some have blue eyes, others brown, some have black skins, some white, some people speak with deep voices, others with high. The analytic socio-cultural task is, not to measure these differences precisely and explain them physically, but to ask why some differences, and not others, are taken as so important, become so exaggerated, are used to buttress social attitudes or prejudice. What activates these 'inert' facts, then, is the business of critical qualitative analysis - why do people think a particular difference is important, how do they use the difference, is this use related at all to a system of attitudes and beliefs. I shall be arguing later that these differences are indeed interpreted by beliefs, and I shall spend some time explaining, both at the level of theory and practise, my view of how this system of beliefs, or as I shall call it -ideology, comes about and is sustained. But, for the moment, let us look at the concrete area of women in sport. Is there anything to learn here about the central values of our society today?

To come at the nature of the wider culture through the relatively small area of women in sport is not so idiosyncratic as it may at first sight appear. Sport is in a specific and privileged position to highlight the central preoccupations of our society. It is away from the productive process, freer and more voluntary than other activities. We can expect, in micro, and in exaggerated caricature, perhaps in reversal, perhaps in negation, to see the same tensions, stresses, concerns, attitudes and values that are current in society generally. It is also a field of relative

reasonable and objective, the female athlete is actually shown with her baby in the background. Even in the case of a successful athlete you see at a glance that she is different from men, defined essentially by sex rather than athletics, and perhaps even a freak for being able to have a baby and be successful in sport.

Games and sports played by women could be judged purely for themselves, without reference, all the time, to what are taken as the absolute values, the only yardstick, of achievement - male achievement. And furthermore, the wide spread of characteristics through both sexes, and the considerable overlap of the spectrum of physical characteristics between men and women, means that it is quite likely that a team of high ability women will be better, even in so-called masculine qualities, than a low ability men's team. And yet, the meanest local, 5th division, male works team gets more respect, in popular consciousness, than a women's national team. I am developing the argument here, that within the relatively small area of women in sport, we see, in a fairly clear though exaggerated manner, a central preoccupation of our society - anxiety about sex role differentiation. We see it manifesting itself in many ways in the area of sport.

Another powerful way in which the sexual identity is given precedence over the sport's identity of female athletes is the vein of sexual innuendo running through much sports commentary. The male may comfortably suppose that even if the sports woman affronts him on the field of play, at least she likes 'a bit of the other' in another field of play. Sometimes the women themselves are guilty parties to this, and collude to be 'sexy' and 'attractive' at the same time as sports women. In such ways the female athlete is rendered a sex object - a body which may excel in sport, but which is primarily an object of pleasure for man. A useful technique, for if a woman seems to be encroaching too far, and too threateningly, into male sanctuaries, she can be symbolically vapourised and reconstituted as an object, a butt for smutty jokes and complacent elbow nudging.

simplicity, where right and wrong, good and bad, are taken to be easily identified. One expects greater strength, or skill, to bring commensurate rewards in sport. It is the area where the apparently unpredictable chance of normal living intervenes least between ability and achievement. The very fact that so much sports commentary is concerned with who 'deserved' to win, goes to demonstrate the overwhelming expectation of simple physical justice. We may expect, therefore, transposed and displaced statements of central cultural attitudes and beliefs distilled to their most elemental and coherent forms in sport, and its complex of surrounding attitudes.

When we look at popular attitudes we quickly realise that the whole notion of women playing sport is taken as bizarre. Frequently reporting of women's sport takes its fundamental bearings, not on sport, but on humour, or the unusual. The tone is easy to recognise, it's exactly the irony, the humour, the superiority, of the sophisticated towards the cranks - the UFO believers, and end of the world disciples on the mountain top.

Often, when a subject is consistently treated with humour we should suspect underlying uncertainty and anxiety. Humour is often used as a technique to handle stress and uncertainty: things can be said, tensions released, in so-called humour, that could never be said seriously. So what is the real concern behind the humour surrounding women in sport? We are given an answer by the widespread insistence, and repetition, of differences in achievement between men and women in the media. The fundamental anxiety seems to be that men and women have to be continuously differentiated; male preserves continuously guaranteed. One way of emphasising this is to promote laughter or cynicism when females take to the field, another way is (c.f. Bobby Riggs) to set out to prove incontrovertibly that women are inferior through direct challenge. Another way is to draw attention to unarguable physical differences out of context. In a Daily Mirror article and photo<sup>(1)</sup> there is an excellent example of this. In the photograph, even though the text is fairly

subjective confrontation with one of the main organising principals of our society at the economic, social, and cultural levels - sex differentiation the main component of which is male domination. At bottom, the questions that really concern us are: what is the basis of the general male dominance in our society?: How is it perpetuated?: Why don't women object?

These are enormous questions to set in a limited amount of time, but it is necessary to face them if we are to make any significant advance. The most basic distinction to make is between those explanations that rest on biological arguments and those which rest on socio-cultural explanations. A clear penetration of this distinction is necessary, not for academic tidiness, but for the proper understanding of the phenomenon as it is experienced in everyday life where the appearances of certain legitimations are quite different from the real base of their argument. I mean that essentially cultural kinds of legitimation can appear as biological arguments - gain their popular assent through the outward look of biological incontrovertibility.

More of this very important shift later, first I want to challenge briefly the pure notion that men are assured of superiority by biological all time givens. Men have not been dominant in all societies. In fact, so far as natural exigencies are concerned, women have the supreme natural advantage of knowing who their offspring are. In certain primitive societies, under certain conditions, this has given rise to 'mother right'<sup>(2)</sup> and inheritance through the female line. In such societies women enjoyed positions of great status and certain real advantages over males. Where males have been in the ascendant it has not been due directly to their physical properties so much as to the economic and social conditions pertaining to the society in which they live<sup>(3)</sup>

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\* See Engels: Origin of the family, private property and the state  
Lawrence & Wishart 1968.

\* Particularly the development of surplus wealth, and pair bonding,  
Engels op.cit.

When we turn away from explicitly mass media coverage to popular consciousness we see sex differences emphasised even more. Sport is strongly associated with the male identity, with being popular and having friends. Rugby is archetypal here, and we imagine men to be at their most gregarious, expansive and relaxed in the pub after the match. It's not hard to see that the stereotype, 'I'd-like-to-be-with-them' males of the beer adverts, 'if you can't beat them join them', are really rugby players. Achievement particularly strengthens male identity; it is assumed that sports success is success at being masculine. Physical achievement, and masculine activity, are taken to be the same.

When we think of women in sport, the situation is entirely contrary. One thinks of female athletes as alone - there is no popular image of back-slapping in the pub afterwards. Indeed there is an important element in the popular response to the female athlete, of uncertainty before the deviant, distrust of the strange, dislike of the marginal. As the athlete becomes even more outstanding, she marks herself out even more as deviant. Instead of confirming her identity, success can threaten her with a foreign male identity. Insofar as she is affected by popular consciousness - and she can hardly ignore it - the female athlete lives through a severe contradiction. To succeed as an athlete can be to fail as a woman, because she has, in certain profound symbolic ways, become a man. Indeed, in certain areas it is not only a symbolic power she faces. The demand for sex tests on female athletes shows us the power of the suspicion - 'if she's successful, she's a man'. A moment's reflection that no male athlete lives this painful contradiction of success-being-failure-really, to say nothing of this failure being physically tested, throws up for us once again the severe interest which sport manifests in differentiating the sexes.

My argument is that sport reflects a crucial central feature of our culture - anxiety about sex roles. This same central element I would suggest is manifested, to a greater or lesser extent, in all aspects of our national life and culture. This sex role anxiety arises from the

ideology, in its deepest character, can induce assent to itself, it is only the manifesto of a group that has power over others.

We can only understand this 'disassembling' nature of ideology if we realize that the general notion of ideology is an abstraction, and that ideology proper exists only through its manifestations at the level of apparently concrete circumstance within the zone of common sense, within what is taken to be reality. In order to find a starting point it is necessary to posit the abstraction of ideology and to indicate its essential parameters, but unless we can show how this abstraction is taken up as the real in the social world, we shall have done nothing more than point to a manifesto. An important consequence of this line of reasoning is also to recognize that the notions of 'levels', presumably above the 'economy' is also a simplifying abstraction. Though it may be necessary to posit the economy as a 'base', it is the base not of a structured dimensional model, but the basis of an argument - the clearest conceptual point from which to elaborate the functioning of a system which, as it develops, quite transforms the 'base', not merely adds more floors above it. In a crucial sense there is only the 'base' which is best considered as a process of great though coherent complexity. The 'base' cannot then be understood as the only determinant of higher 'levels', the master string puller. It may well be the logical (as we think through the process in the only way we can - linearly) prerequisite for other cultural 'levels', but we must also recognize that the base is only achieved, constituted and reconstituted by activities, understandings and expectations of a cultural kind - the machines are operated by real humans in real relationships based in their own straight forward understandings of their universes, and not by robots obeying the laws of economics. My use of 'levels' has been between quotation marks precisely because I wanted to indicate its provisional nature, its status as a heuristic device used to further the immediate flow of the argument but to be surpassed at a later stage.

There is no innate right amongst males then to subordinate women, and we should always be careful to differentiate between real sexual differences and differences of 'gender'\*(4) taught to us by and through the society we live in. Only a small element of 'gender' is directly determined by actual biological sex.

However to affirm strongly that we should be looking for socio-cultural rather than biological explanations of male ascendancy does not win the day. We are still faced by enormously complex problems within the socio-cultural zone. Our analysis will have to come at the different 'levels' of our social existence - the economy, socialization, cultural activities and beliefs, the diverse social sub-regions of attitudes and beliefs such as sport - and show how different moments at these 'levels' are interconnected.

I shall be attempting a 'sketch' of these various levels and the manner of their interconnection in a moment, but before that I want to consider the difficult notion of ideology at a theoretical level. It is a concept that is of crucial importance in pinpointing important moments at different 'levels' and in explaining the manner of their interconnection.

Ideology for my purposes here can be understood as the process of legitimation, in its different forms, within all existing societies, whereby a certain social organisation, and system of order and reward is constituted as the only possible, or the only fair pattern of human relations. Crucially it can only achieve this by disassembling its own nature. The supreme ideological moment is when structure (most basically the economy and its necessary forms of relations) presents itself as culture mediated to the average man by everyday consciousness. The profound function that ideology has for a social system is to render itself in to common sense, or more accurately to reconstitute itself as an apparently material base of necessity.(5) If it does not succeed in this it may be transparently seen as class interest and may be obeyed only through physical coercion. Unless

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\* See Anne Oakley, 'Sex, Gender and Society', Penguin, 1972.

reality, to find in reality what will satisfy itself, and to neutralize or change what seems to contradict itself. The content of our general notion (abstraction) of ideology then is basically a powerful force of definition seeking its own reflection from reality in order to confirm itself.

Now there are competing forces of definition in all the sub-regions that make up society, and the individuals and groups inhabiting every area of the culture have their own at least partially independent forms of understanding and living their own immediate environments that won't immediately yield to an outside version of what is happening to them. On the other hand ideology can only exist precisely if it can embody itself in the concrete common sense of the actors in such sub-regions. This penetration I suggest can only take place in areas of discrepancy within these sub-regions. That is in areas which the immediate forms of understanding have not already totally taken up in to their own definitional field of force. One way of conceiving this was mentioned at the beginning of the lecture - the 'inert' fact, an aspect of reality which is visible but not yet taken up in to a system of belief. Another way is to regard it as a mismatch felt within particular experiential sub-systems, felt discrepancies which the actors involved are puzzled by and cannot adequately account for. In such areas the counterveiling local forces of definition are not strong enough to resist ideological forces, and the 'unknown quantity' can be interpreted globally by ideology for its own purposes - can be used to embody general beliefs in a located social example.

There has been another simplification of course in suggesting that 'inert' facts or social discrepancies are just lying idly by waiting for a more powerful master than their local ones. In fact they have always been in a state of having been interpreted, since to have remained uninterpreted is to have remained invisible to social meanings.<sup>(6)</sup> However to separate them artificially for a moment from the manner of their

What we think of as 'levels' could more properly be presented as moments in different stages of a process whereby the 'base' reaffirms itself in the different modes necessary to its own survival. Within this process what I have called ideology is crucial to the transformation of the modes, or to take a concrete instance, how the inherent logic of a capitalist economy presents itself, is reborn, as the obvious common sense of the job to be done on the stage of the individual and his immediate social relations. This is the moment when structure is reconstituted as culture, is culture, in order for what we take as structure to continue at all. I shall be attempting now to spell out the stages of this ideological transformation, but it is essential to bear in mind that I am suggesting that 'ideology' is a process, or part of a process, and that it does not exist as a static general concept. I shall be forced to begin my explanation with an account of ideology that implies it is a separate thing at separate level, but I ask you to bear with the difficult point that the purpose of the analysis is to suggest that 'ideology' proper is only ever manifested in apparently spontaneous, concrete circumstance.

I should like to represent the operation of ideology in three stages. Though I can only describe them sequentially and separately they should be thought of as simultaneous, mutually dependent and reinforcing elements of an ongoing process. These three stages are: (a) the ideological force of definition, (b) the reinterpretation of discrepancies in social sub-regions, (c) the located rebirth of ideology.

In the first instance I posit an ideological content, a general account of what the ideology 'says', as if indeed it were a manifesto. In our own society this would be something like the importance of work, the necessity for incentive, the justice of meritocratic advancement. Essentially these 'contents' are beliefs about the nature of reality, and can only be upheld if reality seems to comply with them. We must of course be extremely sceptical of 'reality's' ability to speak for itself, to confirm beliefs held about it. Rather we must recognize that belief seeks to define



particular sub-region, and a particular definition of an element of social reality is never won outright. There is always uncertainty and the sway of real events may transform the ability of the various actors to reclaim areas of meanings. Furthermore the various social sub-regions vary greatly in their capacity to be usefully invaded by ideology. An area that seems to exhibit great apparent autonomy is a prime candidate: for instance the areas of the 'natural' or the biological are enormously important to ideology, they seem quite free from human manipulation, and apparently self-determined, the most basic form of external reality. If an example can be won here it offers the ideal opportunity for the embodiment of ideology in the real. The plea to common sense is 'why, even in that separate area the same things are true!'

Even though a particular social sub-region may not offer the advantage of being apparently autonomous it may still be a frequent ideological target if its values and norms in some way impinge on an important principle of ideology. If the particular area throws up values or definitions which challenge ideological beliefs, the field clearly has to be contested. Even if ideology cannot totally submerge itself as common sense it can at least forward plausible suggestions for the reinterpretation of events. Ideology can never afford to let contradictory interpretations of reality go free from at least a crippling ambiguity. At the other extreme sub-systems that produce definitions of the real which run parallel to ideological definitions are clear candidates for insurgency. Again though the meanings derived from such areas may not always have the unquestioned hallmark of the real, or the undetermined, they may all add to a gathering weight of a certain version of reality. It's all cash in the bank of a growing deposit of the 'obvious'.

This investment with ideological meaning of disputed elements in local social systems does not however, fully account for the ideological process.

cultural investment at least shows the theoretical potential for the penetration of ideological meaning in to located social sub-regions.

An important consequence of this penetration is that apparently concrete instances can be used for general legitimations that are quite distinct from the inherent logic of the particular social sub-regions from which they came. Examples can be quoted out of context to support more global versions of reality which may even contradict the organizing perspective of the system from which the example is taken. In the modern era of telecommunications, and a central societal consensus based on information provided by the mass media, such out of context citations are common place and the most important mechanism for allowing the illusion of a central and agreed normative value system. The media could never succeed in presenting their unifying consensual vision of social reality unless it can be continually embodied in a wealth of concrete news items. Television as the purveyor of the ultimate concrete image has greatly augmented this process. The contextual disengagement practised by the media certainly gives news reporting a reassuring continuity and feeling of straightforward reasonableness, but for those involved in the real events which are being reported there is a characteristic muted sense of colossal misinterpretation. The continuity of real events has been sacrificed in the media to the continuity of much larger myths about the real. The profound needs of society to embed its ideology in empirical reality totally overrides the participants of particular scenarios, even renders to them their own reality unintelligible, in the interests of a larger coherency, a larger version of social reality.

The distribution of this ideological penetration is most uneven, and a further cause for the rage of the participant actors. There are a number of factors accounting for the degree of penetration of a certain area. The relative powers of definition are always changing within a

They have conceded the battle without even realizing that there was a 'battle'. These points may become clearer by example, one of a 'battle' apparently fought, and another of no 'battle' at all. In both cases I will point to what would have been the only successful grounds for repelling ideological penetration.

Trade Union opposition to employers which is couched in the form of a demand for more money accepts the legitimacy, and gives new life to the legitimacy of wage labour in general. Even the most vociferous and militant demands for more money which seem on the surface to challenge the functioning of the capitalist economy, at a deeper level underwrite more forcefully the legitimacy of the market economy and its exchange values. Union activity could only directly challenge the capitalist system if it challenged the terms on which workers are rewarded at all, and offered an alternative account of how the workers could be related to their product.

To take the very different area of crime and deviancy, so long as the miscreant himself makes excuses for his misdeeds, he is powerfully supporting the normative structure of the main society. For to make excuses for his conduct (perhaps for no other reason than to attract a more lenient sentence) accepts the whole definition, recreates the definition, which first defined his behaviour as antisocial. The criminal or deviant who is truly a threat to the 'fabric of society' is the one who remains unhumbled in the dock, and places his own definitions across his acts, and finds them just. It is no accident that such defendants frequently claim the status of political prisoners; the belief system which is strong enough to counter the ideological definition of their actions must be well supported by a complex political analysis of society and its internecine unequal struggle to define reality.

It's not the case then that located actors are doomed carriers of ideology. A sufficiently strong repossession of the definition of the situation can reverse the process. But by and large we can see that

The real dynamic is supplied to the system in our third stage, where the concrete social elements invested with ideology take on an ideological life of their own, and give a genuine rebirth to those beliefs with which they have been invested. This rebirth comes about because the local social actors surrounding an element that has been 'ideologised' do not remain neutral to it - social life is of course continuous and always monitoring and adapting its meanings and actions to its social and cultural environment. Within this reaction lies the basis for the rebirth of ideology (in fact the only real manifestation) in concrete reality. It does not matter whether this reaction is positive or negative so long as the underlying definition of the situation is accepted. Within this response any reaction short of a wholesale counter redefinition accepts the penetrating ideological meaning and inducts elements of that meaning in to the system as a whole. Frequently the immediate response of the actors involved will be one of opposition, but the opposition, unless it is extremely self aware, can only take up the issue in the terms within which it has been offered, the terms which render the phenomenon apparently concrete and real. The reaction of the local actors then, though hostile to the surface forms of the penetration, in fact gives completely new life to the underlying definitional power of the ideology. To take certain questions up is already to have given up the right to challenge the epistemological foundations of those questions. The 'battle' so to speak is conceded as soon as it is started, by starting it. If the local cultural participants do not attempt to challenge the immediate apparent issue, and have no other account of reality, then they have no choice but to collude in the ideological definition of what confronts them. They may well be puzzled and uncertain as to quite why they are behaving in such and such a way but they have in fact given a mute rebirth to the ideology. They are living the ideology in that social area because they have no other voice to speak with, they act in the only mode that is open.

'base' itself. There is no simple economy that pre-exists its concomitant cultural forms, and what confronts us at one particular time is the most recent state of an infinity of moments beyond the point at which an original structure presented itself as culture. The overall development of the process over time is not however without form, and as the objective moments of technology dialectically develop with their forms of culture and ideology, new possibilities are opened up for what social reality might be. Within this, social actors have some potency to speed events if once they can realistically place themselves within their particular social nexus, and add their weight decisively and knowledgeably to a crucial shift in the definition of reality.

We have taken a long detour from the immediate subject of male ascendancy in our society, but I want to insist strongly now that the belief in male ascendancy is essentially an ideological belief - which is supremely important at several moments in the basic processes of our society. It is a belief which, in the manner of the above explanation, both arises from the 'base' and allows the 'base' and other 'levels' to work at all. Let us investigate some of these 'levels' briefly.

In a very important sense the whole functioning of the capitalist economy depends on and gives rise to the common sense belief that the sexes are fundamentally different and the male superior. One of the clearest areas of the intricate involvement of this belief with the economy is in the pivotal role of the nuclear family in our society. The family is the smallest unit of our economic system, and within it there is specialisation of labour, reflecting specialisation in the larger society. In order to meet the very expensive costs of maintaining the separate dwelling, services and luxuries, vastly increased by the reduction of the family, the man is forced out - into the competitive world of industry. The enormous demands thus made on the man mean that the woman has herself to specialise. She looks after the

particular actors in local social areas who are not armed with an analysis, will always struggle in the obvious way. If they are told they are asking for too much money they will reply that they deserve what they get, if they are told that they are evil, they will reply, 'it's not us it's the conditions we have lived through'. By not challenging the basic terms of the exchange they will have given rebirth to the legitimacy of defining the whole situation in terms of money or evil.

The argument at this third stage then is that the ideologically imbued concrete elements of particular social sub-regions take on a life of their own, and produce spontaneously the essential elements of ideology. This is the manner of the continuing life of ideology in the common sense realm of the concrete. If we can accept the continuous complex functioning of this process in all the diverse areas of our social life, we can see that what we take to be the general force of ideology is only ever a set of continually reconstituted beliefs and definitions occurring in empirical circumstance. We can see that what we take to be the 'base' is only made possible by the ideological moments within itself which continually reaffirm the 'only possible way of doing things'. If ever the ideology becomes detached from the 'base', then its essential dynamic is lost, its essential grip on everyday consciousness is lost. It becomes merely a static manifesto and not a social principle. In such circumstances the 'base' will either stop, or if this is unimaginable, induct another ideology, another embedded and continually reborn version of social reality.

This account may seem to attribute too much of an automatic unconscious character to ideology, and not enough primacy to fundamental factors of capitalist economic organisation. This risk has to be run however in order to prevent the simplistic notion of an economic system directly determining other cultural levels. The economic system can only grow and develop precisely through complex ideological development within the

to mindless, domestic consumption. It is only this ever slightly accelerating cycle, that allows governments to manage modern western economics, and it is deeply interwoven with, both creates and is created by, the common sense belief in the differentiation of the sexes.

Another clear area of our social existence which both creates and is created by the widespread common sense assumption of sex differentiation is that of the processes of demand induction. We have seen that the capitalist system depends on ever increasing demand, but it cannot rely on an automatic increase in overall demand. In fact there are some important mechanisms working precisely to limit demand. Expansion can only be achieved 'artificially', or more exactly through the exploitation of ideological beliefs. This is not simply a matter of pointing to advertising as a discreet process within the overall system. Demand induction is a quality and function of the whole society, and of the life of all the various concrete located social sub-regions. It is precisely as ideology, to which it is intimately related, in being part of what we think of as the 'base'. It partakes in the creation of taste and even consciousness itself, since what we are is, in part, a function of our relationship with objects and it is precisely this which demand induction manipulates. Demand induction then isn't the simple addition of 'advertising' to our social environment, it is a very basic part of our social reality that teaches us what objects to expect and how to consume them and constitutes therefore an important element of our awareness. But demand induction can't simply be willed by capitalism, it relies on and draws from the complex processes of ideology as well as feeding that ideology.

The ideological belief that the sexes are profoundly differentiated has been one of the richest areas for demand induction to intertwine itself with everyday consciousness and the common sense. As industry searches for greater and greater demand, it has focussed more and more on women as the

home and the children. To simplify somewhat, but to make the point graphically, the men provide the workforce, the women service and reproduce the workforce. Without this clear differentiation of roles, industry could not, for long, keep up its breakneck pace and headlong rush continually for greater and greater production.

The nuclear family, and its separate dwelling, is important in another economic sense. I mentioned, a moment ago, that industry is involved in a headlong rush for greater productivity. This may seem surprising especially in the light of Britain's low comparative growth rate. But I want to suggest that modern industry can only survive by finding, or creating, ever more demand. The continuous crisis threatening capitalism is that of falling demand, falling investment and slump. Though I don't have the space here to substantiate this claim, I think it would be agreed upon by most economists. Necessarily then, capitalism is continuously involved in a breakneck pursuit of greater consumer demand, simply to keep its wheels turning - and they have to turn ever slightly faster or stop although - whether or not the commodities it produces are objectively humanly necessary or not. The great lesson of post-Keynesian economics, on whose principles the great capitalist countries are still being managed, is that demand is all. The nuclear family, living in its separate dwelling, is an enormously important factor in increasing overall demand. Each family needs its roof, furniture, utensils, transport, etc., etc... Increasingly, each family 'needs' to be seen to be at least as affluent as their neighbours, whether or not they really want the extra objects.

There is, in all this, a profound irony, in that the nuclear family provides on the one hand, the specialised over-stressed workers to produce, often in unpleasant and highly competitive conditions, the commodities which the very structure of the nuclear family has induced the demand for. We have a circle of never ending production and consumption, that, for the most part, enslaves men to mindless productive jobs, and enslaves women

It may seem surprising that women remain largely obedient to these images of femininity, but we must remember that individual women are the product of their own history within this society and its intertwined ideology. Ideology is deeply embedded in the processes of socialization of women in our society. As an abstract force lying over concrete social relations it would be extremely difficult to see how ideology could be involved in the minute day to day experiences of the growing girl. But in the light of my explanation above it is possible to see that parents and institutions are supplied at every turn with a wealth of apparently common sense assumptions about the nature of life by ideology. A very powerful set of taken for granted assumptions cluster around the innate difference between the sexes - the 'natural' passivity of the female, the 'natural' aggressiveness of the male. Small wonder then, that at various difficult decision points those responsible for the guidance of the growing girl rely on the stock of received definitions concerning femininity. The young girl is supposed to be pretty, well mannered, quiet and above all, passive. You may wish to deny such a simple proposition, but how many of you, when buying a present for a little girl, consider a tractor instead of a doll? How many of you, when faced with little girls fighting don't intervene and stop it? You may intervene between boys, but are you sure there is not another communication occurring at the same time, a smile or a twinkle in the eye, that effectively communicates - 'yes, boys will be boys'?

These kinds of differences, often subtle, but nevertheless powerful, are duplicated throughout childhood and in school. By the time children are old enough to gain some independence from their homes, and schools, and become involved in youth culture there are already, deep seated feelings that girls are attractive and passive, boys are tough and active. Youth culture, by and large, emphasises these tendencies. The girl is asked to become ever more demure, attractive and passive; the boy expected to become even more daring and tough - providing a spectacle for the girls to appreciate. It's certainly no accident that around the teenage years,

objects, and executors, of conspicuous consumption. By taking existing ideological attitudes towards women, confirming and establishing them through advertising, it is possible to significantly expand markets, and even to create new ones. Women can be presented as the object of spectacular consumption for men, so that a man improves his status, by purchasing clearly extravagant articles for his woman. Women themselves, in so far as they have already been persuaded by ideology to be narcissistic, can be further persuaded by advertising to consider themselves as sex objects. They can be induced to buy vast ranges of make-up, perfumes and clothes to enhance their 'objectness'. In so far as advertising can convince the woman that she should be as the stereotype 'good mum' keeping her children's shorts as white as her neighbours', she can be induced to apply enormous pressure on the wage-earning man to provide an ever increasing range of up-to-the-minute gadgets and hardware. A moment's glance through any woman's magazine should be enough to convince that advertising continually uses a fixed range of ideological stereotypes of women - inviting them to become more like the already-received, differentiated, and exploited roles they know - mother, lover, sex object, hostess. How many adverts invite the woman to identify herself more as worker, producer or professional? Not many of course, because, in these roles, she would not be pushed to consume more, she would not be further differentiated.

Women are used in even more invidious ways to promote commodity demand across the board. Exploiting the highly differentiated role of sex object, advertising continually attempts to associate objects with beautiful, desirable women. By driving a certain car, smoking a certain tobacco, buying a certain suit, a man can also buy an image of himself surrounded by seductive females. We can all be induced to buy sprays to choke and poison our pores, in order to be certain not to upset, with a human smell, that mythical Adonis of the opposite sex.

victims of an unwelcome ideological process.

If we trace our three processes of ideology through women in sport we shall see just what a fertile and unsuspecting field there is here for the legitimation of a certain dominant version of social reality. Taking as our starting point the general belief that the sexes are innately different, and males superior, we can posit a powerful force of definition seeking for confirmation in social sub-regions. The area of sport generally offers itself as an important target because of its apparent autonomy. Sport is just itself and part of the ideologically important area of the 'natural'. If evidence can be found here for ideological belief, then it will have the cache of the real, it will be admirably suited to citation out of context. But within this already privileged zone there is the further sub-region of women in sport which offers the bonus of biological, and absolutely incontrovertible differences between the sexes. Now within the local terms of reference - those women involved in sports performance - this biological difference is noted as discrepancy, but is not very strongly mobilized as an element of their definition of social reality. Their main social reality is presumably connected with sport for its own sake, and the frustrations and hopes of that world - there is of course no reason why female sport can't be judged for its own sake, for its own enjoyment and meaning. Ideology however, can claim this discrepancy fully for its own. The discrepancy is not strongly contested by the local actors, and gives the opportunity for the classic ideological shift - that of presenting cultural legitimations as biological factors. There is the tailor made opportunity for transforming ideological belief in to an aspect of concrete reality at the plane of common sense. The fact that no one can deny the inferiority of female sports performance, becomes the fact of female inferiority, becomes the fact that females are innately different from men, becomes the fact that women who stray across the defining boundary are in a parlous state. To put it another way, a structural prerequisite for the functioning of the capitalist system has

girls often lose interest in gym and sports at school. That is a zone for masculine activity, that develops masculine identity, and is contrary to all that the culture, the music, the dress, of youth culture expect her to be. If we take the more extreme forms of activity on youth culture, the delinquents and highly anti-social groups, we see an even more marked differentiation between the sexes. As the young woman experiments and adapts to a stable sexual relationship, she faces another area of symbols, values and meanings rooted in ideology, which all conspire to remind her that submissiveness and passivity are the important female qualities. Moving to the next stage of a female's life, marriage and children, she is faced with the whole complex of being 'a good wife', 'a good mother', and organising a 'good' home, pursued all the time by the myths and stereotypes of the mass media. We have looked at the nuclear family, and its role in sexual differentiation. At every stage then of a woman's development, she is faced with a mass of established cultural forces, concretely embodied in specific ideological manifestations, working to define her as differentiated from, and inferior to, males and in their turn all of these stages give their own scope for ideological penetration. Once a young girl and her mentors have accepted the definition of gender supplied by ideology they then supply in their actions, further 'proof' of the common sense validity of those beliefs.

A full analysis of the mechanisms involved in the perpetuation of the ideology of female inferiority is beyond the scope of this paper. I've attempted to show some of the main ways in which we can understand the complex manner in which the ideology of male superiority supports, connects and is created by the various 'levels' of our society - an outline of a socio-cultural explanation of male dominance. To return finally, however, to the area of women in sport, we are confronted here with a particularly rich and appropriate area for ideological penetration. As we saw before the distribution of ideological meaning is greatly uneven, and forever shifting. At the moment women in sport seem to be the puzzled and unfortunate

The response of the participants in the area of women in sport and of the researchers of positivist academics may, therefore, produce profound and unintended consequences, and actually exacerbate the processes which in the first place brought unwelcome attention.

In the terms of my analysis the only effective way sports women have to counter their role as the unwilling victims in a larger legitimization of belief about the nature of sexes is to offer much more strongly their own version of sports reality which undercuts altogether the issue of male supremacy. I mean that sport could be presented as a form of activity which emphasises human similarity and not dissimilarity, a form of activity which isn't competitive and measured, a form of activity which expresses values which are indeed unmeasurable, a form of activity which is concerned with individual well being and satisfaction rather than with comparison. In such a view of sport, differences between the sexes would be unimportant, unnoticed. We wouldn't have the measures to realise that there was difference, or to be able to base conferences, or research projects, on measured differences - there would not be the fuel to supply popular consciousness with its prejudices about femininity.

If such a counter definition of sport could be mounted, and it's here that research might play a more helpful role, then there would be the possibility of influencing society in the positive direction of challenging received ideas about the nature of women. As it is we must pessimistically conclude that, for the moment, the responses of those involved in sport, and most of the research done on sport, have been a force for reaction and for the continuation of the popular belief that the female of the species is inherently inferior to the male.

come through ideological processes to be deposited in our culture as a common sense assumption - 'of course women are different and inferior'.

Looking at the third stage of the ideological process, the situation of women in sport offers even more to ideological development. For local cultural participants, the sports women, unarmed with a counter definitional force of their own, either immediately collude with the ideological definitions (the female athlete conspiring to be sexy with the news reporter) or take up the challenge totally within the terms of the preferred ideological definition (the angered sportswoman setting out to prove male equivalence in her sport's performance). In many cases the latter is even preferable to collusion, since it makes the case so much more visible, and so eminently suited to citation out of context. One can think of many examples; Billie Jean Kings response to Bobby Riggs is an archetypical example here - not least because she won.

Researchers and positivist enquiry also bear some responsibility here, since they so often take it as their task to explain differences in performance - thereby dignifying that difference. Sometimes they even offer a base for closing the gap between male and female sports performance. To accept that it is a worthwhile endeavour to push female performance closer to that of a male, even surpass it, admits at a stroke the stigma of femininity and the legitimacy of that male eminence which coined the standards. So no matter how the actual physical gap is closed, there is an equal and opposite reaction which expands the cultural and ideological resonance of that gap. It creates anew the frame of reference in which, and by which, the gap was measured in the first place. By accepting the terms of the ideological definition, the attempt to approach male performance levels in fact strengthens popular prejudice about femininity. It creates an expanding bank of the obvious examples of female inferiority which in their turn aid the ideological penetration of other areas of society.

References

- 1) Daily Mirror of 20th July 1973.
- 2) See Engels, 'Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' in Selected Works, ed. Lawrence and Wishart, London 1973.
- 3) Particularly the development of surplus wealth and pair binding. Engels, op.cit.,
- 4) See Anne Oakley, Sex, Gender and Society, Penguin 1972.
- 5) One of the most important discussions of 'common sense' is in relation to 'hegemony' in A. Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1973.
- 6) On the question of the ever pregiven-ness of ideological interpretation, see L.Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in Education:Structure and Society, Penguin, 1972.