

Gendered Identities: How does Participation in Sport affect the Construction and Performance of Gendered Identities among Young Girls?

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Abstract

This study seeks to consider the ways in which participation in sport affects the construction and performance of gendered identities among young girls. Gender can be understood as something that is performed based upon societal expectations of activities appropriate for one's sex category, rather than something that exists inherently. This study aims to build upon existing research that suggests that participation in sport alters the way in which masculinities and femininities are constructed and performed, by considering the exact nature of this effect amongst adolescent girls in the case study sport of sailing. Using both qualitative and quantitative data collected amongst girls aged 13-18 participating in the case study sport, this study shows that involvement in sailing affords young girls the opportunity to construct an identity alternative to traditional ideas of femininity. This alternative feminine identity, based upon skill and performance rather than appearance or other traditional markers of femininity, has been found to not only be performed in the sporting environment, but to alter the performance of the traditional identity while in the wider world. The study concludes by stressing the importance of involvement in sport to allow the creation of alternative gendered identities that are unconstrained by the contemporary gender order.

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Introduction and Theoretical Review

Since the beginning of the twentieth century there have been dramatic changes to the way that gender shapes difference. Discrimination based upon sex is now unlawful in the UK, meaning that opportunities for men and women are theoretically equal. However, there are still many other forms of difference between the sexes, not least how the different biological categories of sex are translated into differing ideas of gender and gendered identities. These gendered identities remain one of the most acute aspects of separation of the sexes in present society. This study seeks to consider the way that involvement in sport affects the creation and performance of gendered identities and separation between the sexes amongst teenagers between 13 and 18, using the case study sport of sailing.

The study will start by a review of the previous literature on the subject to place the study in its broader context. This review will start by considering different approaches to gender and masculinities and femininities, and then downscale in approach, looking then at gender in institutions, before considering the subject area of sport, and the case study sport of sailing.

1.1 Gender, Society and Gendered Relations

In many western societies, 'women' and 'men' are seen as naturally defined categories with distinctive psychological and behavioural propensities (West & Zimmerman, 1987, Connell, 2001, Connell, 2005). These categories are seen as binary opposites to each other. So called 'masculine traits' include aggression, competitiveness, physical strength, and rationality (Connell, 2001). As women and men are opposite binary categories, these versions of masculinity are shaped in relation to ideas of femininity: what is not feminine is masculine (McDowell, 2003). In contrast, women are therefore perceived as timid, non-competitive, weak and emotional (Brittan, 2001, Connell, 2005).

These differences between men and women are seen as fundamental and enduring. The division between genders is perceived as a natural practice that is rooted in biology, while the structural arrangements of society are presumed to be responsive to these differences (West & Zimmerman, 1987). However, for sociologists, gender means something different.

While 'sex' can be seen as a category determined by the application of previously agreed upon biological criteria, 'gender' in contrast, can be seen as the use of situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitude and activities appropriate for ones sex category (West & Zimmerman, 1987, West & Fenstermaker, 1995). Gender can therefore be seen as something that is performed, based on societal expectations, rather than something that exists inherently (Connell, 2005).

This definition of gender as something that is created by society is supported by research that has been conducted into the differences between men and women in a range of factors including temperament, emotions and intelligence (Rosenberg, 1982, cited in Connell, 2005). It was found that there was no statistically noticeable difference between men and women, and that where there was difference, it was small in comparison to the difference socially between sexes, in terms of unequal incomes, unequal responsibilities in child care and drastic differences in access to social power (Connell, 2005). This research backs the idea that natural characteristics cannot be solely responsible for the inequalities that exist between men and women in most societies (Connell, 2005). Gender can therefore be suggested to be something that is created by culture (Brittan, 2001). As such, gender is a set of processes and relationships formed in culture (Connell, 2001).

However, this approach does not highlight the flexible nature of gender identities. While gendered identities can be seen as configurations of society, it must also be stressed that these ideas of gender alter over space, time and culture to create many versions of gender, masculinities and femininities (Connell, 2001, Connell, 2005). For example, while men and women have always been binary categories, it is only in the last century that women and men have become perceived as binaries based on an idea of opposition. In earlier history, women and men were still seen as binary categories, but rather than being opposites, women were seen as the same as men, but an inferior version. They were seen to be less rational, less in control of their emotions, and possessing less of the faculty of reason, an idea that was grounded in western religion (Connell, 2001). Here, women were seen to be inferior, rather than opposite, to men. The current idea of men and women as opposite, separate, alienated categories, is therefore a relatively recent social product that has only arisen in the last 100 years. Gender as a concept is therefore something that alters over time (Connell, 2001).

This idea of gender as a concept that alters over time has been developed by other writers to create an idea of a tentative, provisional idea of gender identity (McDowell, 2003). These different identities can be seen as different gender 'roles'. These 'roles' are situated identities, that are assumed and relinquished as different situations demand. Rather than a master identity, multiple roles of gender exist and are switched between (West and Zimmerman, 1987, West & Fenstermaker, 1995).

How these multiple forms of gender are expressed must also be considered. As discussed above, Connell defined gender as something that is performed, based on societal expectations, rather than something that exists inherently (Connell, 2005). McDowell (2003) also writes about the expression of gender as a performance, stating that gender is an ongoing performance, variable in space and time, but regulated by social norms and expectations (McDowell, 2003). West & Zimmerman (1987) also discuss the expression of gender through narratives, however, for them gender must be seen as a recurring achievement, something that is performed continuously. Gender is performed through appearance – clothing, figure, hairstyle – but also through behaviour. However, performing gender successfully requires more than simple behavioural patterns; performance must be finely fitted to situations and modified and transformed as the occasion demands.

Many situations are not initially related to gender, however what occurs within them is obviously gender relevant. For example, when crossing the street the man may perform masculinity by taking the woman's arm to guide her across the street, and she may perform femininity by consenting to being guided, and by herself not initiating such behaviour with a man (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In contrast, some occasions are routinely organised to display the differences between gender and celebrate behaviours that are conventionally linked to ideas of either masculinities or femininities. Organised sport is one such arena. Here, the qualities associated with dominant masculinities, including aggression, strength and competitiveness, are displayed and celebrated (West & Zimmerman, 1987, Connell, 2001).

1.2 Gender and Sport

Dufor (1999) proposed sport as a major arena for gender and society to be studied. She stated that sport was a mirror for society, an institution which reflects all other institutions and elements of society that benefit men (Dufor, 1999, see also McKay, 2000). Sport has been used by men since ancient times to separate and distinguish themselves from women. There is a physical gendered division of space within sport, with men expected to be on the playing field, and women allowed to cheer from the sidelines. When women do participate in sport, they are separated into different sports, different competitions, and different changing rooms. Dufor proposed that this gendered division of space is reflective of the gendered division of space across wider society, such as in domestic and employment situations. As such, she proposed that sport should be studied as a way of exploring the society and social practice as a whole (Dufor, 1999).

1.3 Sport, Identity and Ideas of Self

As well as considering the way that sport is constructed to exclude women, the way in which sport affects both women and men and their ideas of self, must be considered. Dufor proposed that for many men, sport damages their ability to form healthy emotional relationships. She found that sporting culture encourages the celebration of traditional masculine identities that include aggression and strength, as these traits are required in traditional male sports such as rugby. She also found that men who embraced these traditional identities were also more likely to embrace other traditional hegemonic ideas of the relationship between men and women, including the superiority of men over women and the perception of women as sexual objects. Associated with the idea of masculine aggression was also a reluctance to appear vulnerable before women, or to address emotional problems. This means that male athletes are found to often retain a lack of intimacy with girlfriends or wives. Not only does this create damaging relationships between athletes and others, it also increases sexual harassment of women (Dufor, 1999).

The ways in which women construct femininities in sport must also be considered. Sport symbols are linked intimately with ideas of masculinity: strength, aggression,

competitiveness. There is therefore an inherent conflict between athletic prowess and femininity. Traditional notions of femininity suggest women are polite, controlled and biddable (Kessler et al, 1985). Women participating in sport are therefore part of a contradiction between the two roles. The goals set by each role, feminine woman, or sports woman, are mutually exclusive, so that assets for one are liabilities for another (Komarovsky, 1946). For some women, this contradiction causes them to create multiple forms of their own identity, and to move between these forms dependent on place and occasion (Hargreaves, 1986).

Dufor proposed that this conflict can also manifest itself as assumptions of a relationship between female athletes and homosexuality. Some female athletes respond to this through overfeminisation. For example, US college sports players often play wearing hair ribbons and makeup, as an assurance to both themselves and others of their status as women (Dufor, 1999). However, some women respond to these conflicts in different ways, such as allowing men to fit them into stereotypical female roles, such as mothers and sisters. Although this often allows men to come to grips with the presence of female athletes, women's acceptance of these traditional roles is consistent with further subordination to men, by reinforcing traditional female notions of compliance, nurturance and empathy (Walk, 2000).

1.4 Sport and the Body

The relationship between sport and the body must also be considered. There is often the temptation to treat the individual as a disembodied decision making agent, rather than a synthesis of biological, psychological and socio-cultural effects (Maguire, 1993). The body is the primary object of social production and inscription (Cole, 1993). Within sport, the unrestrained movement of the body contributes to the illusion that the body is free and transparent, set aside from social constraints (Scruton, 2002). However, within sport the body is instead a space for oppositional practices, a space to challenge the physical passivity inscribed on the body of women attempting to meet the feminine ideal and instead allowing them to create a body based on grace and power (Cole, 1993, Gorely et al, 2003). Women

learn the habits of feminine body comportment from a young age: walking like a girl is expected to, tilting her head like a girl is expected to. Women learn to constrain their movements in order to meet the traditional feminine expectations of timidity, delicacy and grace (Scraton, 2002, Gorely et al, 2003). The idea of this body timidity can be explored through Bourdieu's idea of a Habitus. For Bourdieu, the body is a site of social memory. The social expectation is written onto the physical body through the continuous repetition of movements. It becomes sedimented in routine, to the extent that it becomes second nature (Bourdieu, 1993, cited in Gorely et al, 2003). Participation in sport enables women to allow their body to move in a different nature, breaking free of the Habitus, and therefore allowing their body to be less constrained by social expectations of the gendered body.

The idea of the sporting body is inherently tied to the idea of muscularity. The dominant idea of male identity forms a natural association between masculinity and muscularity. Male muscularity is associated with normalness: a perception that men are supposed to look like that. Muscularity allows an individual to forcefully occupy space and manipulate objects. It is therefore overlain with hegemonic masculine ideas of dominance and control (Gorely et al, 2003). For women, the association is less positive. Muscularity and strength contradicts ideas of the feminine identity as one that is timid and passive and as such, is a threat to gender hegemony (Cole, 1993).

Bourdieu proposed that muscularity can be understood in terms of physical capital. As capital exists within a system of exchange, physical capital can be converted into cultural, economic or social capital. It is a resource that can empower (Bourdieu, 1993, cited in Gorely et al, 2003). For men as a social group, this construction is clear. However, for women this physical capital remains largely bounded within the physical activity field. Muscular bodies are acceptable for women, but only within the confines of sport. The physical capital generated through participation in sport has little exchange value between the sporting environment and the wider world. Girls, as a general group, are not able to benefit from the construction of society in this way in the same manner that boys can (Gorely et al, 2003).

1.5 The Development of Identity

This contradiction between ideas of the self shaped by society, and that required for sport, is something that is most heightened during adolescence (Scraton, 2002). Although the process of identity formulation begins from early childhood, it is during adolescence that childhood sex roles are exchanged for adult sex roles (Katz, 1979, Adams & Jones, 1983). The onset of physiological sexual maturity can alter the stability of childhood sex roles. Biological changes must be adjusted to, and new patterns of interpersonal skills must be acquired as preparation for appropriate adult sex roles (Katz, 1979).

At this time, girls become more aware of how others perceive them, and become more interested in outward appearance (Scraton, 2002). The objectification theory states that the repeated experience of being treated as an object to be looked at and evaluated gradually convinces women to view themselves from the same viewpoint, leading to increased appearance anxiety and body shame (Richman & Shaffer, 2000). During adolescence, in studies by Richman & Shaffer (2000) and Slater & Tiggemann (2010) girls were found to be beginning to become susceptible to this process as they gained an awareness of the gaze of those around them.

1.6 The Research

In the existing literature, there is very little research into the lived experiences of women and girls participating in sport. Wheaton & Tomlinson, in their 1998 paper on women in the windsurfing subculture, appealed for more research into the experiences of women in sports, and particularly how sporting values are linked to alternative masculinities and femininities in sport (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998).

There is also very little work on how young people in particular are affected by participation in sport throughout their upbringing. As discussed above, adolescence is a time of sudden heightened anxiety for young girls over their femininity (Richman & Shaffer, 2000, Slater & Tiggemann, 2010). Throughout this period, the construction of a feminine identity becomes a key issue in the development of young girls and their sense of self.

This dissertation will attempt to address some of this research deficit, by considering the lived experiences of young girls participating actively in sport, focusing specifically on the type of feminine identity they construct around themselves, and how this gendered identity alters fluidly between different spaces, such as home, school, and the sporting environment. This dissertation will consider as a case study the sport of sailing, and in particular, dinghy racing.

2. Research Design and Methodology

2.1 Research Aims

To structure the research into specific areas of interest, several broad questions were identified. These lines of enquiry were created after an initial period of familiarisation in the environment to gain an understanding of the micro-scale processes and social relations occurring in the sporting culture. These research questions were not, therefore, the starting point of the design, rather the result of preliminary research (Bosco & Herman, 2010). Throughout the research process, all research was conducted in a fluid manner in order to allow any emerging themes to be identified as they arose. This meant that while the main areas of research remained fixed, deviations were allowed within these areas in order to encompass new ideas.

The four main research questions can be summarised as:

1. ***Distribution:*** *What is the relative distribution of girls and boys in the case study sport, in both participation and achievement?*
2. ***Identity:*** *What different versions of a feminine identity are found in the case study sport?*
3. ***Parallel Identities:*** *How do girls move between sailing identities and identities in the wider world?*
4. ***Empowerment:*** *How does sailing participation affect confidence and empowerment of young girls?*

2.2 Sample Selection and Access to Participants

As the processes being researched were social processes, qualitative methods formed the basis of the research in order to create an in-depth understanding of the issues being considered (Bosco & Herman, 2010). However, this was combined with quantitative data in order to give any conclusions formed objective support.

Until relatively recently, children have rarely been the focus of academic study. They were often conceptualised as unreliable, incomplete, mere objects more easily studied from a distance. However, there is now a growing understanding of the importance of speaking directly to children. Children must be understood as social actors in their own right, and therefore competent witnesses to speak for themselves about their experiences of the social world in which they live (Barker & Weller, 2003). In consideration of this, throughout my research I spoke directly with young girls involved in the study, and did not interview coaches or parents as a proxy.

When working with children and young people, attention must be paid to the particular power dynamics attached to the social context of adult - child relations. In addition to this, child appropriate methods of research must be considered (Barker & Weller, 2003). For young adults this includes a focus on spaces dominated by their generation, including the internet, and more specifically social networking sites such as Facebook.

The study aimed to consider girls in their teenage years, so included girls aged between 13 and 18. Girls of a range of sailing abilities were considered, although all those involved in the study had a suitably high level of commitment and involvement in the sailing scene to ensure they were immersed to some extent in the sporting culture. Data was collected primarily at the National Schools Sailing Association Regatta Week – 24th to 30th July 2011 - which is a prestigious national youth sailing competition held every year in Britain. The research also however, considered girls sailing at a lower, yet still highly involved level, through consideration of the Oxford 'Pirates' – a youth sailing team based at Farmoor Reservoir, Oxford.

2.3 Research Methods

- ***6 week immersion period in the culture and journal of observations kept***

Traditional qualitative research methods, such as focus groups, while aiming to gain in-depth knowledge about social issues, still retain an inherent divide between researcher and participant (Bosco & Herman, 2010). To study fully the social process acting within the environment of study, the researcher must interact with this environment. In order to achieve this, I spent 6 weeks working full time in a water sports centre in Oxfordshire, teaching sailing whilst also competing and training regularly myself. By immersing myself completely in the sporting community which I was studying, I gained both insight into the cultural norms that surround it, as well as gaining the trust of those whom I was including in my research. Towards the end of this period of immersion, I conducted the more formal part of the research.

- ***6 focus groups held with girls at the NSSA Regatta***

The main method of research was a series of focus groups held amongst girls in the study. Focus groups were felt to be appropriate for several reasons. Firstly, the dynamic conversations and discussions that are encouraged in focus groups shift power dynamics. Power relations between researcher and those being researched are broken down to create a more fluid environment (Bosco & Herman, 2010). When working with young adults, this shifts the power away from the researcher and places it more evenly amongst all members of the group, thus lessening the concerns mentioned above in relation to the inherent power dynamics of adult-child relations (Barker & Weller, 2003).

Secondly, focus groups challenge traditional divisions between research and participants. Participants are involved in the research processes, and so are made aware of research issues. This can act as a liberating force and a creative push for those involved (Bosco & Herman, 2010). It was hoped that involvement in these focus groups would act as a liberating force for the girls involved in the study.

The focus groups were kept relatively small, around 4 girls in each, to allow for an intimate discussion and to talk in depth about themes that are considerably complex

and delicate. Only girls were present in the sessions, as they were the group under study, but this was also felt to add homogeneity to the group. This is meant to contribute to a climate where participants can speak freely in an atmosphere of mutual respect, as people feel more comfortable with those with whom they share similarities (Bosco & Herman, 2010).

The focus groups addressed the latter three of the four research questions, on how they performed their gendered identity both inside and outside of the sailing environment, and issues of confidence and empowerment. These topics are quite subtle, so had to be introduced gradually. However, most of the girls involved in the study were keen to talk about sailing and their sense of self. It was clear that to many of them it was an important part of how they perceived themselves, and not something anyone had asked them to put into words before. Therefore, I had to do relatively little prompting, as the participants keenly debated and discussed the issues amongst themselves.

- ***Questionnaire, circulated to 60 girls at the NSSA Regatta.***

A pilot questionnaire was trialled at Oxford Pirate training sessions. This was then adapted and redistributed amongst girls at the NSSA regatta. Questionnaires were circulated to 60 girls out of the 72 that attended the NSSA Regatta 2011. Response rate was high at 68%. The questionnaire addressed the same questions that the focus groups raised. This, in addition to the themes raised by my time in the culture, allowed for verification of important themes through several independent methods, in what is commonly known as triangulation (Baxter & Eyles, 1997).

- ***Quantitative numerical data on male/female attendance at the NSSA Regatta, including results by gender, and attendance at Oxford Pirates Training by gender***

Numerical data on attendance at the NSSA Regatta was obtained through the researcher's connection to the organisation. This data was broken down into gender, age, and squad membership. Attendance data was also obtained for the Oxford Pirates weekly training sessions, as this allowed for the consideration of sailing involvement at

events that are less constrained by cost and other factors. This allowed me to address the first research question with quantitative data.

- ***Opinion poll on Facebook***

Opinion polls were conducted on the social networking site Facebook. Research was done through the National Schools Sailing Association's Facebook page, which is followed by young sailors across the country, through the researcher's position of an administrator on this page. Facebook is a space for communication dominated by young adults, and allowed for young people who were otherwise unwilling or unable to take part in the study, to take part in a low commitment, completely anonymous fashion. The opinion polls addressed the same questions as the questionnaires and focus groups, allowing further verification of results.

2.4 Ethical Implications of Research

Working with those legally considered children poses extra ethical considerations in research. Contact with the girls in the study was made through my position as a coach to the Oxford Pirates youth team, and as a member of staff of the NSSA. For both positions all staff are required to be checked by the Criminal Record Bureau, so before conducting research I was already police checked.

In addition to this, one of the primary problems with working with non-adults is the difficulties of privacy (McDowell, 2001, Valentine, 2001). It is inadvisable to be at any point alone with a child, or a small group of children (Matthews et al, 1998). However having another member of staff present for focus groups raises additional problems both practically and in terms of the power balance of the group, as adults have an inherent dominant power relation with children (Bosco & Herman, 2010). In order to resolve this, I used public spaces around the sailing club and lake shore to conduct all my focus groups. Focus groups could be held in full view of other staff and competitors, but by being some distance away, the girls felt a sense of privacy and were able to talk freely.

Children, in the same way as adults, have the right to know why they have been selected, and whether or not to take part (Matthews et al, 1998). Girls were given an information letter before taking part in the study, and written consent of a parent or guardian was also obtained.

All data collected from the girls was fully confidential. Real names were never used during the research, to ensure anonymity.

2.5 Limitations of Methodology

An inherent limitation to qualitative research is the question of the position of the researcher within the research. Often the concern is primarily the divide between the researcher and the researched, and how this may lead to a lack of empathy, understanding, or trust, in dialogue between the two. In this research the restrictions of divide were low. In my teenage years I was an active sailing competitor, and a regular at NSSA events. In my information sheet I made sure to stress my past involvement in the organisation, and many of the older girls recognised me from past events. Due to this, there was a high level of empathy and trust apparent in focus groups, allowing for engaging discussion on all sides.

However, the position of the researcher can arguably be too close to that of the participants. Some writers (see Rose, 1997 and Chacko, 2004) have discussed the problems of researchers spending too much time in the studied culture and 'going native' (Chacko, 2004). Some writers have argued this can lead to a loss of objectivity and impartialness – some level of which must be retained even in qualitative studies. However, some writers have also argued that researchers who occupy a space between that of insider and researcher are able to see fully the opinions and ideas of a marginalised group such as young girls (Chacko, 2004). In my research I felt my close relationship with the culture under study was more beneficial for allowing me to engage with the marginalised group than it was detrimental to the objective nature of the study. I sought other ways of maintaining objectivity, including quantitative data to support claims made in the research conclusions.

3. Distribution: What is the Relative Distribution of Girls and Boys in the Case Study Sport, in both Participation and Achievement?

3.1 Gender Disparity in Youth Sailing

The sailing sport and its culture are clearly dominated by men. According to the Sport England Equality Scheme, any sport should be available to all “irrespective of our customers’ age, disabilities, gender, race, religious beliefs or sexual orientation” (Sport England, 2010, P3), while in sailing specifically, according to the equality action plan for the Royal Yachting Association, the organisation is committed to “making boating an activity that is genuinely open to anyone who wishes to take part” (RYA, 2009, P4). However, despite several national scale initiatives to promote the achievements of women in sailing, an increase in female coaching staff, and initiatives encouraging clubs to run women-only training, women still only account for roughly 17% of the sailing community. In girls under 18 specifically, the proportion is much higher, with 42% of advanced training squads filled by girls (RYA, 2009, 2005). While this suggests that initiatives to increase female participation have had an effect on participation at this level, this has yet to filter up to the general sailing community.

As can be seen in Fig 1, of the 18 member squads that sent teams to the National School Sailing Regatta Week in July 2011, not a single squad contained more girls than boys. Only 1 squad - Tees and Hartlepool - contained equal numbers of boys and girls, and they were an exceptional case in that their team contained only one girl and one boy. A further 3 teams – Datchet, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire – took teams that contained no girls at all. Overall this meant that girls made up exactly a quarter of the total number of competitors, which this year was just under 300 young adults.

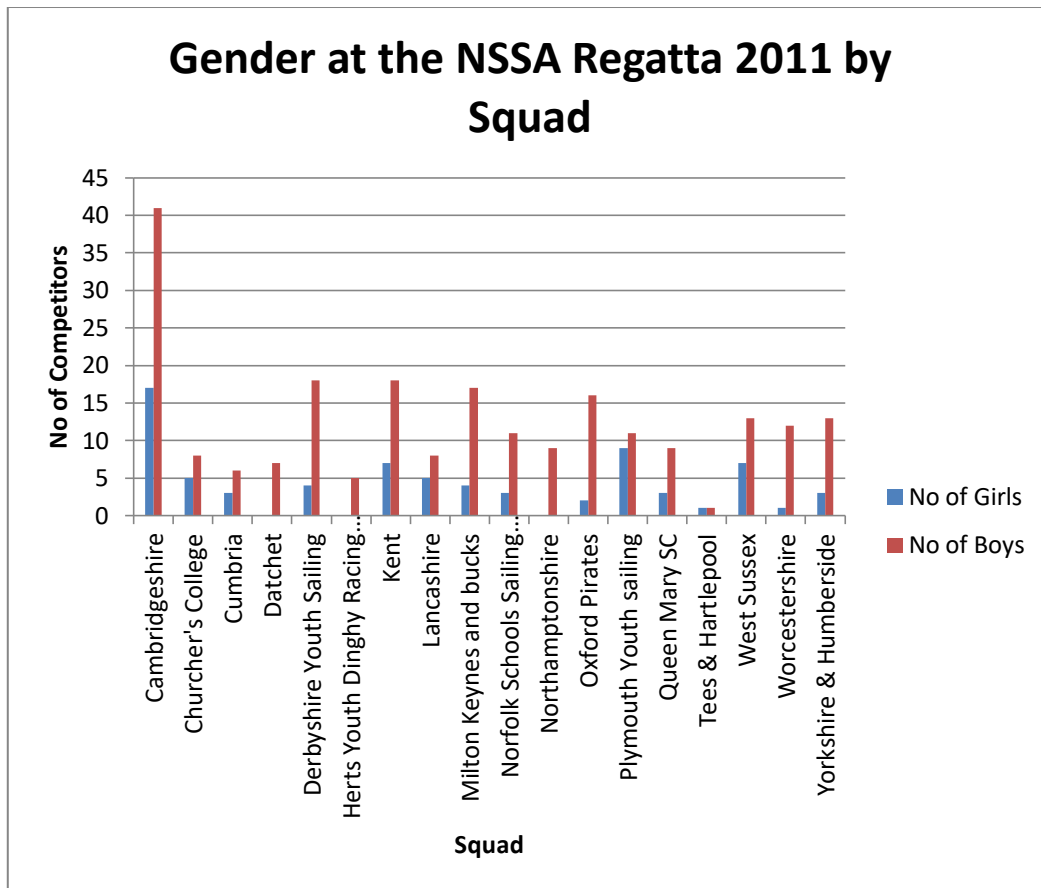


Fig 1: Relative participation of girls and boys at the NSSA Regatta 2011 by squad

A similar pattern can be seen considering a single squad in greater detail. The Oxford 'Pirates' is a youth sailing group that regularly sends squads to both NSSA and other events. It also however, runs weekly training sessions for children up to the age of 18 of all sailing abilities throughout the summer season of April to October. Many of these young adults are of a lower ability than those found at the NSSA summer regatta, and yet are still significantly involved in sailing to the extent that they train regularly. Consideration of this squad allows for examination of gender distribution at a wider level of commitment than the NSSA encompasses.

Here, the gender distribution, as shown in fig 2, can be seen to be comparable to that of the NSSA Regatta, with boys dominating the squad. Throughout the 2011 season, boys were the majority at training sessions every week bar one – week 13 – which was attended by 7 girls and 6 boys. The distribution ranged between this and week 5, where only 4 girls attended

compared to 24 boys. Overall, of the 18 week season, 14 of the training sessions contained twice as many, or over, boys than girls.

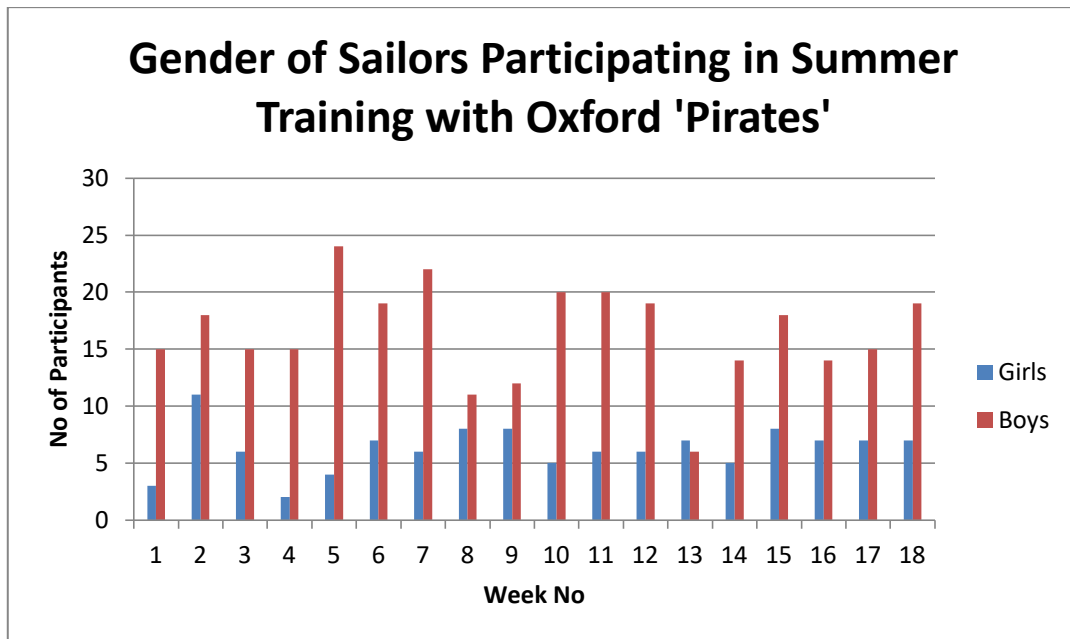


Fig 2: Relative participation of girls and boys at Oxford 'Pirate' Training

These figures reflect the lack of girls participating in the sport. However, in the sailing community, these figures are frequently seen as unsurprising, and sometimes even seen as successful. A senior member of the NSSA staff remarked to the researcher that a ratio of 25% girls to 75% boys could be deemed a success, when compared to previous year's events and the wider sailing community.

3.2 Gender and Achievement

Although there is a disparity in terms of attendance at sailing, there is an even greater disparity in terms of female achievement. At the NSSA Regatta a quarter of competitors were female, but only in one of the five fleets did girls manage to achieve a quarter of the top ten places. In three of the fleets no girls placed in the top ten at all. In the top twenty they were slightly more highly represented, achieving a quarter of the top twenty positions in 2 fleets. However, boys dominated the top ten positions of four out of five fleets.

<i>Fleet</i>	<i>Highest Ranked Female Sailor</i>	<i>Percentage of Female Sailors in Top 10</i>	<i>Percentage of Female Sailors in Top 20</i>
Laser Standard	n/a	0	0
Laser Radial	17 th	0	5
Topper	12 th	0	20
Fast Handicap	2 nd	30	25
Slow Handicap	9 th	10	25

Table 1: Female achievement at the NSSA Regatta 2011

4. Identity: What Different Versions of a Feminine Identity are Found in the Case Study Sport?

It is important to stress that amongst any culture there will be multiple interpretations of any normalised identity. Girls' involvement in sailing is contradictory and multiple. For some, the sailing environment and the chance to train and compete is a central part of their lives. For others, involvement in the sport is on a casual basis with a high emphasis on the social side of things. Although in this dissertation it is the experiences and identities of those actively involved that is the primary focus, it is important to recognise the diversity of girls' experiences and the different feminine identities that exist within the sport. This is highlighted by the two most extreme versions of feminine identity found within the sport: the committed sailing girl and the more traditional gender identity associated with the 'social sailor'.

However, before these different versions of sailing femininities are discussed, the concept of overfeminisation, a phenomenon seen commonly in both traditional and non-traditional sports, must be addressed.

4.1 Overfeminisation

As sport is linked so intimately with ideas of masculinity there is an inherent conflict between athletic prowess and feminine identities. Some female athletes respond to this through what Dufor (1999) refers to as overfeminisation, and Connell (1987) calls emphasised femininity. Overfeminisation involves emphasising heterosexuality and femininity particularly through clothing and appearance, as an assurance to both themselves and others of their status as women.

However, amongst the most serious of sailors, overly feminine appearance was very rare in the sailing sport. The most serious, committed sailors were the ones least likely to be seen in feminine kit, flowery board shorts, or bikini tops, favouring instead hi-tech wetsuits called 'hikers', dark coloured waterproof 'spray' tops, and hair fastened back out of the eyes.

The least serious of sailors, the ones who have the least commitment to the sport, and therefore the least connection to the masculine idea of the sport were the ones most commonly seen in small flowery board shorts, tight fitting rash vests or bikini tops, oversized sunglasses and makeup.

Overfeminisation in other sports was found primarily amongst those with a high commitment to the sport, those who are intimately linked with expectations of masculinity, and whose bodies have adapted to the sport physically and no longer conform to societal expectations of female forms (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). However, in the sport of sailing, there is very little evidence that girls with high involvement feel the need to assume overly feminine identities. Indeed, of the over twenty girls involved in focus groups, only one admitted to acting in an overly feminine manner within the sport.

Sailing is a non-traditional sport, and so has less of such a distinct relationship with ideas of masculinity. Most girls in the study agreed that there is very little assumption either within the sport, or in the wider world, that to participate in sailing requires masculine characteristics.

“People don’t really understand how strenuous it is, and how tiring, and how you just want to go to bed at 9 o’clock every night... I think if people knew more about sailing they might make more assumptions, but mostly they just think I’m just sat on a big yacht, or a powerboat or something... when people come to the club they’re like, you actually sail with a sail? And ropes and stuff? They don’t really understand what it is.”

It would appear that the lack of understanding of the sport within the wider world means that girls who participate in the sport are not subjected to assumptions of masculinity. This has meant that while in other sports there is a conflict between masculine and feminine identities in female athletes, this does not occur in sailing.

4.2 Traditional Gender Roles: Social Sailing, Board-shorts and Bikinis

While overfeminisation in its true definition does not appear to occur within sailing, that does not mean that no sailing girls construct identities based around a feminine ideal.

Indeed, there is a whole grouping of girls who have identities constructed around a feminine appearance at sailing.

For many of these girls, sailing is not a central part of their lives. Instead, they participate largely in sailing to take advantage of the social nature of the culture. To compete in competitions they must have a minimum sailing ability, but many of these girls achieve this at a young age, and then 'coast' at the same level, training rarely, and attending major residential competitions such as the NSSA Regatta largely to take advantage of the holiday atmosphere and opportunities to socialise.

For these girls, their feminine identity is constructed around a much more traditional interpretation of gender. This traditional feminine identity includes the idea of the female as gentle, delicate and glamorous. The 'social sailors' build up identities constructed around this ideal. These girls are the girls most commonly seen in short board shorts, tight rash vests and sunglasses. Status is attained not through sailing ability, but through a combination of appearance and male attention. There is a perception that being a higher achiever than the boys will detract from this male attention by 'bruising the boys ego' as one girl said, so girls are either complacent about mediocre results, or play down achievements off the water.

"Some of the girls aren't bothered about doing well. I think they have this idea that if they do well the boys will be jealous, and won't like them. They think that boys won't want a girlfriend who's better at sailing than them."

As well as being attractive to the boys, being gentle and delicate is a part of this traditional identity, and it is not uncommon to see boys assisting these girls with strenuous tasks they could probably do themselves, such as lifting masts into boats, or helping pull boats up the beach. In contrast, the more committed sailing girls were more often to be seen taking pride in doing these things on their own.

These girls perform a traditional feminine identity: attractive, gentle and deferent. However, in many cases it appears that while these girls may attract some attention from the male sailors, they do not command the same respect and status that the committed sailing girls do.

“You don’t want to be too girly sometimes.... I don’t think the boys would take you very seriously if you looked too girly, or acted too girly. They would think you were just here for the social.”

Amongst the committed sailors who train all year round, and compete seriously, these girls are viewed with mild derision for their lack of commitment to the sport. There was a clear assumption among the girls within the culture that those dressed in an overtly feminine way were less serious, less competitive, and on the whole less talented.

4.3 Committed Sailing Girls: Wetsuits and Lucozade Bottles

“We have a joke in our squad that if they’re not wearing Rooster hikers and they haven’t got a Lucozade bottle, then they’re not competitive, so you don’t have to worry about them.”

In contrast, for the committed sailing girls of the sport, status was built not on traditional ideas of appearance, but on ability and talent. For these girls, appearance both on and off the water was shaped around proficiency and commitment, rather than conventional prettiness.

For example, as the quotation above, taken from a focus group, shows, appearance in terms of being prepared and equipped to compete was more important than appearing conventionally attractive. Across the focus groups, girls were asked how they chose their sailing kit, and almost all of the participants chose practicality and price over appearance or colour. Being well equipped on the water translated into a commitment to the sport, and for these girls that was the only way in which appearance was important.

This view to outward appearance also translated into a different attitude on the shore. Girls wore tracksuit bottoms or jeans, hoodies or coats, and no makeup. There was no access to electricity on the campsite, so hair was unstyled. For these girls though, not needing to care about their outward appearance was part of the appeal of sailing. Without having to care about what they looked like, girls felt they could be more themselves, instead of attempting a facade under a layer of makeup as many of them felt they had to outside of the sailing environment.

“At sailing, it doesn’t matter how you look. Your hair is going to get messy, and be all over the place! You can’t straighten it or anything... and you get to be more yourself I think, because of that. I mean, my makeup bag’s gone right to the back of the tent already!”

In this quote, it is interesting to note that while this participant states that she has not used her make-up bag while at the sailing event, she still brought it with her. Here, there appears to be a conflict between ideas of femininity in the sailing environment, and traditional ideas of femininity. This conflict will be discussed further in section 5.

4.4 Binary Identities

These two contrasting identities - the traditional and the non-traditional performance of being female - are created through opposition and difference to each other. This occurs in the same way that male and female identities are binary categories created in relation to each other: what is not male is female and vice versa (Connell, 2001). The same process appears to be acting here: the two forms of identity act in opposition to each other and shape their sense of self in relation to the other. Opposite values are therefore part of each identity. The non committed sailors base their performance of gender on appearance, on a non-threatening performance, on being gentle and delicate. The committed sailors have an identity based upon everything that opposes this. Where one is gentle, the other is strong. Where one values appearance, the other values talent. Where one takes care not to achieve too much, the other strives for success.

These categories therefore are shaped by opposition to the other in a similar fashion to how the categories of male and female are shaped. Without one, the other would not exist in the same sense. For example, take the act of lifting a mast into a boat. It is difficult, and requires considerable strength. For many girls, this is the opportunity to appear gentle and delicate, in need of assistance from a larger, stronger boy. However, this gendered act of asking for help, deliberately appearing weak and in need of protection, is perhaps why so many girls prefer to struggle and succeed themselves, rather than ask for help. The girls asking for assistance are subscribing heavily to traditional expectations, and so the committed girls are forced to refrain from asking for help in order to stay removed from the identity the other

girls represent. Committed girls value their own identity as something that is different, removed, from these traditionally female girls, and so work to be seen as opposite, to be as far removed as possible. These two conflicting identities can therefore be understood as a binary, something that works in opposition to each other.

4.5 Identity as 'Sailor' or 'Woman'?

Breaking away from a version of femininity based on appearance and attractiveness meant that these girls achieved status in a very different way to the less committed sailors performing the traditional gender identity. For the committed sailing girls, respect amongst other girls and boys alike was based upon sailing ability, commitment, and attitudes to the sport. Successful results were valued highly, and sailing ability was a more significant divider of society than gender was.

Many girls described how friends were created irrespective of gender. Amongst the sport the fact of being female itself was not a basis for any unity or bonding. Many girls described how friendships were formed based on fleet positions as the week went on. People sailing at the same level made friends with those who finished around them, and so friendships were formed based on mutual sailing ability and respect for the other.

"...but they don't really care what you look like, 'cos it's just about the sailing. It's more what you say, or what you do, especially on the water, rather than how you look. The only thing that affects how people treat you is sailing ability, more than anything else"

These comments show that for the committed sailing girls, their identity as a sailor was far more important than their identity as female. The shared identity between those committed to the sport, irrespective of sex, was greater than that shared by the committed sailing girl and the less committed 'social sailor'. Girls were showing that the shared identity of 'sailor' was more important than that of 'female'. While in the sailing environment, they were able to create an identity that was based more on their identity as an athlete, a sailor, than as a girl.

Away from the sailing environment, girls described how most of their friends were girls, and there was clear divide between them and the boys.

“It’s different at school. You don’t really talk to the boys that much. They keep themselves together, in like a group, and all the girls stay together. I guess it’s ‘cos we’re meant to all be girls, and stick together, or whatever. But it isn’t like that at sailing. You can just talk to whoever.”

In the school environment, the natural assumption was that girls shared a natural similarity based on their shared sex. Sex was a clear divide socially. Here, it can be seen that girls and boys alike were basing their identity on their sex, and how they are expected to perform according to gender stereotypes. This shared identity based on gender created a presumption of an affinity between girls: they all performed their identity based around the same criteria, therefore share fundamental similarities that make them disposed to mutual friendship.

However, in the sailing environment, the opposite can be observed. Although their sex is a part of their identity, it is not the most fundamental characteristic. Girls were not displaying some inherent female bond that made all girls share some sense of self. Instead, girls described how the identity based on shared experiences, shared values, and shared talent, was more important than a shared sense of being female. Girls in the sailing environment were able to understand themselves as a sailor, rather than as a girl.

4.6 One of the Lads?

While performing this alternative version of identity based upon their sense of self as a sailor rather than a female, girls were forced to tread a fine line between being ‘one of the lads’ and still retaining their own sense of femininity.

In many sporting environments women have described themselves as in some ways asexual to the boys... ‘one of the lads’ (see Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). In many ways, this was found amongst the young sailing girls, in that the boys treated them with respect based not

upon gender, but upon ability. Girls described how sailing was all that mattered, and the boys saw them more as sailors, as competition and as rivals, than girls.

“I think also, they’re a lot less sensitive, so they don’t take into account that you’re a girl very much. They treat you like a boy, which is good sometimes, ‘cos then you’re not treated very different.... like when they say things about weight and stuff. I know it’s silly, but when they say no, I want someone lighter in the boat... It’s a bit like ouch! But I’d still rather they said that, that they forget I’m a girl and just think about the sailing.”

And yet, flirtation and romance was a common sight both on and off the water. For many girls, the sailing environment and the freedom of expression it afforded was a place to meet confidently new people of a like-minded nature, and many young girls formed relationships with sailing boys they met at training or competitions. The researcher herself watched a flirtation develop between two Laser sailors over the course of the week, who met on the water at the top end of the fleet, and were soon inseparable on the shore. At the end of the week they finished only one position apart.

This appears to be showing that these girls, although seen sometimes as more sailor, than girl, are still retaining a sense of their own version of femininity, and through this are still girls, still female, simply in a less conventionally feminised way. They are performing their own sense of being female, one that is based upon talent, respect and equality with the boys. As the many relationships formed in the sailing environment and observed by the researcher show, this form of sexed identity is clearly one that these boys find desirable. While many of the less committed, social sailors, performing a traditional feminine identity worried that being more talented than the boys would make them less desirable, it seems that in fact the reverse may be true. Committed sailors in the sport are therefore performing their own form of identity, based upon talent and attitude, rather than conventional female markers such as outward attractiveness, gentleness and delicacy. And while many athletes have described the conflict between being successful at their sport and retaining a sense of femininity, the identity these girls are performing manages to shape their femininity on being successful and desirable because of this, rather than in spite of this. This identity, formed upon skill rather than outward appearance, would appear to be a more positive, constructive identity than the traditional feminine identity. Rather than

focusing on outward appearance to secure social status, girls are focusing on skill and performance to achieve the same result.

5. Parallel Identities: How do Girls Move Between Sailing Identities and Identities in the Wider World?

5.1 The Sailing 'World'

"Sailing is obviously a sport, but it's more than that. We camp, we go away together. We have different ways of doing things."

As the quote above shows, for many girls, sailing is more than just a sport. The entire sailing environment forms a distinct cultural space separate from the wider world. This sailing 'world' is a phrase banded about regularly in the sailing environment, showing that for all involved in the sport, it is not just the sailing itself that forms a part of their life, but the distinct set of cultural ideals that accompany it.

In the sailing 'world' there are distinct versions of femininity performed, as discussed in the section above. However, in the wider world these versions of femininity conflict heavily with normalised expectations of femininity. For many girls, on a practical level, the movement between the two worlds allows them a sense of security. If something goes wrong in one world, they can escape to the other. In almost all cases the girls in the study talked about, they talked about things going wrong in the school world, and sailing 'world' being the place to which to escape.

Girls also spoke about the differences between the two worlds on a practical level, about the different social environments found at each. The wider world - and school in particular - is a place in which they felt unable to be free to express themselves. School was cliquey, and they stuck mostly to their own clique. In more extreme cases, some girls spoke of constantly keeping their heads down out of fear of bullying.

"I can just go up to anyone at sailing, whereas at school I only speak to the people I'm close to, and that's it. Even if I knew people, if they weren't in my group I wouldn't approach them. But if that was here I would quite happily go up anyone in the team and have a conversation with them."

In contrast to this, girls spoke of the sailing 'world' as a small, tightly knit community where people could act exactly as they wanted. They described how it was not so much the sailing, but the entire cultural backdrop that created a different social environment. NSSA sailing squads in particular were described time and time again by girls in focus groups as a family like atmosphere, where living and training together created tight relations between competitors, and a sense of being able to be accepted whatever their nature.

This divide between two crucially different cultures has both beneficial and detrimental effects. For some, they spoke of the frustration of moving between the two, and of how their school friends 'just don't get it'. High commitment and weekend training meant they missed out on socialising with school friends, and many said their friends soon stopped bothering to invite them. Yet most agreed that their sailing gave them a sense of having something that others didn't, that they knew they had a talent to fall back on, that their weekends consisted of more than just shopping or the cinema, and that knowing that gave them something to cling onto, even when school life was proving difficult.

5.2 Makeup and Straighteners? Different Feminine Identities in the Sailing 'World' and the Wider World.

For most girls, being back in the wider world meant a return to the traditional feminine identity formed around outward appearance, being conventionally attractive, gentle and delicate. At school, girls performed this version of femininity in order to fit in, and be normalised. According to the questionnaire, 84% of girls said they acted in a more conventionally 'girly' manner at school. They wore makeup, straightened their hair, and played down their sporting prowess.

These girls are therefore moving between two separate versions of the feminine identity, and adapting their performance of femininity to suit their environment. In the last section, it was observed that while committed sailing girls felt they didn't have to worry about appearing conventionally attractive while in the sailing 'world', some had still brought elegant clothes or makeup with them. As quoted previously in section 4:

"...my makeup bag's gone right to the back of the tent already!"

In this remark, the transition between the two identities while moving between the two environments can be observed. While packing for the event, the participant packed those items she required for the performance of the traditional feminine identity. However, once within the sailing 'world' these items were no-longer needed, and so remained unused.

While these girls performed a traditional feminine identity while in the wider world, they still appeared to retain a sense of a different identity to the girls who weren't involved in sport.

"You can tell them apart, they sort of look different. The girls who don't do sport, they have blond hair and hair extensions, and lots of makeup. And not just that, they have a different attitude to everything."

Other girls conformed more fully to the normalised feminine identity, dying hair, wearing fake tan, and creating an identity completely centred on appearance. However, the committed sailing girls retained a sense of their other performed identity. Although they wore makeup and did their hair in order to be accepted, very few of them had dyed hair, or wore fake tan. Very few of them had therefore invested so heavily in the traditional version of femininity. For many girls, the confidence they found from the sailing 'world', and knowing they don't have to act in an overly feminine way in order to be accepted meant they had the confidence to perform a version of femininity that had less of an emphasis on appearance than that of their peers.

"I feel like sailing, it's made me more confident to be, I dunno, I guess I know I don't really have to be really feminine all the time, 'cos that's not really my nature anyway, and just be less girly all the time. It's sort of seeped through I guess."

It can therefore be seen that although sailing girls are performing two separate gendered identities, and moving between these as they move between the worlds, they are not retaining a complete separation between them. Although these two identities are separate, they are inherently affected by each other. The contrast between the non-traditional sailing identity and the conventional identity performed in the wider world has meant that the traditional gendered identity is made less feminine by the proximity of the other.

Here, there can be seen to be a relationship between the two identities that means that these sailing girls are able to form not only a different identity at sailing, but also to form a different version of the traditional female identity in the non-sporting world.

6. Empowerment: How does Sailing Participation affect the Confidence and Empowerment of Young Girls?

Feminist theorists have debated heavily as to whether sports are a site for empowerment of women or for their increased domination by men. Dufor (1999) proposed that sport was an institution that separates men from women and is used by men to justify their hegemony. However, other theorists have stated that participation in sport can increase social stature and confidence through the creation of physical capital (Bourdieu, 1993, cited in Gorely et al, 2003).

From the research it became apparent that there are two main ways in which immersion into the sailing environment affects the confidence and empowerment of young girls. Firstly, the alternative society found in the sport creates an environment in which young girls are able to construct a feminine identity based upon skill and talent, and secondly, through the effect that sport has on muscularity and the body in young girls.

6.1 Confidence and the Alternative Society

For many girls participating in the study, sailing offered an opportunity to construct an alternative feminine identity based around their status as a sailor, rather than their appearance or desirability to boys. This identity although constructed around the sailing environment, filtered through into their normal life, allowing girls to feel they had a greater confidence in their own abilities even when removed from the sailing 'world'. When asked in the questionnaire, 77% of girls said that sailing had made them more confident within themselves, while 49% of girls said they felt that sailing had made them more confident in the wider world.

The obvious case of empowerment occurs in those who achieve high results and therefore feel more confident about their own ability. But participants in the study explained that sailing not only made them more confident when they achieved things, but it made them more confident simply by participating.

“I think it makes you more confident, just being here, at these competitions. I don’t know how to say this, but just being here, just sailing, it makes you have more confidence within yourself, and you’re better just walking around.”

“Just sailing all the time, it makes you more confident. I dunno, when you sail a single-handed boat you have to become more independent, more assured in yourself when you’re meeting other boats. Taking the risks, being able to shout at people. You have to be confident to do that.”

For some girls, simply participating in something different from their peers gave them a sense of their own individuality and worth when they returned to school. They spoke of feeling that there was more to them than their peers, and about having more interesting stories to tell. Through this, they said, they felt they had more worth as a member of their circle, as they were in some way different from the others.

“friends at school, they kinda don’t get it, but they’re also kinda fascinated. It’s something different to what everyone else does. Your stories are often more interesting than theirs. It’s not just that you’re more confident, it’s that when you go back to school, you’ve got something.”

For some though, the confidence was about the whole sailing ‘world’, not just the competing and training itself. The alternative society of the sailing ‘world’ afforded them a place where their values were more respected, where their individuality was more celebrated, and where they felt less likely to be judged or measured on superficial markers such as conventional prettiness as they were at school.

“I think it’s the atmosphere that’s made me more confident. Cos I’m not actually that good at sailing, in the grand scheme of things. I mean I can do it, but I’m not that good. But I dunno, I think it’s just the people. They’re accepting.”

Coming to a place removed from the rest of their lives, and finding a place where there were people like themselves, offered many of the committed sailing girls the chance to see they could fit in without conforming to the same normalities they needed to at school. In the sailing environment, while still performing a specific feminine identity, girls who felt uncomfortable with the overly feminised traditional feminine identity of the wider world

were able to find an identity they could achieve successfully. In turn, the confidence of knowing they could be happy and accepted in some spheres allowed them to approach school and the wider world with a greater sense of their own empowerment.

6.2 Muscularity, Physical Capital and the Body

Sport has always been associated with traits that are empowering to men: strength, aggression and competitiveness, amongst others. These traits have traditionally been a source of male empowerment, separating them from the traditional feminine identity. For women, these traits were at conflict with their traditional performance of gender, and so were something to be avoided.

However, for female athletes, many of these traits are required in order to succeed at sport. In sailing, skill is the main requirement to succeed, and yet in some cases strength, especially in the legs or arms and shoulders, can compensate for lack of skill.

For many of the committed sailing girls, the development of muscles on their upper arms and shoulders was a cause for both celebration and concern. On the one hand, it went against traditional feminist ideals that they would have to equate themselves with in the wider world in order to achieve social standing, and yet on the other hand it was a show of strength, training and commitment in the sailing environment.

“Compared to most people here I’m not muscley at all, but when I go back to school I’m the girl who has big muscles. And everyone’s like, why are your muscles so big? But here, it’s normal. And you need it, you need to be strong to do well when it’s windy.”

The conflict these girls experienced over the development of muscles can be understood in relation to Bourdieu’s concept of physical capital. Bourdieu proposed that muscularity can be understood in terms of physical capital. As capital exists within a system of exchange, physical capital can be converted into cultural, economic or social capital. It is therefore a resource that can empower (Bourdieu, 1993, cited in Gorely et al, 2003). For men as a social group, this construction is clear. However, for women this physical capital remains largely bounded within the physical activity field. Muscular bodies are acceptable for women, but

only within the confines of sport. The physical capital generated through participation in sport has little exchange value beyond the area of sport. Girls, as a general group, are not able to benefit from the construction of society in this way in the same manner that boys can (Gorely et al, 2003).

The conflict that girls in the study described over their muscular form would suggest that while strength can be understood as a form of physical capital in the sporting arena, as Gorely et al (2003) suggested, this has little transfer value in the wider world. While immersed in the sporting environment, this physical capital can be exchanged for social or cultural capital. For the committed sailing girls, muscles are therefore, in the sailing environment, a source of pride and social standing, and generate confidence and empowerment. However, in the wider world, it seems that this physical capital does indeed have little transfer value, and in fact can be a source of body embarrassment, shame, and therefore low confidence.

In this sense, the sailing environment is perhaps failing to increase the confidence of young female participants by increasing the conflict over body image between the two cultural environments. This would offer a possible explanation for the fact, discussed above, that only 49% of girls said they felt that sailing had made them more confident in the wider world, compared to 77% feeling it made them more confident in the sailing 'world'.

Therefore, while the cultural association in society between girls and muscularity remains one of abnormality, committed involvement in any sport for young girls will continue to create a conflict over body image, and with this, a loss of body confidence.

6.3 The Body, Movement and Confidence

In addition to the expectations in the traditional feminine identity of how the body should look, there are also expectations as to how the body should behave (Cole, 1993). The female body is expected to be passive, constrained and graceful (Cole, 1993). Girls learn the habits of feminine comportment from a young age: walking like a girl is expected to, tilting her head like a girl is expected to. Girls learn to constrain their movements to meet the traditional expectations of timidity and grace (Gorely et al, 2003).

However, in the sailing environment, girls are not performing a traditional feminine identity. Instead, they are performing an alternative identity based less on conventional ideas of appearance and the body. While sailing they are therefore able to allow their bodies to move in a completely free and unconstrained manner. Instead of limiting the body, and shaping it to be passive, the body is able to move, flex, bend and twist without social constraint.

“I feel like, when I’m on the water, I don’t have to bother about how I’m acting, what I’m doing. I don’t have to act like a girl, be graceful, or anything like that. That doesn’t matter – it’s sailing the boat well that matters, and getting the perfect pump out of a roll tack, instead of worrying about... I dunno, whether you look right.”

Here, the body is breaking free of what Bourdieu terms the Habitus (1993). For Bourdieu, the body is a site of social memory, and social expectation is written onto the body through the repetition of movement, to the extent where it becomes second nature. However, when sailing, the demands of the sport exceed the demands of social expectations, and so the body is able to break free of the Habitus, and move in a way that is completely unhindered.

“I always feel happy when I come off the water, unless you know, I’ve done really badly in a race or something. Especially when it’s windy, and I’m tired and aching and I capsized but I survived and went planing and it was amazing!”

Here it can be seen that this freedom of movement equates to a feeling of wellbeing amongst girls in the sport. Rather than feeling constrained and controlled, they are able to allow their bodies to move unhindered. This natural movement appears to allow the girls to break free of the expectations of society both physically, through the movement of the body, but also mentally and socially. Here, the movement of the body is creating a space shaped by power, strength, and movement, rather than control. This in turn appears to give the girls a sense of wellbeing, simply through the act of movement.

Here, young girls are understanding their bodies in a way that is related to strength, ability and movement, rather than outward appearance or expectation. Through engaging in physical activity the focus becomes channelled on strength and function, rather than appearance or body shape. Girls engaging in sports such as sailing are therefore, in this way

at least, less likely to engage in body worry, and to be more confident about their overall body.

Sport in relation to the body can therefore be understood as a contradiction, both in terms of the differing expectations of sport and society, but also in the way that it affects body confidence. The question remains whether the increased confidence from sport participation in terms of a different understanding of body can override the loss of confidence that this body conflict over muscularity can create. Perhaps through a different social understanding of the body, one of strength and movement, concerns over muscularity and appearance will be eased. However, at present, the low rate of increased confidence seen in the wider world would suggest that at present, concerns over body image still have a dramatic effect on confidence.

7. Concluding Thoughts

The study has shown that involvement in sailing affords young girls an opportunity to construct an identity alternative to traditional ideas of femininity. For the committed sailing girls actively involved in the sailing environment, the culture of the sailing 'world' allows them to perform a version of femininity based on skill and physicality rather than conventional attractiveness or other traditional markers of femininity.

The traditional feminine identity and the alternative feminine identity, while understood as separate feminine identities performed in different environments, have each been found to influence and shape the other: the performance of one identity in one environment affects the performance of the other. Girls constructing an alternative feminine identity in the sailing environment retain a sense of this identity while performing gender in the wider world, and so invest less heavily in the traditional version of femininity. The construction of an alternative female identity is therefore not only affecting girls while in the sailing environment, but is also affecting the construction of feminine identity in the wider world.

In addition to this alternative version of identity, the sailing environment also leads to the empowerment of young girls in multiple ways. The alternative, relaxed society of the sailing environment, filled with people of similar ideas and interests, creates a space for girls who do not excel in the wider world to feel celebrated and worthwhile. The sport itself allows girls to understand their bodies in a different way. While sailing, the demands of the sport exceed the demands of social expectations, and so the body is able to break free of what Bourdieu (1993) terms the 'Habitus' and move in a way that is completely unhindered. The ability to move without societal restraint acting on body, and allow the body to be a space for power, strength and movement, allows girls to experience control over their body, and with this a feeling of well-being. However, the association between the body, muscularity and societal expectations remains unclear. More research is required into the conversion of physical capital and social capital in young women outside of the sporting environment.

This study is restricted by size and by its consideration of only one case-study sport, leading to difficulty in verifying all the elements of the exact nature of the relationship between the construction of a feminine identity and involvement in sport amongst adolescent girls. However, what is clear is that the involvement of young girls in sport alters and affects their construction of a feminine identity both in the sporting environment and in the wider world. The sporting environment can therefore be seen as a space that encourages the creation of identities alternative to traditional gendered identities. This study seeks to conclude by stressing the importance of participation in sport to allow individuals the opportunity to construct gendered identities that are unconstrained by the contemporary gender order.

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