14
Panic Sport and the Racialized Masculine Body

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The Politics of Sporting Bodies

With the advent of consumer capitalism and what might loosely be called postmodern culture, human bodies have become an increasingly visible locus of personal needs and desires. By the manipulation of general appearance, adoption of fashion codes, bodily adornment, calculated nutrition, physical conditioning regimes, and so on, the projection of body images into the social realm has taken on renewed (although hardly unprecedented) importance (Featherstone, Hepworth, & Turner, 1991; Kirk, 1993; Shilling, 1993). Human bodies also constitute a site of struggle over symbolic and material rewards between dominant and subordinate groups. Ultimately, social control is exercised through direct bodily coercion or the threat of it, or by training bodies to “discipline” themselves (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1990). Bodies are, then, both social subjects and objects, phenomena that are constantly in action and also acted on.

The sociohistorical development of bodies is, according to Shilling (1991), a dialectical process by which “people make their bodies through labour, sport and play, but they do not make them in circumstances of their own choosing” (p. 665). In this chapter, we are concerned with this process of “body-making” through sport which, especially in its mass mediated form, is one of the principal institutions through which disciplined bodies are activated and displayed. The physical, psychic, and representational forms of bodies (Gatens, 1988) are made meaningful through what Grosz (1987) called “corporeal subjectivities” articulated under conditions in which “there is no monolithic category ‘the body’... only particu-
lar kinds of bodies" (p. 9), although we maintain that there are material limits to signifying and discursive processes and practices (Ebert, 1992-1993; Hall, 1985). We concentrate on the constructed, black male body—a configuration with a peculiarly strong attachment to the institution of contemporary sport. We do not wish to rehearse here our arguments concerning the strengths and weaknesses of postmodern theory (McKay & Rowe, 1997; Miller, 1993) but instead to use selected elements of postmodern insights to help inform the analysis of sport, gender, and race.

This chapter considers the dual role that media representations of sport play in constituting symbolic and material struggles over bodies, especially those that are heavily masculinized and racialized. Sport is deeply implicated in discourses of the body, in that it is a cultural form productive of various bodily dispositions—exertion, force, rule-bound activity, physical competition, and so on (Andrews, 1993; Cole, 1993; Gruneau, 1991; Heikkala, 1993). Hargreaves (1986a) described the body as "an emblem of society" (p. 13) over which there is a struggle for control, so that the corporeal arena of sport is of necessity a key site of social and cultural contestation (see also Messner, 1988; Trujillo, 1991). Sport, particularly in its elite, commercial form, has both reflected and projected a worldwide body crisis—or, in postmodern terms, "body panic" (Kroker, Kroker, & Cook, 1989). The subversion of traditional gender-bound body images; the continued expansion of bodily surveillance, modification, and manipulation; and the "dis-ease" of AIDS have all problematized bodies in new ways, and in a manner that has placed sport in the foreground. To illustrate this argument, we analyze how some recent media scandals have dwelt on the meanings of specific sporting bodies in the elaboration of contentious ideological positions. Such discourses of celebrity (Marshall, 1997; Rowe, 1997) provide fertile ground for the practice of contemporary cultural critique and politics.

**Gendered and Racialized Sporting Bodies**

Traditionally, sport has been a potent symbol of commonsense ideas about masculine superiority, as Messner (1990d) argued:

> Football, based as it is on the most extreme possibilities of the male body, ... is clearly a world apart from women, who are relegated to the role of cheerleaders/sex objects on the sidelines. ... In contrast to the bare and vulnerable bodies of the cheerleaders, the armored bodies of the football players are elevated to

mythical status, and as such, give testimony to the undeniable "fact" that here is at least one place where men are clearly superior to women. (p. 213)

However, the capacity of sport to legitimize ideologies of masculine superiority has been increasingly destabilized as females have struggled to gain greater access to sport. The "gender gap" in the sporting performances of males and females has gradually narrowed, and some women have outperformed men in certain (usually endurance) events. Increasing numbers of women are competing in traditionally masculine sports like power-lifting, bodybuilding, the martial arts, rugby, and ice hockey. The entry of women into this customary male preserve illustrates the "double movement of containment and resistance" characteristic of all cultural struggles among dominant and subordinate groups (Hall, 1981). On the one hand, the presence of vigorous and robust women athletes demonstrates that sporting prowess is not "naturally" masculine, whereas on the other hand, the presence of physically powerful female bodies poses a threat to hegemonic masculinity, thus precipitating male "hysteria" and attempts by men to contain women's aspirations and resistance (Disch & Kane, 1996; McKay, 1992; Ndalianis, 1995; White & Gillett, 1994). There is a paradox at work in these "intrusions." Women traditionally have suffered restrictions on their access to sport via biological claims that their bodies are unsuited to athletic activities. Now these old scientific arguments partially function in reverse, thanks to female superiority in certain endurance events. But just as the antiquated scientism was vitally connected to power relations between the sexes, so the latter-day biological "truth" is deeply encrusted with social politics in terms of access to facilities, training, and prestige.

Sport, especially at the elite level, plays an integral role in the assemblage and projection of engendered and sexualized postmodern bodies. For instance, in an analysis of photographs of the Olympic Games, Duncan (1990) argued that women were represented as subordinate and sexually inviting, whereas men were represented as dominant. Similarly, Wright (1991) showed that although Olympic gymnastics may inscribe bodily meanings onto women that countenance highly circumscribed kinds of beauty and femininity, it also may present a sustained challenge to the competitive and limited accounts of women's physical abilities. The competitive nature of international sports has of necessity extended the form and nature of international sports has of necessity extended the form and
performance of femininity. All of this, however, occurs in an additionally contradictory manner, with juvenile female competitors being taught to flirt with an audience in the quest for judge and crowd appeal. Messner, Duncan, and Jensen’s (1993) study of American basketball and tennis revealed that commentators marked women athletes and women’s sports as “other” by infantilizing them and by ambivalently framing their achievements. In an analysis of the entry of Renee Richards, a constructed-female transsexual, into the women’s professional tennis circuit, Birrell and Cole (1990) highlighted how journalists constructed and normalized gender/sex and sexuality through narratives based on conventional binary oppositions. McKay and Huber (1992) demonstrated how specific “technologies/techniques of gender” anchor images of men’s and women’s bodies in ways that naturalize the technological and sporting superiority of men, and marginalize, contain, and incorporate visions of women. Similarly, Schulze (1990) argued that representations of women bodybuilders are implicated in a “recuperative strategy” that repositions women within permissible spaces.

As noted, the recent literature on bodies stresses their centrality as sites for articulating specific gender identities and practices. Connell (1990; see also Connell, 1995), for example, argued that male identity is both complex and polyvalent, with no singular set of qualities consistently marked as masculine. Masculinity and men’s bodies (here symbolically conceived as unitary) are shown to be contested sites fraught with contradictions. In an in-depth interview with an Australian sporting professional who is seemingly the (literal) embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, Connell’s respondent is asked about the meaning of being a man. He replies in negative terms: To be a man is to “not be a gay.” This exclusion of male desire for other men from the definition of masculinity occurs in the context of all-male competition and single-gender affinity on and off the sporting field. Connell observed a profound contradiction in “the articulation of self and body” here: The body is invested with a narcissistic social currency as an object for professional improvement and success, but this narcissism is unstable and can never be satisfied. The commoditized body is in constant need of self-surveillance and renewal if it is to remain competitive and hence marketable to sponsors. In a similar vein, Miller (1990) showed how the media stitch together an awkward combination of apparently rebellious individualism with highly orchestrated managerial practice among men in Olympic swimming and coaching. Sporting bodies, then, are produced under sociopolitical conditions that simultaneously reinforce and subvert existing structures of power in a manner that militates against secure and consistent gender identities. In summary, sporting bodies can be viewed as a terrain on which power relations are activated, tested, and contested at a number of points in the social formation.

We have argued previously that sport has been one of the most significant means by which gender boundaries have been marked and their meanings extended to propose an ineluctable difference between men and women, especially where that difference entails an assumption of inherent male superiority. If male identity and superiority in sport have been problematized from the outside in recent times, there are also internal fissures within masculinity that have further undermined it. As suggested previously (and discussed subsequently), the idea of male sporting excellence coexisting with homosexuality has been difficult for many men (and also women) to accept, because command of sport has been one of the defining characteristics of heterosexual masculinity. The second area of unease concerns race, because if sex or gender unites white men and men of color, race and racism also socially divide them (Sabo & Jansen, 1998). The appeal to “natural superiority” that men make in regard to women is compromised in the history of white racist ideology because closeness to “nature” is also what makes black men “inferior” to their white counterparts. The capacity to transcend nature and the limitations of the bodily world that white racist masculinity champions is occluded in the corporeally dominated realm of sport (and also sex). It is here that black men not infrequently claim genetic superiority, and white men counter with assertions of mental and moral domination. Hence, the practice of “stacking” in sport (Anderson, 1993), whereby certain roles are distributed by assumed racial characteristics, is an attempt to reinstitute a sporting hierarchy on other than strictly corporeal grounds (Anderson, 1993; Brooks, Alhouse, & Tucker, 1996-1997; Davis, 1995).

One of the remarkable features of contemporary sports culture is the domination of the image of the black male sporting body, especially through its massively successful circulation in the promotion of sports goods produced by companies like Nike and Reebok (Boyd, 1997b; McKay, 1995). The iconic ascendency of Michael Jordan (Andrews, 1996a, 1996b; Andrews, Carrington, Mazur, & Jackson, 1996), in particular, has produced the contradictory outcome that the black male body is simultaneously celebrated when associated with sport and feared and dehumanized when connected with violent crime. It has resulted in the projection of the potent image of the “black superstud sportsman” (Rowe, 1994) and at a time when systemic racism stimulates “million man marches” and other expressions of the subordination of African American men.
probe these fault lines in sport in an attempt to understand how sports and masculinities are in transition and how changes in one sphere may have corresponding effects in the other. We proceed by examining a series of "panic instances" and provocations concerning the black male sports body, seeking to illuminate their exemplary cultural and ideological roles.

**Big Bad Ben on Steroids**

One of the biggest media sport scandals of the late 20th century occurred in 1988 when the Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson broke the world record in the 100 meters at the Seoul Olympics but was subsequently disqualified and banned for using anabolic steroids. In the massive controversy concerning the use of performance-enhancing drugs that followed, including state-funded inquiry, such practices were found to be not only widespread but, in many cases, routine and officially tolerated (Jackson, 1998a, 1998b; Jackson, Andrews, & Cole, 1998; Simson & Jennings, 1992). Hence, the biomedical order of power in sport was revealed to be profoundly contradictory, resting on a notion of "clean bodies" that was being systematically undermined by institutionalized bodily "contamination." Kroker et al. (1989) described these events as the "Panic Olympics," an "age of sacrificial sports" where

the Olympics, under the pressure of the mass media, re-enter the dark domain of mythology. No longer . . . about athletic competition, but as postmodern sports now fascinating only because the athlete's body is a blank screen for playing out the darker passions of triumph and scapegoatism. (p. 172)

Of course, it was modernity that first enabled Johnson's disgrace to become a global phenomenon. The 19th century British model of competitive sport had, Goldlust (1987) stated, "swept all before it and emerged as a truly universal modern cultural form" (p. 53), constructing in the process a global means by which bodies could be interpreted and disciplined. Modernization, in the form of military, cultural, and media imperialism, disseminated competitive sport across the globe, and so created the conditions for the international emergence of the postmodern condition, with its attendant crisis of the body. This crisis is produced by the simultaneous commoditization of the body and its subjection to instrumental technique, surveillance, and invasion (Fitzclarence, 1990). Sport is particularly significant in symbolizing body panic because of its tendency to present elite athletes as productive machines whose activities are intensively monitored by the media, even as they are supposed to embody "natural" capabilities. Professional (and, increasingly, semiprofessional and amateur) athletes are now routinely subjected to bodily invasive techniques of training, physical conditioning, and proscribed drug detection.

Johnson's subsequent life ban (imposed in 1993 after he again tested positive for steroids) served to confirm the depth of a panic now unrelieved even by the comforting narrative of detection, exposure, retribution, remorse, and redemption. The Canadian media quickly attenuated his "Canadian-ness" by placing his Jamaican origins in the foreground. As his body plainly shrank to presteroid proportions, much was made of his figuraiive as well as literal diminution. The Ben Johnson story suggested two lessons—that the elite sporting body is susceptible to manipulation, and that such interventions may be performatively effective, if strictly unethical. This loss of innocence provoked a deeper anxiety about the threat to corporeal integrity posed by high-performance sport, an ontological insecurity produced by the schizophrenic implosion of self and other. Yet, such uncertainties also are seen to be licensed by the "caring professionals" dedicated to the maximization of corporeal efficiency, whose training regimens are complicit with the systematic invasion of sporting bodies (McKay, 1991). The "scandal" of performance-enhancing drug detection is seen to lie not in the intrusion of the public gaze into the realm of the private and personal, which is a traditional concern of civility, but rather in the public revelation of the private and personal activities of celebrities in a postmodern universe in which public/private and surface/depth distinctions have been, if not entirely dissolved, then certainly obscured. Hence, the detection of recreational (i.e., non-sport-related) drug use has been of greater widespread concern than the invasion of privacy occasioned by the naming of players and their conduct.

So, the Ben Johnson affair is instructive in relation to the general biomedical struggle over the bodies of athletes. Yet, it also had its specific dimensions. Much of the focus of condemnations of the use of performance-enhancing drugs in sport concerns its breaching of sex and gender boundaries. Hence, Chinese female swimmers are pejoratively described as "men" by some commentators, and much is also made of the feminizing effects on men of steroid use. In the case of Johnson, Simson and Jennings (1992, p. 195) noted the consternation among his entourage when it was discovered "that after years of hormone drug doping he had developed an enlarged left breast. He was turning into a woman!" Johnson can be seen, therefore, to have engaged in two transgressions. The first is to be caught
taking drugs, thereby compromising his "natural" attributes (accentuated by his blackness) by using "artificial" and "synthetic" substances. The second is to problematize his masculinity (again, accentuated by his blackness) by ingesting female hormones. (Ironically, as Simson & Jennings pointed out, a "cover story" for Johnson in the case of detection was that he was using the drug probenecid—a well-known steroid "masking" agent—to enhance the effectiveness of penicillin in the treatment of gonorrhea; p. 169.) The sexual and racial anxiety provoked by Johnson, as a successful black man (Mercer, 1992) at the peak of his career, was to some degree discharged by his fall from grace. This phenomenon was also evident following the announcement of the HIV-positive status of the National Basketball Association (NBA) superstar Earvin "Magic" Johnson.

"Magic," HIV/AIDS, and (Hetero)sexual Athletics

When in November 1991 one of the most prominent sportsmen in the United States called a press conference (to preempt a move by the popular media) to announce that he was HIV-positive, the reaction in that country was of similar intensity to that which characterized the Ben Johnson affair 3 years earlier (King, 1993; Rowe, 1994). In this case, corporeal jeopardy did not stem from the calculated injection of drugs but from the unwitting transmission of a virus through sexual contact. The "globalizing panic" (O'Neill, 1990) resulting from HIV/AIDS is, according to Williamson (1988), an acute anxiety about the breakdown of social and bodily systems:

What seems particularly threatening about AIDS is that it is linked to the breakdown of boundaries. The virus threatens to cross over that border between Other and Self: The threat it poses is not only one of disease but one of dissolution, the contamination of categories. (p. 5)

Attempts by the media to control the ensuing heterosexual panic have resulted in an "epidemic of significations" about HIV/AIDS (Treichler, 1987). The association between virus/syndrome and athletes is particularly problematic because sporting prowess is derived from symbolic and physical transcendence. In the case of Magic Johnson, the virus was apparently transmitted as a result of the heterosexual male "promiscuity" conventional in elite American sporting culture. For this reason, it was a crisis of gender as well as of race and sexuality. The "shock" of the announcement was quickly followed by speculation about the future of Johnson's contracts to endorse corporate products and the possibilities of infection on the basketball court. The interpenetration of capital and the body thus produced simultaneous panics of capital accumulation, of viral contagion, and of gendered and racialized sexuality.

In media narratives, Johnson's disclosure of his HIV-positive status was framed within preexisting channels of hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, and misogyny. For instance, a pervasive theme was Johnson's unselfish "accommodation" of the female groupies who allegedly preyed on him (Crimp, 1993; McKay, 1993). In a Sports Illustrated article cowritten with journalist Roy Johnson, Magic stated that he was certain he was infected by a woman who carried the virus but could not specify the time or place, because it was "a matter of numbers" given that "after I arrived in L.A., in 1979, I did my best to accommodate as many women as I could—most of them through unprotected sex" (p. 22). He then pleaded with other athletes and entertainers who also had been "out there" to get tested and to start practicing safe sex, the clear assumption being that "promiscuous" male celebrities are recipients rather than transmitters of the virus, the origin of which was traced to insatiable female desire:

It doesn't matter how beautiful the woman might be or how tempting she might sound on the telephone. I know that we are pursued by women so much that it is easy to be weak. Maybe by getting the virus I'll make it easier for you guys to be strong. (Johnson & Johnson, 1991, p. 22)

The male athlete-as-victim of female predators (Gmelch & San Antonio, 1998) also emerged in coverage of other basketball players and sports. A syndicated report from the New York Times titled "Hockey Teams' Bad Dreams" opened with a statement to that effect:

Across Canada yesterday, players, coaches and fans of professional ice hockey anxiously struggled to come to terms with the disclosure by two Montreal doctors that a young woman who died of AIDS two years ago contended she had sex with 30 to 70 National Hockey League Players. ("Hockey Teams' Bad Dreams," 1991, p. 7)

In the issue of Sports Illustrated in which Johnson made his disclosures, E. M. Swift (1991) described the "Dangerous Games" that male athletes play, including one NBA player "who estimates that he has slept with 2,500 different women, and counting" (pp. 40-43). An article by John Elson (1991) in Time titled "The Dangerous World of Wannabes" stated,
“Magic Johnson’s plight brings fear into the locker rooms across the U.S. and spotlights the riskiest athletic perk: promiscuous sex,” a hazard graphically if improbably illustrated by “Hall of Famer [the late] Wilt Chamberlain [who] boasts of having slept with 20,000 women—an average of 1.4 a day for 40 years” (Elson, 1991, pp. 59-60). Although two NBA players were quoted as saying that players had to take responsibility for their sexual behavior, a considerable portion of the text and graphics concentrated on the “Annie,” “buckle bunnies,” and “wannabes” who “beguiled” baseball players, rodeo riders, and other male athletes.

The crisis of the sexualized body here is presented as that of the male besieged by “fatal attractors.” This is not a wholly novel phenomenon—images of women as “gold diggers” and “femmes fatales” are familiar ones, and Treichler (1988) cited the work of historian Allan A. Brandt in demonstrating that “venereal diseases have typically been assigned a female identity” (p. 220). The idea of a global, invasive virus carried by sexually aggressive women and infecting reluctant, passive men gives, however, a new twist to traditional sexual stigmatization. In Magic Johnson’s case, it also functioned to override conventional white male fantasy-fears about black male sexual potency by writing sexual difference over racial difference. This racial indifference was long a part of Johnson’s blinding mystique as an ideal male citizen. As he put it in describing his rivalry with Larry Bird, who is white: “It’s hard to look at a white man and see black, but when I looked at Larry, that’s what I saw” (Ryan, 1992, p. 46). Magic Johnson was routinely described as open and friendly with the press and possessed of “the embodiment of Showtime with his million-dollar smile” (Ryan, 1992, p. 49). He also epitomized the kind of fastidious, economic patriarchal obeisance that middle American culture celebrated: “After God and my father, I respect Larry Bird more than anyone” (Ryan, 1992, p. 55).

Male sports reporters demonstrated little professional skepticism about the assumptions that Magic Johnson’s infection had come from packs of sexually marauding women. There was virtually no concern for the women who had been in sexual contact with Johnson (apart from his wife, Cookie, with whom he had a socially sanctioned liaison) and other “promiscuous” sportsmen, and so may have been placed at risk by them. By drawing on semantic discourses that celebrate heterosexual men and denigrate women (Schulitz, 1975; Spender 1980; Stanley, 1977; Thorne & Henley, 1985), male journalists articulated the body panic surrounding HIV/AIDS and sport in ways that framed heterosexual women as the virulent agents and heterosexual men as the “innocent” victims. These accounts are readily accepted because they are embedded in a gender order that privileges heterosexual male “promiscuity” and devalues, pathologizes, or criminalizes other forms of sexuality (Dworkin & Wachs, Chapter 4, this volume). Thus, the compassion and admiration initially articulated by journalists were not simply because Magic was a venerated athlete who became one of the “chance” victims of HIV infection, but also because he was a (heterosexual) athlete. The possibility that Magic—or any other male athlete—could have had sex with other men was simply unimaginable.

This favorable media treatment of Magic Johnson (which would have been unlikely if he had “confessed” to homosexual transmission or if he had presented a “queer” public persona like that of Dennis Rodman) enabled him later to come out of retirement to play on the “Dream Team” that won the gold medal at the 1992 summer Olympics and then to return to the NBA. Johnson’s decision to play in the Olympics precipitated further unease when some Australian athletes indicated that they were afraid of being infected by him and might not compete against the United States if Johnson played. The resultant U.S. nationalist outburst put the body panic temporarily into reverse. Some American players and journalists responded with outrage and warned that they would not play. Australia a severe defeat if the two teams met at the Games. Hundreds of protesting phone calls and bomb threats allegedly were made to Australia’s diplomatic missions in the United States. Australia’s Minister for Foreign Affairs publicly rebuked the Australian team’s medical director, who had recommended that players should not compete against Magic and called for boycotts against any games in which he participated (Hole, 1992, pp. 1-2). This “reprisal” may be seen as a triumph of national chauvinism and international trade Realpolitik rather than of sexual health enlightenment. In November 1992, Johnson again retired after some club opponents (including Olympic teammate Karl Malone) expressed concern about being infected when he bled slightly after rigorous body contact during a pre-season NBA game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the preseasom NBA game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the preseason NBA game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game. Even Johnson, one of the most revered idols in the pre-season game.
returned as a player and retired again, then coached and even toured with his all-star team, in one instance being refused entry into a country on account of his "medical condition."

Media narratives of the HIV/AIDS body panic in sport, in this instance, were anchored by archetypes of male "superstars" and female "super-groupies." So rhetorically effective was this framing device that no attention was paid to the sexual norms and practices of elite sportswomen and their interaction with "fans." Sportsmen engaging in successions of one-night stands were depicted as being put at risk and undermined, because they "accommodated" licentious women. The only crime of the "victims," as Treichler put it in related context, was to behave like "real men" (Treichler, 1991, p. 191). In a classic scenario of "sin-and-redeemption," women were framed as the cause of the HIV/AIDS problem and men were absolved of due responsibility for their actions (Messner & Solomon, 1993). In the case of Magic Johnson, it seems, the particular version of black maleness he represented deflected a racialized discourse of power toward that of gender. "Symbolic" violence was perpetrated against the sportsman through consensual sex with a stigmatized Other—the "promiscuous" woman (also often presented in media accounts as predominately black or Hispanic). The Magic affair, therefore, can be distinguished from and yet parallels another sport scandal involving the sports star first as rapist and then as "cannibal."

**The Fall and Fall of "Iron Mike"**

In 1992, Florida police investigated a woman's charge that three New York Mets players raped her, and later in the year former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson was convicted of rape. Reporter John Durie commented on these incidents, as well as on Magic Johnson, Wilt Chamberlain, the rape trial of William Kennedy Smith (the only white male discussed), and the U.S. Senate committee hearings on charges of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas:

Baseball players . . . are notorious for accepting the advances of the groupies who mob them in team hotels after the game. This baseball season starts this month and, with spring training in Florida, this is the first chance for the groupies to make friends with a baseballer. It is not the last chance because the six-month season often splits players from their families. Players felt they were being victimized because they were rich, said Mr. Jesse Barfield, a Yankees outfielder. He noted that, "after this Tyson thing we have to be careful, we are easy targets." (Durie, 1992, p. 10)

After Tyson was sentenced, male reporters and lawyers began raising concerns about the fairness of the trial and Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz launched an appeal, which invoked themes in the media that were strikingly similar to the Magic Johnson case. Russell Miller (1992), for example, described Dershowitz (the successful defense lawyer depicted in the Hollywood film *Reversal of Fortune* and later a member of O. J. Simpson's "dream team" of defense lawyers) as "a fearless champion of civil liberties" who has earned the enmity of "radical feminists" (p. 3) for claiming that rape should be categorized into degrees of criminality. Miller went on to question the credibility both of the plaintiff, Desirée Washington, and of the jury, alleging that Tyson could not have received a fair trial because "events had conspired significantly against him" in the wake of the publicity surrounding William Kennedy Smith and Clarence Thomas. Finally, Miller queried the motive for the victim's legal action: "Was it because she had been raped, or was it because she had been treated like a cheap groupie?" He quoted Dershowitz's contention that Washington took legal action not because she was raped, but because she was affronted by Tyson's suggestion that she either walk or take a limousine home after consenting to sexual intercourse:

This woman came on as a groupie. Everybody knows what the rules are for groupies who hang around famous athletes and rock stars. They get 15 or 20 minutes of not very good sex, no kiss goodnight, no telephone number, no appreciation. All they get are bragging rights—"I slept with the champ." (Miller, 1992, p. 3)

In this way, it is Washington, not Tyson, who is positioned as guilty and aggressive. Miller noted that Dershowitz and one of Tyson's associates consider him to be "sweet, soft-spoken and intelligent . . . a very bright guy" (p. 3). Like Johnson, Tyson is portrayed as a victim of female rapacity:

[Tyson] . . . is not finding it easy in jail. He is terrified of being set up, having drugs planted on him or getting into a fight by someone wanting to make a name for himself . . . . "He is a man in a lot of pain," says Dershowitz . . . . "He doesn't
understand why she did this to him. He understands that she might have been upset, but that’s no excuse for destroying a man’s life and career.” (p. 3)

In this way, the body of Tyson is repositioned to acquire characteristics of “feminine” vulnerability from the now implicitly “masculinized” bodies of women who take the sexual initiative, so reversing the direction of “normal” corporeal power. The functional connection between the basketball groupie who infected Magic Johnson and the boxing groupie who undid “Iron Mike” is made clear in such statements. Causality and culpability are carefully attributed within a gendered discourse that represents the valorized body of the elite male athlete (and, by extension, the male body per se) as devalued through hazardous exchange with the debased bodily currency of the sexually compromised female. This case, like the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, is further overdetermined by the competing affinities of gender and race (Kimmel, 1995a). The defense of Tyson, like that of Magic Johnson, was conducted by drawing on the image of racialized and sexualized sports black masculinity and transmuting its symbolic invincibility into vulnerability by invoking another discourse of power—“active” female sexuality. In this way, the body of the black male elite athlete is protected from racist discourses that seek to reduce it to no more than blind sexual urges—only by projecting such identity onto the bodies of women. It can be seen, however, that such strategies are not always successful. Mike Tyson did go to jail, but in less than half a decade he was back in the ring, having converted to Islam (and in other ways apparently unchanged). In June 1997, during a fight with Evander Holyfield, he bit off a portion of the lower ear lobe of his opponent, incurring widespread condemnation for such “savagery.” This assault sealed Tyson’s fate as incapable of control both in and outside the ring, thereby leaving him open to traditional white racist distrust of black male bodies.

As in the later O.J. Simpson trial discussed subsequently, there are troubling and competing explanations according to the invocation of either gendered or racial discourses. Tyson is reported to have said, “I like to hurt women when I make love to them. I like to hear them scream and see them bleed. It gives me pleasure” (from Callahan, quoted in Sloop, 1997, p. 112). His defense, in seeking to rebut an intentional rape charge, made much of the great difficulty he had in relating to women in a “normal” way. Yet, as Sloop argues (see also Jefferson, 1997, 1998; Lule, 1995), the routine portrayal of Tyson as a “man-beast-machine” and a corresponding distillation of Desiree Washington from negative images of black women produced a highly racialized prima facie supposition of Tyson’s guilt:

Playing into the myths of the black male and the black athlete, it becomes only logical that Tyson is guilty. Again, the crime is seen as evil the more unforgivable once we consider the repositioning of Desiree Washington as something other than the stereotypical black. Washington, given the subject position of the college student and Sunday school teacher, is able to effectively shed the myths of the stereotype of the promiscuous African American female and is enabled to become the sexually naive and innocent debutante, whitened to such a degree that Tyson’s inevitable rape is both more predictable and all the more unforgiving. (Sloop, 1997, p. 112)

The difficulty of disentangling assumptions of guilt or innocence of an appalling sexual crime from preexisting racist and sexist discourses—not to mention the knowing exploitation of those discourses by both prosecution and defense—reveals the extent to which ideologies of power are ever-present in the practice of everyday life and in the conduct of cultural politics (Barak, 1996; Chancer, 1998; Morrison & Brodsky Lacour, 1997).

The Ben Johnson, Magic Johnson, and Mike Tyson “affairs” all invoke myths of the black male’s inherent physical advantage, translated into white conceptions (and fears) of sporting and sexual prowess (Cashmore, 1990; Dyson, 1993; Wallace, 1991). The image of the black male sporting body, like that of the black male pop star, is a heavily sexualized one. There is no absolute correspondence here between myths and interpretation, of course. For example, in the case of black tennis player Arthur Ashe, who died in 1993, primary reference was to his medical acquisition of HIV/AIDS. Nonetheless, the generally idealized sexual capacity of the black male does readily serve to reinforce the symbolic potency of these narratives of sexual manners and body panics, whereby even the most heroically formidable embodiments of heterosexual masculinity are overcome by a sexualized, feminized disorder. In a manner similar to British boxer Frank Bruno (Carrington, 2000), Ashe represented “the acceptable face of Black masculinity.”

The mythicized downfall of the “black superstud” (Wallace, 1991) also can be placed in the service of a full-blown, multifaceted body panic. Wells (1991), for instance, in a facetious attack on the control and muddled banning of tobacco sponsorship of sport, invents a letter from a David D. (presumably standing for white racist would-be politician David Duke) of
Louisiana to an Australian named Fred. The article, couched in the language of bigotry, represents athletes' bodies as subject to fascist control:

See the links? Smoking-sport-in-the-dark-races-sex-AIDS-fags? I tell you, when I read that book of Roland Fishman's you sent me, and then heard about Magic Johnson, I wished I was back with the Klan.

So the Australian cricketers went off to the West Indies and Fishman tells us that there was so much skin chasing going on that it was no wonder that your boys couldn't perform during the day.2

And are we supposed to believe that it was only the white ladies your boys were fooling around with?

Then Magic Johnson announces that he has AIDS. And that he got it from a woman. And he sure hasn't been ignoring those black mommas all these years.

If Magic Johnson has AIDS then who knows what is going on in cricket? Or the Olympics, where the athletes of all colours don't seem to be able to keep their hands off each other. Ban sport Fred! (p. 70)

Wells's rhetoric is a perfect expression (following Kroker et al., 1989) of panic sport—the control of tobacco promotion masking an agenda to ban sport and to suppress polymorphous pleasure. It is, however, not an instance of playful postmodernist irony but a right-wing, populist exploitation of the connotative linkages between sport and diverse physical practices. In this instance, the sexuality of Magic Johnson (and, in a more diffuse way, of the Australian men's cricket team) is used to symbolize corporeal freedom. In this way, it can be seen that the image of racialized sports sexuality can be placed in the service of many discourses, but that they are rarely progressive, and, if appearing so, absolve the implied "guilt" of one subordinate group by transferring it to another.

Conclusion

We have argued in this chapter that the combination of sport, race, and masculinity has great popular ideological and discursive power. Our three "case" studies each highlighted different deployments and outcomes, and it is clear that the figure of the black sporting male retains its positive and negative valences. Contested images of black sportsmen continue to emerge and occupy vast tracts of politico-cultural space. On the negative side, the O.J. Simpson trial, for example, afforded an extended opportunity for the interrogation of the black male sports body on and off the field of play (Barak, 1996; Chancer, 1998; McKay & Smith, 1995; Morrison &

Brodky Lacour, 1997; Rowe, 1997). More positively, the ubiquitous image of Michael Jordan continues to posit highly attractive signs of black masculinity in the entertainment media against its extremely negative meanings in the news media. Somewhere in between is the transgressive, ambiguous body of the black sportsman, best symbolized currently by Dennis Rodman. In both of his books to date, Bad As I Wanna Be (1996, with Tim Keown) and Walk on the Wild Side (1997, with Michael Silver), Rodman's body is to the fore inside and outside the covers. On the front of Bad As I Wanna Be, for example, he is naked astride a motorcycle, gazing directly back at the gazer as the reader's eyes are drawn to his multicolored hair and tattoos, and inside there are images of his cross-dressing. The text makes provocative statements (suitably bolded, often in upper case or different typefaces): "Fifty percent of life in the NBA is SEX. The other fifty percent is MONEY" (p. 179); "MENTALLY, I probably am bisexual," (p. 216); and "IF MAGIC HAD A GAY RELATIONSHIP, THAT'S HIS BUSINESS" (p. 198). On the cover of Walk on the Wild Side, he is painted in "animal" mode, with the back cover "blurb" reading, "I have this fantasy that I can live my life like a tiger in the jungle—eating whatever I want, having sex whenever I want, and roaming around butt naked, wild and free." Rodman, it can be seen, is consciously playing on and with discourses of black male sports sexuality, simultaneously exploiting and subverting prevailing readings of the heterosexual "super" body. He also appeared as a front-cover feature in The Advocate, a gay and lesbian magazine, in which he detailed his sexual interests and enunciated his libertarian position. Rodman's history as one of the "hard men" of the NBA, via his relationship with the championship Detroit Pistons teams, which engaged in an aggressive style of play, and his legendary rebounding exploits, sit disconcertingly with his love of feather boa. He truly destabilizes the mainstream media discourse that sport is inherently masculine, by showing that there is no necessary correspondence between maleness, physique, and conduct.

From Benton's (1991) "cautious welcome" to the reconceptualization of the relation between modern biology and social science, to Featherstone et al.'s (1991) postmodern reinstatement of bodies in social process, to Falk's (1994) reexamination of corporeality and consumption, it is apparent that bodies are again an integral concept in theoretical analysis. As Loy, Andrews, and Rinehart (1993) noted, "The sporting body is a key site for studying the dynamic relationship between power, knowledge, and corporeal existence" (p. 75). The sporting body, in its postmodern multiplicity of formations, operates, we have argued, as an effec-
tive vehicle for the enunciation of the recurrent body panics evident in contemporary life. The welter of discursive practices of “body policing” in sport constitute these bodies as a terrain of struggle, resistance, and subjection. In this chapter, we have attempted to show how the relationships of sporting bodies to gendered, sexualized, racialized, and biomedical orders of power are relayed by the mass general and sports media. Any acquaintance with such politics of the body cannot ignore the crucial role of sport in relaying and problematizing the meanings of gender, sexuality, and race. Social and cultural analysts need to be sufficiently well versed in these popular manifestations of body politics to turn their knowledge of specialized theory and research into effective interventions in the discourses of everyday life. The racialized masculine sports body, now as pervasive in the world of promotional culture (Wernick, 1991) as it is lodged in the collective unconscious, presents a consummately complex and ambivalent phenomenon for those seeking to understand contemporary masculinities.

Notes

1. This attitude is reminiscent of the reaction of a man interviewed by USA Today about Rock Hudson’s death: “I thought AIDS was a gay disease, but if Rock Hudson can get it, anyone can” (cited in Treichler, 1988, p. 205).

2. The reference is to a journalistic exposé that Fishman (1991) wrote about the off-field sexual behavior of some members of the Australian men’s cricket team during a tour of the West Indies.