

## Elegant Violence: The Promise and Peril of a New “Feminine” Sport Ethic

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1

**Thesis:** Transformations in gender taking place via sport hold kernels for gender equity and wellness while simultaneously enabling certain problematic aspects of hegemonic masculinity to remain and/or become normalized for both men and women

2

**Historical context:** Sport has historically served as a “male preserve” that functions to justify patriarchy

(See Dunning 1986; Gorn 1986; Messner 1990; Curry 1993; Sabo 1994; White et al. 1994; Oriard 2001; Hartmann 2003; Rodgers 2014)

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**Historical context:** Sport has also served as a salient site for challenging gender ideology

(See Cahn 1994, Ware 2011, Schultz 2014)

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**Historical context:** Rugby has proven an especially fruitful place for women to levy gender transgressions, expansions, and deconstructions

(See Wheatley 1990; Board 2001; Shockley 2005; Chase 2006; Curtin 2016; Hardy 2014; Kanemasu and Johnson 2019)

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**Historical context:** Hegemonic masculinity and the 'pain principle' may be harmful to both male and female athletes

(See Connell 1995; Sabo 2009; Messner 1990; Curry 1993; White et al. 1995; Rodger 2014; Young and White 1995; Theberge 1997; Charlesworth and Young 2004; Berg et al. 2014; Chu et al. 2003; Gill 2007; Fields and Comstock 2008)

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### Methodology and Theoretical Assumptions

Focus group interviews (19 players; 5 groups of 5-7)

Semi-structured

Atlas.ti software for common terms and phrases

Feminist theory, hegemonic masculinity, and discourse analysis

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**Major finding:** Players framed their experiences with conventionally feminine traits and norms *and* performed aspects of hegemonic masculinity

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### Themes (outside head injury reactions):

- Sport can become “too competitive”
- Focus should be social connections and improvement
- Opponents are facilitators
- Sport should be inclusive
- Rugby is “like a family”

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“You literally get to pumble each other’s faces into the ground . . . with rugby you really get to body slam someone else”

(Player 1)

10

New U consistently played through and even concealed head injuries

11

“Whole world just got spun around . . . kind of laid there for a second . . . I just kept going . . . I just have food poisoning . . . [Peer tells her] ‘you do not look good, you don’t sound good, you’re not making any sense, I don’t know what you’re saying’ . . . Dragged [to the trainer] . . . I’m good; I don’t have one; I’m fine.”

(Player 4)

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**Interpretation:** by “feminizing” rugby, the New U players may be casting a shield of care and respect around otherwise troubling realities

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“There is elegance to the violence . . . It’s not just collisions, and it’s not just stereotypical aggression . . . It’s not a malicious thing”  
(Player 16)

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## Conclusion

Conventional femininity could become implicated in the concealment, re-positioning, and re-deployment of historically masculine characteristics, which sport would be better off without.

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Thank you!

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