



SPORT, CAPITALISM, & PATRIARCHY

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L'auteure examine certains rapports entre le capitalisme, le patriarcat et le sport. Le pouvoir des hommes dans une société patriarcale influence tous les aspects de cette société. Voir les femmes comme "féminines" aide à préserver ce pouvoir; cette vue fait également obstacle à la pleine participation des femmes aux sports soi-disant "masculins", pour lesquels la prouesse physique est essentielle. La commercialisation du sport a aussi aidé à préserver les idées traditionnelles de "masculin" et "féminin".

Some people look at the above illustration and see two profiles. Other people notice a wine goblet. If one studies the graphic carefully, it actually shows both the profiles and the wine goblet. The contours of one define the outline of the other. The foreheads become the bowl of the goblet. The necks define the goblet's base.

This picture can serve as an analogy for the relationship between

two complex social systems in our society, capitalism and patriarchy. What defines certain aspects of capitalism, when seen another way, also serves to outline aspects of patriarchy. Capitalism and patriarchy are a unified whole but are most often seen as distinct parts. Just as we teach ourselves to focus on either the goblet or the profiles, we can train ourselves to be able to see both capitalism and patriarchy at work in our daily lives. We can recognize the lines of commonality that these institutions share.

Because sport is an integral part of society, if we are to understand sport — and particularly the experience of women and girls in sport — we must understand society. This essay will attempt to reveal some of the connections between capitalist, patriarchal society and sport.

Capitalism and Patriarchy

Before we can draw connections between capitalism and patriarchy,

we need definitions so that we know what to look for in distinguishing the faces of patriarchy from the goblet of capitalism. Capitalism is the economic system of Canada, the United States, and western Europe ("the western world"). This system is different from other economic systems such as feudalism, which existed prior to the industrial revolution, and socialism, a system which is being attempted in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. Capitalism is distinguishable from these other economic systems for three reasons. First, private property exists under capitalism — that is, the resources such as land and machines with which we make and use other products are owned by specific people and not held in common by everyone. Second, profits (the amount of money left over for the owners of resources after selling the products and paying the costs of production) are used to invest in capital such as machines or more land. Capital,

coupled with labour, helps the owner produce more products and earn increased profits. The distinction between owners and labourers, or the division of people into unequal social classes, is the third characteristic of capitalism. Class stratification is the division of people into groups based on whether or not they own resources. In sum, the three important distinguishing features of capitalism are private property, capital accumulation, and stratification by class.

Patriarchy is a social arrangement wherein men, simply because they are men, have more power than women. Power is the ability to control others through, for instance, legal authority or physical coercion. This does not mean that every man will have more power than every woman. But men as a group have power over women as a group under patriarchy. Men's power under patriarchy is manifested in three ways: in the control of women's sexuality, in the control of women's labour, and in the control of women's leisure. This results in monogamous, passive heterosexuality for the female, in women's ghettoized labour (which means that, on average, women earn approximately 60 per cent of what men earn), and in restricted leisure opportunities for women.

Let us examine, by using sport as an example, how capitalism and patriarchy are interrelated.

The Commercialization of Sport

Originally, sports and games in Canada were played mainly by middle- and upper-class men as a pastime. Over time, capitalists such as owners of arenas and railways saw the potential for marketing sport as a consumer good; they also saw the chance to make a profit. The staging of sports spectacles such as boxing, wrestling, rowing, and running in the late nineteenth century, and team sports such as hockey and baseball in the twentieth century, brought increased business for the arena or stadium owner, who could sell tickets to the contest. As well, the owners of nearby taverns and transportation services

and the media entrepreneurs who reported the results of the contest could profit from increased use of their services. Entrepreneurs saw that sport was a salable commodity. They used advertising to capitalize upon (and perhaps create) a consumer need for sports spectacles — and made a profit from them.

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This rise in commercial sport resulted not solely in the accumulation of capital. It also helped perpetuate patriarchy — the control of female labour, sexuality, and leisure. This growth of professional male sport was accompanied by a decline in female sport. Promoters saw more potential for exploiting stereotypically masculine, aggressive sports. As professional leagues grew and a corresponding need for feeder systems of young male athletes increased, public facilities were devoted more and more to male sports. Thus we see that with the growth of capitalism, males gained control over women's labour by promoting male sport and excluding women from professional teams. As well, women's leisure was controlled, because their access to public sporting facilities was limited. Capitalist enterprise strengthened patriarchy.

The Sport/Femininity Conflict

Clear evidence of patriarchal control over women's sexuality is pres-

ent in the mythology surrounding female participation in sport. We can understand female sexuality as the way women think and behave as women in relation to men, other women, and children — or more simply, as their "femininity." Though it has not existed through time nor among all peoples, today's image of female sexuality or femininity is one of passivity. Women are stereotypically seen as inactive, weak, quiet, and often helpless. The stereotypical notion of masculinity includes aggressive, dominant, strong, and active traits, which are commonly associated with athleticism.

The primary myth surrounding female sport is that there is a conflict between sport and femininity. Researchers, in trying to refute this myth, have tested female athletes to show that they are indeed psychologically feminine. However, this sort of debunking perpetuates the idea that such traits as passivity are inherently feminine and that dominance is inherently masculine. What should be recognized is that the myth is founded upon a patriarchal belief in two *opposite and separate* sex roles, through which men naturally dominate women. Stereotypic notions of sexuality are at the root of the myth.

The perpetuation of this myth has led to the exclusion of women from sports that require blatant displays of traits considered masculine, such as violent and aggressive body contact. The myth has contributed to a modification of style in sports in which women do participate. "Masculine" behaviours are eradicated where possible, their impact minimized at all times. Thus we have the truncated sort of sport that women played exclusively in the past and play often in the present. Distances and times are shortened, rules delimit movement patterns more rigidly, coaches rarely teach aggression, referees thwart any body contact. Of more importance, perhaps, than the modified version of sport played by female athletes is the aversion to sport of a substantial portion of the female population.

Because sport's essential element is physical prowess, a trait that has

been defined as masculine, it has been socially reduced to a typically male form of behaviour. "Masculine" sexuality is demonstrated through sport. The notion that man is physically superior and woman is physically inferior, that men control and women are controlled, is perpetuated. Sport is a primary means of exhibiting the patriarchal notion of sexual inequality.

Teaching girls and women that they are less active and weaker than boys, by modifying and limiting their participation opportunities, is part of a broad pattern of ideological socialization. Schools are primary sources of the idea that girls are submissive and passive, whereas boys are dominant and active. The subtle encouragement that peers and teachers give male students for active engagement in everything from speaking in class to carrying chairs to the assembly room parallels the equally subtle methods of discouraging girls from, for example, objecting to a teacher's statements or being disk jockey at the school dance. The media are perhaps the worst culprits in this socialization into sex roles; one need only think of advertising products that appeal to and perpetuate the woman's need to be a sexually attractive object and the man's need to be a dominant, active agent, owner, and builder in society. The myths in sport are an aspect of this pervasive message which condones passive female sexuality as the norm.

Just as the commercialization of sport perpetuates both capitalism and patriarchy, so too does the myth of "the sport/femininity conflict." Passivity is closely aligned with dependence. While girls and women learn to be passive, patient, and submissive, they also learn that they are dependent. Belief in one's physical inferiority transfers into the need for physical protection from those who are physically superior. Women learn to think of themselves as dependent and in need of care and protection. Men tend to think of themselves as independent protectors.

How do these mutually compatible role expectations help to maintain capitalism? One of the main

supports to capitalism is the family. The family aids in the accumulation of capital in three ways. First, family members are consumers of the goods that capitalism produces. The ever-growing need for consumer products is nurtured in the family. Second, work done for family members, primarily by the wife and

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the mother, prepares labourers to perform their work. If wives did not cook food, maintain homes, and care for clothing, husbands could not go to work. Even with the large increase in numbers of women performing paid labour, the wife/mother is still principally responsible for housework and childcare. If no one performed domestic labour, products could not be produced and profits could not be made. The third way that the family helps capitalism is by preserving stratification by class. Capital, both material and "cultural" (for example, knowledge and speech patterns), is passed on from one generation of a family to another. Thus sport, by teaching women and men stereotypic notions about their sexuality, helps to sustain the notion of the dependent, domestic wife in the home, thereby maintaining the belief in the family, an institution which supports capitalism.

Thus we see some of the shared contours of capitalism and patriarchy. We can train ourselves to see that the commercialization of sport and the myth of "the sport/femininity conflict" are borders which define both capitalism and patriarchy, just as the boundary between the faces and goblet is a common one. But this analogy, if extended too far, leads us to think of patriarchy and capitalism forever in conjunction, with one institution unable

to maintain itself or change unless there is a parallel, identical change in the other. However, capitalism and patriarchy are not always or necessarily in conjunction. Contradiction can occur between these two institutions. Sometimes the amelioration of patriarchal relations can create even more entrenched capitalist relations. The reverse can also occur.

Let us turn to an example from sport to understand capitalism and patriarchy in conflict. Since the early seventies, there has been a vast increase in female sporting opportunities. Women have begun to participate much more frequently in a wide variety of sports. Associated with this move has been a change in the self-concept of many women athletes. These women no longer see themselves as passive and dependent. Sport and other changing institutions in society have taught women that they can be active, strong, and independent. The patriarchal conception of femininity is being undermined.

But in some ways capitalism has taken advantage of this decrease in patriarchal attitudes. Many new professional women's golf and tennis tours have been developed. The women's sporting-goods industry is highly profitable; the media can now sell themselves by reporting women's sport. The economic power of such companies as Virginia Slims and Bonne Bell attests to the fact that the decline in patriarchy can assist capital accumulation.

Returning to the goblet/profile analogy for the final time, we find that the goblet and the profiles are related and cannot change independently. If the contours of one are changed, the outline of the other must necessarily be changed. If our analogy is accurate, the implication for capitalism and patriarchy is that patriarchy cannot be changed unless capitalism, too, is changed. There is a lesson here related to how we go about changing sport.

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Mario Scattolini

CANADIAN WOMAN STUDIES/LES CAHIERS DE LA FEMME