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Playing the Ball: Constructing Community and Masculine Identity in Rugby

[Spracklen, K](#) (1996) *Playing the Ball: Constructing Community and Masculine Identity in Rugby*. Doctoral thesis, Leeds Metropolitan University.

Abstract

This thesis explores and examines the construction of a sense of community and masculine identity in the sport of rugby league. I pose the question of how the game constructs these identities, then the thesis proceeds to synthesise a working theoretical framework which draws upon ideas of the cultural production of class, community, history and gender to provide a focus for the research. I develop the way rugby league becomes an imaginary community, 'the game', and how this sense of community defines the ideas of masculinity and northern-ness, and creates both belonging and exclusion. My theoretical framework develops new ideas about how community is created, and how hegemonic masculinity is produced and maintained in sport. The thesis is situated in a particular research paradigm, the naturalist paradigm, which best serves the aim of exploring the field and developing theory through a grounded theoretical approach. This informs both the synthesis and development of theory around the concept of exploring the field, and suggests a particular

methodology. This thesis is based on qualitative research I undertook in a field consisting of a number of rugby league clubs in a district I called Sudthorpe. In addition, I did fieldwork at a rugby union club and a women's rugby league club so that the theoretical concepts I developed could be expanded and explored further. This qualitative fieldwork was flexible enough to allow me to explore the social networks that extended outside Sudthorpe, and I used both ethnography and semi-structured interviews. In addition, I reviewed en-L literature, secondary sources, and consulted archives and experts. Coupled with a literature review, reflexivity and grounded theory, my research was triangulated by a multimethod approach that allowed for a synthesis of ideas. This synthesis of symbolic community and masculine identity in rugby provide the original ideas of the thesis.

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