

If any university types trawl this up, this essay was originally written in the first half of 2009 for a unit at Deakin University, and this PDF was uploaded on January 12th, 2010. Nothing has been changed, aside from the formatting, because I like things to actually look interesting, and one referencing cock-up. (There's really no actual reason for actual people to care about this, but I've got to at least put something here to protect myself from having to deal with plagiarism claims. Lord knows I recycle enough jokes in recaps when I can't think of what to say, but I actually do try and be 100% original with coursework. ANYWAY.)

The essay question was pretty much, "How does the Australian media's focus on sportspeople affect the way they act?" Obviously, it wasn't worded so logically. What is this, Year 8 English?

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The mythologizing of sports figures in Australia through the media has, in my opinion, resulted in a deeply stratified division between males displaying the hegemonic characteristics associated with their athletic pursuits and the remainder of the general populace, and a general tolerance of these traits, especially in Australian Rules Football in the early twenty-first century. I will attempt to show this by analysing two sequences from *Access all areas: Shane Crawford exposed* (2004), and contrasting those with two sequences showing late director Rob Dickson's own experiences as a contestant on the television series *Australian Survivor* (2002). Using the structuralist works of theorists like Robinson (2005), Kaufman (2007), McKay, Mikosza, and Hutchins (2005), Connell (2002), and Jeffords (1994), I will attempt to link these sequences with the theory that the role of sportspeople as public figures, and the atmosphere they experience as such, has affected the way these professional athletes behave, both as current players in a team, and as former players in society.

Objectification of women appears to be a feature common both to current football players in *Access all areas: Shane Crawford exposed* [AAA:SCE] and to former player Dickson in *Australian Survivor* [AS], though it is much more overt in AAA:SCE. Within the first ninety seconds of the film (AAA:SCE, 1 min 05 to 1 min 17), we see a woman exposing her cleavage to Crawford and a small group of fellow footballers on the opposite side of a window. Though it is unknown whether she did this because of the players or because there was a film crew present, the fact that she did it in front of a group of men, wearing club gear -- or so it would seem, from those we could see -- would suggest to me that it is more likely the cameras had no influence on her behaviour, and that the objectification of women in this way is seen as a perfectly normal hegemonic masculinity in this setting. As stated in regards to sexual harassment in schools, 'engaging in such gendered performances is part of the cultural script, which constitutes hegemonic masculinity, thus rendering the boys' sexual harassment as an appropriate form of interaction with girls in their views' (Robinson 2005, p. 27). Evidently, some things seem to never change, at least with regards to footballers. For the majority of males, these sorts of hegemonic characteristics are eliminated over time, but for an unknown reason they appear to remain apparent in professional athletes for a longer period of time than they would otherwise be. To me, the seeming inability to treat women as though they're members of society with equal standing as oneself appears to be a sad indictment more on the reverence given to professional sportspeople in this country, allowing them to see themselves as exempt from the same moral code as the remainder of the population, than on any misogynistic behaviours prevalent in society at large.

Dickson also displays a similar stance on nudity as a player on *AS*. In the seventh episode of the series, the ten remaining contestants are united into one 'tribe' (team), and are rewarded for making the mid-point of the game with a communal shower (*AS*, 1x07 "*It's Time To Merge*", 11 min 50 to 14 min 14). During this shower, Dickson manages to both splash water on the showering female contestants, and bribe one of them to run one lap of the shower block naked. McKay et al. (2005, p. 282) suggest that one of the hegemonic characteristics of the "new lad" is looking at women in various states of undress, which would certainly appear to me to be the case in this situation. Although both of these events appeared to be lighthearted in nature, they suggest to me, especially in light of *AAA:SCE*, that there is little to no change in the behaviour of footballers after they retire from the game at a professional level. (To contrast with this, of the three other male contestants left at this point, one appears to lower his eyesight at one point in a deliberate attempt to not witness the event, one -- who, in the following week's episode (*AS*, 1x08 "*Pick Off*", 9 min 43 to 10 min 03), mentioned rugby league ambitions -- watched intently, and one was not clearly shown.)

Certainly, the situation reminded Dickson himself of his past accomplishments, with him shown stating in a confessional interview during the sequence that "it was like being in a footy... footy room with... with blokes, and Joel's a bigger man than I thought he was. He, uh, he's quite impressive, really" (*AS*, 1x07 "*It's Time To Merge*", 13 min 22 to 13 min 30). As Kaufman summarises:

[...] all those highly charged male activities in the sportsfield, the meeting room or the locker room do not dispel eroticized relations with other men. They can only reawaken those feelings. It is, as Freud would have said, the return of the repressed (Kaufman, 2007, p. 48).

Although Dickson's comment would likely have been rebuked as an impromptu comment not intended to be interpreted in this manner, it's not the only time in the series he makes a comment which could be read like this. It's not even the only time in this particular episode. Later on (*AS*, 1x07 "*It's Time To Merge*", 20 min 05 to 20 min 25), Dickson poses a seemingly hypothetical question about cannibalism to his new fellow tribe members, and opines that he would eat another male contestant's "nice chunky thighs" if the situation called for it. To me, this quote, whilst moderately disturbing in its own right, would also reinforce the theory that the comments may have been made as an attempt to repress some form of past homosexual experience.

Throughout *AS*, Dickson is clearly treated by the other players (and the program's editors) as the 'leader' of their group, possibly as an indirect consequence of his former career. Despite his apparent lack of comfort with being placed in the role, frequently spending time alone reflecting, Dickson appears at the start of the series' eighth episode, seemingly dismayed that he could have made himself so unpopular with the other players that he received a solitary vote at the previous night's elimination (*AS*, 1x08 "*Pick Off*", 1 min 11 to 2 min 43). In this case, Connell's assertion that 'men's lives often embody tensions between contradictory desires or practices' (2002, p. viii) seems to be accurate, with Dickson's desire to be liked and respected -- a hegemonic characteristic in the context of the competition -- contradicting with his desire to be separate from the group wherever necessary, a hegemonic trait Dickson may have been exposed to on the football field. This implies to me that his behaviour in the game, whilst contradicting itself, is nonetheless hegemonic, possibly due to an inability on Dickson's behalf to understand that making oneself seem so hegemonic in this context could conceivably hinder one's chances of success in the game, especially with an athletic past such as his own. Certainly,

it didn't in this case, perhaps owing to the fact that so few of the sixteen players appeared to be playing strategically.

On the other hand, AAA:SCE seems to show Shane Crawford engaging in the expected hegemonic behaviours – the aforementioned objectification of women, pranks in hotels whilst travelling (AAA:SCE, 8 min 53 to 10 min 07) – whilst trying to still convince viewers that ‘there’s no other difference between footballers and [the] general public. We’re all the same. We’re just a little bit different because we pull on a different colour jumper’ (AAA:SCE, 5 min 16 to 5 min 29). This suggests to me that although the media idolises sporting figures such as footballers, the footballers themselves believe as though they are no different to the rest of the population. However, this is diametrically opposed to Jeffords’s claim that ‘there is a line drawn to separate the true [hegemonic males] from the bodies of the remaining [...] citizens’ (1994, p. 48). The problem with this, therefore, is that Crawford’s own behaviour bucks the trends suggested by decades of research. Combining all of these facets of research together suggests to me that there is still a stratification between the perceived hegemonic males in society, which appears to be believed and endorsed by all except the players themselves. In my opinion, this may be due to a general societal understanding, assisted in formation by the media, that professional sportspeople are to be idolised by the masses. The consequence of this is that the sportspeople themselves feel unable to be truly accepted as normal people in society, both during the height of their career, and afterwards once they are all but forgotten.

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