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## Grappling with Gender: Exploring Masculinity and Gender in the Bodies, Performances, and Emotions of Scholastic Wrestlers

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### **Cover Page Footnote**

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# Grappling with Gender: Exploring Masculinity and Gender in the Bodies, Performances, and Emotions of Scholastic Wrestlers

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**Abstract:** We contribute to the sociology of sport and gender literature with an ethnographic analysis of scholastic wrestling by observing the current climate of masculinity and gender. Our results suggest that it is necessary to understand men and sporting behavior within a broader framework of gender, not just masculinity, because the behavior of high school wrestlers fell along a gender continuum between an orthodox masculinity and femininity. Our exploration of the body, performance, and emotion practices of scholastic wrestlers gives credence to the current critiques of a hegemonic masculinity in men's sports. We show that gender is not dichotomous and that even in the highly masculinized sport of wrestling, feminine behavior by men is evident.

**Keywords:** gender, gender continuum, hegemonic masculinity, inclusive masculinity, orthodox masculinity, sports, wrestling

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Social scientists and other scholars have long been interested in the social construction of masculinity as a way to understand and address gender inequality. The scholarly disciplines of women's studies, men's and masculinities studies, and gender studies emerged with similar interests in gender equality. As these disciplines matured, so have their assessments of the causes and consequences of the structures of power in which some men dominate women and some groups of men. An early conceptual development in these fields was *hegemonic masculinity*, which is seen as playing a pivotal role in continued gender dominance. Using the context of scholastic wrestling, we comment on the debates surrounding the relevance of hegemonic masculinity in masculinities and gender studies and offer the conceptual tool of a *gender continuum* as a way to better explain masculinity and gender in contemporary society.

## Theoretical and Empirical Considerations

Hegemonic masculinity is commonly used in social science and humanities literature to explain the prevalence and tenacity of men's gender dominance (Brod 1987; Connell 1995). Working through ideological domination, compliance, and acceptance (Anderson 2005), hegemonic masculinity is tied to structures of power and refers to "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 1995, 77). Discussions using the concept of hegemonic masculinity highlight its outcomes, including physical strength, exclusive heterosexuality, competitiveness, homophobia, and emotional detachment (Brod 1987; Connell 1987; McDonald 2009; Messner 2002; Pascoe 2007; Wellard 2002). Thus, the concept of

hegemonic masculinity is used to explain male dominance and to describe a set of gendered outcomes.

Despite the ubiquitous emphasis on the concept of hegemonic masculinity, some long-standing problems exist with its use. Some key theoretical concerns are that it cannot adequately account for men's subjectivity and agency (Demetriou 2001; Messerschmidt 2000; Miller 1998; Seidler 2006) or for the emergent and context-specific characteristics of social life (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hearn 2004; Swain 2003; Van Lenning 2004). Another concern is that masculine behavior is conflated with male bodies, assuming that male bodies are the location of masculinity. However, a wide array of orthodox masculine behavior can be seen in female bodies (Halberstam 1998; Pascoe 2007), and a wide array of feminine behavior can be seen in male bodies. Pascoe (2007, 5) asserts that masculinity should not be tied to male bodies, but rather to sets of behaviors that are dominant and expressed through sexualized discourse. Focusing on the male body reifies the biological basis of gender and creates simplistic categorization and power dynamics as based on male bodies. As critiques of hegemonic masculinity develop and emerge, the ability of the concept, in all its theoretical guises, to explain gender inequality becomes even more problematic because in attempts to explain everything, it ends up explaining very little. Research on masculinity needs to push beyond the recognition of the hegemony of masculinity (Hearn 2004; Pronger 1990) and develop more complicated tools to understand men and masculinity (Van Lenning 2004).

Some recent sport and cultural research reveals highly nuanced gender experiences in a variety of sporting cultures and thus further engages debates about the usefulness of hegemonic masculinity as a concept. Within literature on sporting cultures, orthodox and alternative masculinities are identified. In many cases, orthodox masculine behavior is dominant but alternative masculinities are just as much a part of the culture. In a study of surfing cultures in Australia, Waitt and Warren (2008, 356) found a strong orthodox masculinity along with other types of masculinities. Domination, subordination, institutional authorization, and complicity were evident and created particular styles of masculinity as hegemonic. However, "the subjectivities of surfer [*sic*] are always contingent upon how the spatial, temporal, desires, abilities, practices and experiences of bodies reside in each other" (Waitt and Warren 2008, 363). A similar argument about the contingent though dominant nature of orthodox masculinity is made by Robinson (2008) in her study of rock climbing, Wheaton (2000) in her research on windsurfers, and Pringle and Markula (2005) and Pringle (2009) in their work on rugby.

Anderson and McGuire (2010) and Adams, Anderson, and McCormack (2010) offer an analysis of British football in which orthodox and alternative masculinities coexist rather than orthodox masculinity being dominant. These authors found two dominant discourses in sporting masculinities. One discourse is orthodox, with principles of homophobia, misogyny, and excessive risk taking (Anderson and McGuire 2010) that use narratives of war, gender, and sexuality to enhance performance (Adams, Anderson, and McCormack 2010). This type of discourse is used primarily by the football coaches. The other discourse challenges orthodox masculinity through processes of segmentation of sporting and social identities (Adams, Anderson, and McCormack 2010) and the contestation of the fundamental principles of orthodox masculinity by inclusive masculinity making (Anderson and McGuire 2010). This discourse is used primarily by football players. Adams's (2011, 579) ethnographic work with a US university soccer team shows that the team as a whole generally demonstrates "metrosexual and inclusive behaviors and attitudes." Thorpe's (2010) research on snowboarding and Miller's (2001) general overview of sport show that traditional understandings of gender and orthodox masculinity are absent in some sport settings. Taken together, this empirical research on sports makes a strong case that what is needed is a broader

definition and understanding of masculinity and gender that goes beyond that offered by the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the dichotomous gendered framework of femininity and masculinity.

Pringle and Markula (2005, 247) argue that dominant orthodox masculinity is not consistently or unambiguously present in sport. Using ethnographic and interpretive data and focusing on sport, they propose instead that gender dominance is about contextual power and sets of behavior. Men and boys create multiple definitions of “what it means to be a man,” with a number of choices and paths (Fisher and Shay 2009, 3). Anderson (2009) argues that in the United States and Western Europe there is no hegemonic masculinity but an inclusive masculinity in which there are multiple masculinities that hold dominant positions and that none of them have cultural hegemony. Thorpe (2010, 184) comments that “unlike hegemonic masculinity or masculine domination, a feminist interpretation of field also encourages us to move beyond conceptions of men as the bearers of power and question the tendency in previous studies to dichotomize the experiences of men and women.” Mindful of the critiques of hegemonic masculinity, the clear need for more nuanced analyses of masculinity in sport, and the new lenses for research on sport and gender and masculinities, we developed a research design to study gender and masculinity in scholastic wrestling.

### **Methodology**

Making use of one’s life course events to conduct qualitative sociological research, such as observing and/or coaching an extracurricular activity of one’s child, is sometimes termed opportunistic (Riemer 1977). Adler and Adler (1997) and Fine (1987) demonstrate the successfully managed fieldwork sites of their children’s lives and topics in which scholars have other personal interest (e.g., Fine 1996, 1998). As parents of a high school wrestler (one, a coach), we managed multiple selves while in the field (Reinharz 1997). Given the multiple roles held by us, including father, mother, coach, fan, and researcher, we were able to access the research site and collect and analyze data from varied perspectives, giving us richer data sets and analyses.

We collected and analyzed data using an inductive approach, and we employed the qualitative method of participant observation in the research sites, making close observations, while there, and making field notes upon leaving the research sites (Duneier 1999; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; May 2001; Montemurro 2006). Participation with and observations of wrestlers, parents, fans, and coaches at youth and high school wrestling events during seven wrestling seasons, Fall 2003 to Spring 2010, were used to collect data for this project. Our research roles in the field were, for the most part, covert. For the vast majority of the time our behavior in the field was not any different than it would have been had we been only parents and coaches and not researchers. We did not attend events, talk to anyone, or observe anyone that we would not have had we been only parents and a coach. We were not granted any special access, nor did we ask questions or behave in any way that was outside the normative behaviors of parents and coaches in order to fulfill our researcher roles. To protect those involved in the study, we use pseudonyms throughout the analysis and in the data presentation. As with most participant-observation strategies, while in the field, we held uncountable numbers of conversations with parents and other observers. We attended wrestling practices, meets, and tournaments, alone and together. While in and out of the field sites, we discussed wrestling observations and took individual and joint field notes.

During the collection and analytical stages of this research, we used a “constant comparative method” to weave analytical conversations amongst the participant observation and informal interviewing data (Glaser and Strauss 1967), and to reassess our fieldwork roles and analytical foci. This method kept the

analysis true to the data by checking and rechecking pieces of data analysis against prior analyses. In this way, we made sure that the analyses were congruent; in cases where some pieces of data did not make sense or contradicted other pieces, we were able to reformulate analysis to take into consideration the new data. During data collection stages, we had multiple analytical conversations, both in and out of the field, discussing the common themes and patterns we had observed. This was how we selected the events for inclusion in the project. As themes emerged, and we returned to the literature and then came back to the data again, behaviors kept falling into sets of patterns. The events included in our findings section are those that we found best typified the theme. After collecting data over seven wrestling seasons, we were seeing very little new information in the field, so we agreed that we had reached theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

### **Description of Research Context**

We observed three different age levels of scholastic wrestling: a youth wrestling club, a middle school wrestling team, and a high school wrestling team. The wrestlers included in this study were almost exclusively boys and young men, white, from the United States (although there was one Canadian), working and middle class, and apparently heterosexual. The youth, middle school, and high school teams most closely followed were from Midwestern Catholic schools. Over the seven seasons of observation, only two youth girl wrestlers were members of the teams we observed. Each wrestled for only one season. Except for the brief careers of those two youth wrestlers, women's roles in the wrestling communities were as family members, friends, or cheerleaders. Mostly, but not always, mothers of the wrestlers were in the background when fathers were present.

Regardless of where the wrestling took place, rules for all age levels called for wrestling to be performed in the center of a large thirty-eight foot by thirty-eight foot square mat made of thick shock-absorbing vinyl-covered foam (Diehl 2003). Unlike the professional wrestling one might see on television, the rules for amateur wrestling are very specific and safety minded. There are three periods to a wrestling match. Depending on the age level, the duration of a period can be from thirty seconds to two minutes long. Both wrestlers begin the first period standing in the center of the mat where they try to take each other down. At the start of the second period, one wrestler is given the choice to choose the offense position (where he is up on one knee, and his opponent is down on both hands and knees), the defense position (where he is down, and his opponent is up), or neutral position (where both are standing). At the start of the third period, the opposite wrestler is given the same choices. Points are scored by gaining a takedown (two points) an escape (one point), a reversal (two points), or a near fall (two, three, or four points). The wrestler with the most points at the end of the third period wins the match. An exception to this, and possibly the most exciting part of wrestling, is the rule that either wrestler, no matter what the current score, can immediately win the match by scoring a fall (pin). "A fall occurs when any part of both shoulders or scapula of either wrestler are in contact with the mat for two seconds," to be silently counted by the referee (Diehl 2003, 20); then, he or she slaps the mat signaling the end to the match. As a closing gesture of sportsmanship, both wrestlers shake hands. As a final show to the crowd, the referee grasps their hands during the hand shake and holds up the winner's hand, and both wrestlers exit the mat.

Sites in which we observed wrestling and masculinity were places such as the daily practice room, dual meets, and tournaments. The practice room in our study was only big enough to tightly fit two, full-sized, wrestling mats, with padded walls all around from floor level to about six feet high. Temperature in the room is intentionally kept high (about ninety degrees Fahrenheit) to keep the wrestlers' muscles warm so

they are less apt to experience pulls and strains. This also facilitates excessive perspiration for those who are trying to “make weight.”

Dual meets are where two wrestling teams compete, typically at the home team’s school gymnasium. In a dual meet situation, a wrestling mat is placed directly in the center of the gym, where only one wrestling match takes place at a time. Fold-up-style steel banquet chairs are lined up along two sides of the mat, where coaches and wrestlers sit, often in order of weight class. The two teams are basically facing one another, and throughout the meet, wrestlers are typically sitting right across from the person they will be competing against or have competed against. During the meet, wrestlers either sit in their respective seats while others are wrestling, or they warm up behind their team’s chairs. Although the setup of a meet seems orderly, the neatly lined-up chairs become scattered from the excitement of a particular match or the need for wrestlers and coaches to converse with one another.

Wrestling tournaments also usually take place in school gymnasiums. However, there may be three or more wrestling mats in the center of the gym, depending on the size of the tournament and the gym. In a tournament setting, unlike a dual meet, there are no chairs set up for the wrestlers. Upcoming wrestlers warm up in an inconspicuous location, many times off to the side or out of sight of the crowd. Other wrestlers on the team usually sit in the stands, in a group, watching the matches, eating and talking. Some wrestlers pay close attention to those matches within their own weight classes to take note of their competitors’ technique. Others do not watch their competitor’s matches because they prefer to focus on what they need to do to win and/or because they do not want to get anxious. Coaches and parents will also carefully watch their wrestlers’ competitors in order to strategize matches.

### **The Social Construction of Gender in Wrestling**

Scholars who do research on the social construction of gender and masculinity frequently fashion their analysis assuming gender as a kind of binary construction, either masculine or feminine (Brod 1987; Chodorow 1978; Connell 1987; Kanter 1977; Luker 1984; Messner 2002). Traditionally, masculinity calls to mind a man who is strong, rational, determined, competitive, physically strong, emotionally detached, and non-feminine (Brod 1987; Connell 1987; Messner 2002). A woman is someone who is physically attractive, nurturing, emotional, and caring (Chodorow 1978; Kanter 1977; Luker 1984). Like some men’s and masculinities authors who identify multiple masculinities (Coles 2009), subordinate masculinities (Waitt and Warren 2008), and inclusive masculinities (Anderson 2009), our ethnographic observations and analyses of scholastic wrestling reveal wrestlers’ behaviors as falling along a continuum of gendered behavior. To illustrate this continuum we identify three points along it: traditional masculine, androgynous, and feminine (see Table 1). We use as evidence wrestlers’ body, performance, and emotion practices because these practices systematically emerged as central in the wrestlers’ sport world.

<b>Table 1: Gender Continuum</b>			
	<b>Masculine</b>	<b>Androgynous</b>	<b>Feminine</b>
<b>Body Practices</b>	Being strong Taking pain	Making weight	Physical intimacy
<b>Performance Practices</b>	Never wrestle a girl Cool dude	Indifferent individual	Manic man
<b>Emotion Practices</b>	No crying	Rejoicing	Care work

### *Masculine Wrestling Behavior*

Our analysis of youth and high school wrestling reveals orthodox masculine behavior in the (a) *body practices* of being strong and taking pain, (b) *performance practices* of never wrestling a girl and the “cool dude,” and (c) the *emotion practice* of no crying. On the masculine end of the gender continuum, orthodox masculine body, performance, and emotion practices are expected, given traditional characteristics of masculine behavior.

*Body practices: being strong, taking pain.* Sociologists of sport and leisure substantively and methodologically have accomplished much in researching the body in relation to sport and leisure. In many respects, masculinity is embodied within the physical body (Bordo 1993; Butler 1990; and Foucault [1979] 1990). Klein’s (1993) research on bodybuilding, Baker and Boyd’s (1997) edited volume on sports, gender, and identity, and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) reveal that the construction of masculinity is heavily linked to the body performances and bodily skill that construct orthodox masculinity in sports. In wrestling, as in other sports, participants value the physicalness of their sport. Wrestlers sustain and support the construction of an orthodox masculinity through their emphasis on physical strength and being tough. Strong bodies are a key site for orthodox masculinity construction.

A highly masculinized body practice we identified in scholastic wrestling sites is *being strong*. Being strong includes the proper amount and kinds of muscle and endurance. Muscle comes from lifting weights and doing exercises, such as push-ups and sit-ups. One day we took a tour through the weight room at the local high school to find senior wrestlers Andrew, Steve, and Ron doing their routine lifts at the bench press. Ron had the largest body, followed in size by Steve, and then Andrew. Andrew was on the bench and attempting to lift an amount equal to that just lifted by Ron and Steve. Judging from the facial expressions of Ron and Steve, this weight appeared to be too much for Andrew. However, Andrew tried with all his might to lift it. He was given encouragement by Ron and Steve as they “spotted” for him, guarding the weight from dropping on Andrew. They exclaimed, “It’s all yours, Andrew! You got it, man!” Andrew’s arms shook with effort, as he let out a grunt and then a loud howl. Amazingly, Andrew lifted the last inch or two required and placed the set of weights on the rack over his head. The two spotters



congratulated Andrew and spoke of him being “ripped” as he “pumped that iron.”

Another example of strength as a body practice is the building of endurance. Wrestlers gain endurance by performing extensive and sometimes complicated cardiovascular conditioning drills both during practice and in individual workouts. For example, it was typical to witness the end of a high school practice with an endurance drill. A popular endurance drill we observed had wrestlers standing at one end of the wrestling room in a single line, where each wrestler immediately after another would run on his hands and knees down and back the length of the room. Upon his return, he was required to go back to the end of the line and wait for his turn to do it all over again. This was repeated over and over until the endurance drill was complete, usually until each wrestler went through a half dozen cycles. If the coach noticed wrestlers appearing fatigued, he would continue the drill until no one acted tired.

A second highly masculinized body practice that is integral to wrestling is that of *taking pain*. As Messner (1992) notes, taking pain is an essential element of orthodox masculinity and creates some of the most costly consequences. Young and White (2000, 115) comment that “there are numerous ways that men, more than women, take risks, endure pain, and suffer ill health through sport and play.” Whether during practice or at a match or meet, successful wrestlers experience pain. Although it is against the rules in scholastic wrestling to intentionally inflict pain on one’s opponent for its own sake, pain is normative for wrestlers, as it takes place within the process of the legal and illegal moves of wrestling.

For example, we saw a high school wrestler get slammed hard by his opponent just as they were falling out of bounds. The wrestler’s head bounced on the unprotected gym floor outside the mat, causing him to lay motionless, calling for immediate attention from the wrestler’s coach and trainer of the host team. The match was discontinued by the coach, and the other wrestler was disqualified by the referee for performing an illegal slam. Having to stop the match and win through disqualification rather than points aggravated the injured wrestler. Although he suffered an illegal slam warranting a discontinuation of the match, he wanted to wrestle through the pain for a “real” win.

Some of the legal moves and holds in wrestling can also cause extreme pain. For example, we observed a youth wrestler, Andy, do the “cross face.” This is a defensive move where a wrestler crosses the face of his opponent with his forearm, usually to break the hold of his opponent. Another example is the “double arm bar,” a favorite hold of a high school wrestler named John. When he is in the “up” position and his opponent is on his hands and knees in the “down” position, John is able to grasp his opponent’s arms from behind, just above the elbows, pull both of his opponent’s arms behind his opponent’s back, and using the captured arms as levers, wrench the opponent onto his back. Judging from the looks on the opponents’ faces, these holds are extremely painful.

*Performance practices: never wrestle a girl; cool dude.* Performance practices, while wrestling, that support an orthodox masculinity are those that demonstrate such traits as heterosexuality, physical strength, competition, and emotional detachment. Rationality and control are the common characteristics of these traits. Performance practices that uphold an orthodox masculinity include never wrestling a girl or woman and maintaining a composed, determined, and strategic demeanor.

A decision made by some wrestlers, before going onto the mat, that upholds an orthodox masculinity is to *never wrestle girls and women*. Many times we heard wrestlers and parents present reasons why male wrestlers should not wrestle female scholastic wrestlers. Typically the reasons are based in a stated assumption that the male wrestlers would be in a “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” position. This means that if a male wrestler wrestles a female wrestler and wins, he just beat a girl, and it is meaningless. If a male wrestler loses to a female wrestler, then he would be humiliated. When the

opportunity presented itself for a male wrestler to wrestle a girl/young woman, some of them would not do it and forfeited the match.

During our observations of middle school wrestling, there were two girl wrestlers. One girl named Kathy weighed in somewhere in the middle range of the weight classes, where many of the boys wrestled as well. During competitive meets, she usually won her matches by pinning her (always male) opponents. We found out that her father, Donovan, was a former high school and college wrestler and came to the wrestling room almost every night during practice. Donovan was very strict with Kathy, always criticizing her and pushing her to the limit. Kathy was a very good wrestler. Very few of the boys ever wanted to wrestle her. The second girl was Melissa. Her father also came to watch her during practice but stayed on the sidelines like all the other parents. Melissa was a decent wrestler, but no better or worse than the average boy wrestler.

Short bursts of unofficial wrestling matches, called wrestling “drills,” were a common strategy for coaching during routine nightly practices. During these wrestling drills, two thirds of the wrestlers paired up by weight class, while the other third sat and rested along the sidelines, waiting to wrestle the winner of the first pair. The wrestlers on the mat chose their opponents at random, and this process worked well as long as there were no girls on the mat. However, when either Kathy or Melissa, or both, were on the mat for wrestling drills, the coaches had to assign partners. When coaches attempted to assign partners for Kathy and Melissa, it did not always work out well. Most of the middleweight boys did not like to wrestle (and lose to) Kathy, and many of the boys in the lightweight range were reluctant to wrestle Melissa as well. In fact, Jordan and Andy outright refused to ever wrestle Kathy—or any girl for that matter. The fathers of these two requested that their boys never be forced to wrestle a girl. When we asked Jordan and Andy why they would not wrestle girls, Jordan said, “It’s a no-win situation. If you wrestle and beat a girl, well, then you’re a jerk for beating a girl.” Then Andy responded, “If you wrestle and lose to a girl, then they make fun of you for losing to her. So the best thing is to never wrestle a girl.” When we asked Jordan’s father, Mike, why he would not let his son wrestle a girl, he simply stated, “No son of mine is going to wrestle a girl, period.” When pressed as to why he had such a stern disposition on the question, Mike said, “Girls don’t belong on the mat.” Consequently, it became a standing rule that no boy had to wrestle a girl.

Another performance practice of orthodox masculinity is to present a kind of demeanor that is composed, determined, and strategic. This kind of performance is undertaken by a type we label a *cool dude*. Before the match, this kind of wrestler may walk back and forth behind the row of chairs calmly, often looking at or toward the opposite team’s bench, presumably at his opponent. This is a kind of stare down in which the wrestlers size up their opponent while also trying to instill fear. While on the mat, cool dudes may stretch and jump up and down to keep their leg muscles warm. Their wrestling moves are primarily slow and methodical. The slowness illustrates the intense concentration it takes in making precise offensive and defensive moves. Cool dudes appear deliberate, intentional, and in control. After the match, the cool dude shakes hands with both his opponent and the opponent’s coach. Typically, there is not much show of emotion, whether win or lose; a calm and controlled appearance is presented. Cool dudes appear balanced, controlled, dignified—and successful—both at wrestling competitively and in presenting a cool masculinity. This pose is highly respected and appreciated by fans and coaches and falls in a very successful range for orthodox masculinities relying on physical strength, a competitive spirit, and emotional detachment.

*Emotion practices: no crying.* An orthodox masculinity closely regulates emotions, mandating that

men be stoic and rational. Emotions are to be kept in check, illustrating the emotional detachment detailed by Bird (1996) in his description of masculinity. A highly masculinized wrestler's performance calls for carefully managed emotion practices. Shield's (2002) work on emotion and gender comments on how sport brings a very public dimension to gender performance: "The emotion of competitive sports is also very public emotion, and the rules of expression, and the violation of those rules or deviation from the guidelines, are matters of public discussion" (109). Crying is a closely regulated activity with rules for when it is appropriate and when it is not. At the orthodox masculinity end of the continuum, *no crying* is preferable.

We witnessed great efforts to avoid crying after losing a match or because of pain and being hurt. We witnessed a wrestler named Ron, who lost a very close match, make a sincere effort to hide his emotions. After losing, he put his warm-up jacket over his head and ran to the locker room to avoid crying in front of his teammates. Another example of having to hold back tears was when one wrestler laid on the corner of the mat, covering his face with a towel, after losing a match. His coach gently nudged him in the side and motioned for him to get up. We speculate that the wrestler was lacking emotional detachment, and the coach did not want him to do so in the public space of the tournament and lose face as a successful performer of masculinity.

The youth wrestlers we observed were more likely than the high school wrestlers to cry, and they would often blame their crying on pain. In a youth tournament we attended, one dad had to literally drag his son, Jordon, from the center of the mat after Jordon clearly and cleanly was "pinned" and went into a tantrum. Jordon shook himself loose from the referee's attempt to orchestrate the ceremonial handshake of sportsmanship between opponents at the end of the match. Instead of congratulating his opponent, the losing wrestler jumped up and down, grasping the back of his own neck, while screaming. As the father forcefully escorted Jordon off the mat, he told his son to stop crying. The boy could be heard by many spectators blaming his tears on the pain he received from trying not to get pinned. We often wondered if crying due to pain was a cover-up for being disappointed and crying due to loss of match. We never witnessed a wrestler cry due to pain after a win. Crying due to pain is unacceptable generally, but it is more acceptable than crying due to sadness over losing a match. We suspect that many of the younger youth wrestlers use pain to cover up for sadness after losing a match, in order to perform orthodox masculinity. Displaying sadness was not acceptable.

### **Androgynous Wrestling Behavior**

Androgynous behavior in wrestling includes behaviors that are not traditionally masculine but did not strike us as particularly feminine. Androgynous behavior is apparent in body, performance, and emotion practices in that we found (a) a *body practice* of making weight, (b) *performance practice* of the "indifferent individual," and (c) *emotional practices* that included rejoicing.

*Body practices: making weight.* One crucial body practice for wrestlers is *making weight*, and we include it in the middle of the continuum because it is something that is culturally associated with women but is a very important body practice for wrestlers. Men wrestlers and women non-wrestlers focus on body weight for very different reasons. Making weight for male wrestlers means that they have to lose weight to be able to wrestle in a specific weight division. The focus on women's body weight is about cultural attractiveness. Because making weight and losing weight are things that both men and women do, we defined making weight as androgynous and put it in the middle of the gender continuum.

Unlike much of the research on men's bodies that finds a hegemonic aesthetic (Filiault and Drummond

2007), which defines men's bodies as visually pleasing when they have muscle and are lean, the wrestlers in this study lose weight and worry about muscle, not because of an aesthetic, but because of wanting to wrestle well and win. Losing weight is about getting to the right weight class so they can do their best in competition. Making weight was one of the most dreaded necessities of the sport.

There are only a limited number of competitive weight classes on wrestling teams, and rules prohibit more than one wrestler in any weight class during a meet. There is usually a small weight range within which a wrestler must stay or will be unable to compete. If there are two wrestlers on the same team at the same weight, they usually have to "wrestle off" to determine who competes at the next tournament or meet at that weight class. Typically, the less skillful of the two wrestlers will either lose weight in order to compete in a lower weight class or compete in a higher weight class with wrestlers heavier than he or she.

Some wrestlers will lose weight, at times excessively, to avoid a better wrestler at their more "natural" weight. The following are examples of the extremes to which wrestlers are willing to go to make weight in order to be competitive. At the youth level, Tim, an eight-year-old boy competing at the state level, lost weight to avoid wrestling a better wrestler at the state level. Tim appeared to be so dizzy from lack of food that he could hardly wrestle that day. Ironically, the wrestler Tim was trying to avoid also cut weight, so these two wrestlers met on the mat despite Tim's weight loss. The attempts to cut weight seem more pronounced at the high school level. We observed Steve's routine weigh-ins during practice. Over a period of one month, we watched him cut twenty pounds to get to a specific weight class and be able to wrestle on the varsity team. Observations of this routine weigh-in process also allowed us to witness Joe, another high school wrestler, lose eight pounds in one day. He said he skipped classes during the school day and spent the time running in a plastic suit in order to make weight. Another example is Tom who told us one day he went through school without eating and then ran stairs for ninety minutes to lose five pounds in order to maintain eligibility for a tournament.

*Performance practices: indifferent individual.* Some performance practices are outside the orthodox standards for masculinity because they display a lack of competitive spirit. We labeled this performance practice as that of the *indifferent individual*. Here the wrestler appeared not to care about winning or losing. In this way, the behavior was neither masculine, which would be competitive, nor feminine, which would indicate caring about winning. This type of wrestler was not highly respected like the cool dude.

The indifferent individual pose is dominated by a wrestler's lack of emotional display. He is not pacing quietly, like cool dude, nor is he overly aggressive and angry. He only looks at the floor and does not stare down his opponent. He presents a basically passive, emotionally detached disposition, indicating that he was not giving it his all. We notice this especially during close matches when a this type of wrestler loses because he does not pursue victory, as is compulsory with the mandates of orthodox masculinity. In this case, the androgyny categorization is a result of our interpretation of this behavior as not particularly masculine but not feminine either.

*Emotion practice: rejoicing.* Emotion practices within the androgynous range of the gender continuum include those kinds of behaviors that we would expect of both men and women, given the context. For example, an emotion display we noted was *rejoicing*. Rejoicing can be seen when a winner jumps up and down, raises both arms up high, and walks or struts around on the mat. For example, at a state tournament, winners often jumped into the arms of their coaches or jumped up and down and slapped each other on the back and butt emphatically. This display of emotion is quite acceptable, but only when attached to winning behavior. Brian, a high school junior, upon winning a very close match during the state tournament, was so happy that he ran to his nearby coach and jumped into his arms. The coach

caught Brian in open arms, and for a moment tears of joy ran down both of their faces as they stood there hugging each other, with Brian's legs wrapped around his coach's waist. A photograph of this appeared in the newspaper the next day. During the awards ceremony, Brian sobbed openly while saluting his grandfather, who had also been a state champ many years prior, but who was now watching (also in tears) from the stands. Tom, a sophomore who is normally very stoic, won a close match during a regional tournament, walked over to the crowd, and without any warning, bear-hugged his assistant coach. Tom had tremendous joy on his face, indicating an expression of emotional involvement. Within this sporting culture, rejoicing is appropriate but not as masculine as being stoic because it lacks an amount of control.

### **Feminine Wrestling Behavior**

It is on this part of the gender continuum that the wrestlers' behaviors contribute most significantly to an understanding of gender. The behaviors included on this end of the gender continuum are those that we observed but did not at all expect given the highly masculinized setting. Here the legitimacy of the use of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the binary concepts of masculinity and femininity, as tied to male and female bodies, are most clearly called into question. Our data analyses revealed (a) *body practices* of physical intimacy, (b) the *performance practice* of "manic man," and (c) the *emotion practice* of care work.

*Body practices: physical intimacy.* One of the most fascinating illustrations of body practices of the wrestlers takes place during tournaments. These are situations where the wrestlers are together in a gymnasium for long periods of time. During breaks, the wrestlers often gather together on the mat and engage in *intimate physical interactions*. Anderson, Adams, and Rivers (2010) studied male students in the United Kingdom and found that a large percentage of heterosexual men kissed other men on the lips. They theorize that the men are able to do this because there has been a loosening of cultural homophobia. We found similar public intimate behavior by young male wrestlers who identified as heterosexual.

For example, while waiting for a tournament to resume, Josh and Tony had just finished practicing a hold. While they both lay on the mat where they were doing wrestling moves, they were in a position that was almost indistinguishable from "spooning." At another time, a group of eight wrestlers from a high school team gathered on the floor during a long break, talked, and practiced wrestling moves. This entailed speaking very closely and face-to-face, lying close with arms around each other and ending up on top or bottom of one another. This kind of touch goes against the masculinity directive that a man be 100% heterosexual and not act in ways that are attributed to women and/or gay men (Anderson 2005; Pascoe 2007).

*Performance practices: manic man.* Emotions within traditional femininity are oftentimes described as irrational, lacking control, and uncalculated. We observed some wrestling performances that were out of control rather than calculated and rationally performed. We typologized this set of practices as made by the *manic man*, who was quite unlike the cool dude in masculine wrestling behavior or the indifferent individual in androgynous wrestling behavior.

Rather than appearing to be ultimately composed, the manic man presents an agitated and distracted demeanor, which is highly aggressive but not highly regarded. He appears out of control and displays unsportsmanlike conduct. Before a match, the manic man warms up behind his team but does so in a hurried way, oftentimes slapping muscles and looking distracted. While on the mat, his agitated behavior increases in intensity, waiting for the match to begin. It appears as though he is too anxious to keep control. During a wrestling match, the moves of the manic man seem out of control, quick, and

less measured. He relies on strength or quickness to do well on the mat but can often fail due to lack of control. After wrestling, he tends to show more emotion both positively and negatively. The manic man is less apt to shake hands with his opponent or the other coach, showing less respect. Additionally, he may storm off the mat and into the locker room. For example, during a state tournament, a match between two middle school wrestlers was decided at the closing buzzer. The favored wrestler had lost and gotten up from the mat arguing with the referee, while the other wrestler simply stood up gracefully. When the referee told the two of them to shake hands, as is customary, the loser refused to shake his opponent's hand and instead went running off the mat and into the locker room. The crowd deemed this wrestler as a poor loser by booing him as he ran off. When some wrestlers lose, they become distraught, throw equipment (e.g., leg bands or head gear), argue with the referee over a call, and/or refuse to shake hands with opponents and coaches.

The manic man performance practices are not highly regarded by teammates, coaches, and fans. Although the performance practices of the manic man can be thought of as very masculine because they are aggressive, we identify the manic man as feminine because his performance practices are out of control, irrational, and uncalculated.

*Emotion practice: care work.* Emotions on the feminine end of the continuum are highly caring. We were struck by the range of caring behaviors exhibited by the wrestlers and coaches. Most of the time this care work took the form of nurturing behavior.

Emotional expression of care is done by wrestlers in a multitude of ways. Before a match, it can be used to help nurture or "psych-up" a colleague. A fellow wrestler may stand behind a teammate getting ready to go on the mat. He might rub his neck and shoulders, pat him on the butt, and hold onto his headgear with both hands, putting his face close to talk. Sometimes when a wrestler goes on the mat to shake his opponent's hand, he may also tap him on the shoulder with his other hand. This was a way to reassure a nervous wrestler, usually one who is expected to lose quickly. In other instances, we witnessed wrestlers and coaches breaking orthodox masculine standards to console or congratulate a wrestler. For example, after winning a state title, a high school senior jumped into the arms of his coach, who held him in an embrace as they danced with joy. In a similar vein, during a youth tournament, Terry lost an advancing match and was eliminated. When he left the mat, his coach and father consoled him by putting arms around him, holding him close, and talking calmly into his ear. Each of these situations is an expression of care and were nurturing. Wrestlers subtly construct sporting identities that fall outside the definitional boundaries of orthodox masculine behavior because they behave in caring, intimate, and emotional ways.

## **Conclusion**

Our data show that an understanding of masculinity and gender necessitates a broader framework than that offered by the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the assumption that masculinity is tied to the male body. Rather, gender should be seen as falling along a continuum between highly masculinized and feminized, regardless of biological sex. Even within the highly masculinized setting of wrestling, where there is an assumed emphasis on physical strength, homophobia, competitiveness, and emotional detachment, we found a continuum of behaviors, some of which we considered quite feminine. The bodies, performances, and emotions of wrestlers evidence an inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2009) through feminine and androgynous behaviors within an environment that tenaciously clings to orthodox masculinity.

It is obvious in this setting that the behaviors along the gender continuum are not equally valued by

the wrestlers or other participants in the setting. The cool dude, who is strong and maintains weight classification, wrestles methodically with strength, wins the match, shakes his opponent's hand, and smiles, is at the top of the status hierarchy. Other body, performance, and emotion practices are evaluated in relationship to those. However, it is equally clear that the wrestlers care deeply for one another, are physically intimate, and hold a wide range of emotions. As in other sports, an analysis of gender in wrestling requires a theoretical escape from the binary, reductionist, and essentialist constructions that often tie masculinity and femininity to the male and female body. These data also make it difficult to accept the notion of hegemonic masculinity as useful for understanding gender inequality if it cannot adequately explain men's behavior.

Adams (2011, 590) suggests that the wearing of pink cleats by a US men's university soccer team, without negative repercussion, illustrates "changing gender relations among youth, compared to those just a decade older." Inclusive attitudes and behaviors are increasingly becoming an acceptable part of contemporary college athletes' performance of masculinity (Adams 2011, 592). Unlike Adams's (2011) findings, our research reveals an orthodox masculinity that is more highly valued than inclusive masculinity because wrestling is a sport that is highly masculinized and the setting is a US Midwestern Catholic school system. Although the inclusive masculine behaviors reported here are not as widely accepted or as enacted as those described by Adams (2011), our research indicates a lessening of the dominance of orthodox masculinity. Observations of scholastic wrestling led us to grapple with gender and masculinity as theoretical and empirical concepts and conclude that there is a growing cultural shift away from orthodox masculinity.

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