

Sean Michael Gilmore on “Sport Sex”

Based on interviews with college-age men and women and open-ended surveys.

Gilmore describes two differences between how men and women talk about sex.

1. Sexual promiscuity was viewed as positive for men but not women. “The ‘mythology of the stud’ is constructed through the discourse of ‘scoring’; that is, men bragging about the number of women they sexually conquered.” Men were rewarded for having sex with different women in different ways; monogamy is stigmatized and sometimes punished.

2. Men discussed sex in terms of games and contests. Women framed sex in terms of the development of a relationship.

“Language defines and constructs what is and is not real. To label an object is to construct what it is and what it is not. For example, to call an object a ‘chair’ is to position the object as something useful that people can sit on, but that same object can be labeled a ‘piece of junk,’ defining it as useless, something to be discarded. Language and labels suggest how actors understand and value their experiences. This research shows how a group of young males created a discursive reality in which women were not just sex objects, but points in sexual contests.”

“As long as there exists positive symbolic reward for males who have sex with multiple partners, and simultaneously negative symbolic punishment for young men who demonstrate signs of commitment toward a woman, many young men will be socialized into competing with each other for studhood. When competing for studhood, sex becomes a game and women become points, objectified as something to score. Young men never say, ‘I got some human being last night. As a matter of fact, I’ve gotten more human being than you have this year.’ Men must objectify women, strip them of their dignity and respect, dehumanize them, in order to play these sex games. By playing these sex games, young men create a reality in which the objectification and exploitation of women becomes the accepted and encouraged norm. For too long, young men have been bragging about sex games and competitions behind closed doors. When we expose the true nature of their sexual discourse and the negative position it creates for women, then action can be taken to rectify the situation.”