Changing Subcultures from Old Roles to New Identities:
An analysis of gender through the emergence of women in drag racing

by

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A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

March 2009

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Acknowledgements

There are a select amount of people to whom I owe my success. Firstly, my supervisor Dr. Rachel Ariss has guided me through with inspirational words and empowering ideas. Secondly, my committee members: Dr. Gary Genosko and Dr. Sharon Dale Stone who have both proposed inspiring avenues through their own research and interests. I would also like to pay special thanks to my external Michelle Helstein from the Department of Kinesiology & Physical Education in the University of Lethbridge, for her scholarly discussions that were inspiring.

I would like to thank family and friends who have been a source of hope. Their interests are directly related to my research. I would like to thank my husband Ron Sundell for his support and thoughts which kept me engaged with my research.

I would like to thank all participants whom I have observed and especially those who I have interviewed. This would not be possible without you.

Thank you to the Department of Sociology and Lakehead University for giving me this opportunity. It is greatly appreciated.

Abstract

This is a study in interpretive and critical sociology of the experiences of women in drag racing. The purpose of this study is to examine and give voice to women's gendered experiences in drag racing.

The methodology includes participant observation and key informant interviews. Analyzing the use of space at the drag racing event reveals its gendered social norms. Case studies of professional racers such as Shirley Muldowney and Danica Patrick are contrasted with the experiences of the interviewees in order to examine gender at all levels of the sport.

Social relationships have both constrained and empowered women's participation in sport. Women participate in many different roles within the drag racing event - as supporters of male racers, sexual objects for advertisements, administrators, and as racers. While most racers are male and racing itself is seen as masculine, women have begun to challenge gender roles and ideals within drag racing through their participation as racers.

Forward

"Real racers drive to the start line, other guys drive around in circles"
This quote was painted on a female racer's car. I find it extremely
interesting that it not only examines the difference between drag racing
and other car races like NASCAR the National Association for Stock Car
Auto Racing (driving around in circles), but expresses her own
participation as a woman in a male dominated sport. Although I am
familiar with the idea of automobile culture, this thesis has expanded the
way I think about women's participation in the sport of Drag Racing.

My grandfather, father and spouse have been interested in some
sort of automobile culture for most of their lives. Searching for my position
in their interests, I was inspired by a peer during my coursework of my
Honours Bachelor of Arts. She was a little over five feet tall, extremely
quiet and seemed rather intimidated in a classroom setting. As she sat
beside me I noticed that she had a NHRA (National Hot Rod Association)
pin on her purse. I thought of the past summer when I went to an
international drag racing competition. These pins were being sold at one
of the many booths at the event.

I decided to ask her if she had attended the event. She replied "No
I didn't get to go this year". She explained to me that she was
disappointed that she did not get to go because her parents went without
her. She asked me if I wanted to go to a drag race in a small, close-knit
town near the university city. The following summer, I knew what my
thesis would be about. My peer, who seemed afraid to speak in class,

completely changed her behaviour during the drag racing event.

She was a female drag racer. She was aggressive and full of excitement. Two completely different social roles; one as a calm intellectual student and one as a 'take charge' drag racer.

Introduction

Racing at speeds of 210 miles per hour, gender seems non existent. Unlike other sports, when you actually watch a drag race, gender roles may seem to be invisible. However, the rituals, values and norms of drag racing create ideal gender roles in the sport's followers. Over the past fifty years, women have begun to emerge in their own right in the sport. Increases in women's participation in male defined spaces have a strong potential to redefine old roles of femininity and masculinity through newly developing identities.

A thorough literature review will be embedded within my analysis to explore theories that are associated with women in male defined spaces such as sport. My grounded framework will include interpretive sociological and feminist theories of masculinity and femininity. I will examine women's gendered experiences and stereotypical views of femininity in sport. A detailed analysis of women in drag racing will explain the changing values and norms around women's roles through their increasing participation (Blinde & Phillips 2003:84). This will create a multidimensional framework for my research on women in drag racing.

Purposive samples using participant observation and detailed key informant interviews will address gender in this subculture. In both participant observations and in depth interviews, I address specific questions that will facilitate an understanding of social relationships and gender roles. Does gender segregation exist in drag racing? And if so, in what ways does it segregate women's participation? What motivates men

and women to participate? Are these motivations changing, and if so why? If both men and women are concerned with achievement and competition, are they both portrayed and viewed as serious racers? In this thesis, I will analyze the themes that arise in my research by associating them with relevant critical studies and my own past experience as a participant in this sport. I will include case studies from specific accounts of the experiences of women as drag racers. I will identify certain values and norms in this subculture. I explore specific themes and discourses that will be utilized throughout my research. In my own perspective, subcultures like drag racing may create an arena for women (with their increasing participation) to step outside of traditional boundaries which usually constrict both genders.

I believe that bringing forward and analyzing the experiences of women racers may challenge traditional male racing norms and may create opportunities for women to become equal competitors against men. If drag racing creates an associated meaning that is the same for both men and women, perhaps we can use these meanings to combat the constraints on women's activities due to gender roles to show that women do not have to be excluded from racing and by extension, from any male-dominated sport. These issues are important because women and men should be given the same opportunities and positive empowerment in society. I argue that women's participation in drag racing has created new opportunities for role deregulation, equal competition and contributes to changing ideas of gender within today's society. With women's increasing

participation in male-defined spaces, I suspect that many gender roles will change and create new meanings of femininity and masculinity.

Drag racing as a subculture began as primarily masculine and/or a male dominated sport. Women began as domestic supporters of their husbands' drag racing participation and in this role, were absent as competitors or 'real' participants in the sport (Muldowney 2005). Through changes within society and increasing participation of women as serious sport competitors, ideals of masculine and feminine sports are changing (Wheaton 1998). However, as women become competitors within drag racing, it is interesting to ask why certain changes have taken place and what this means in and beyond the subculture.

The remainder of this chapter is focused towards my key source: a weekend drag racing event in a small northern Ontario town. I begin with an analysis of drag racing as a subculture and will outline social relationships, norms and gender roles which exist in the event. Then I provide a detailed description of the event, followed by a discussion of my ethnographic methodological approach including participant observation and key informant interviews. My overall methodological approach is ethnographic. The importance of each method is discussed in detail.

Drag racing creates an arena for social relationships to be created and gender norms to solidify in the interactions of the participants within a given event. Many spectator sports such as hockey create a relationship between the athletes and spectators for a few hours; drag racing however, includes interconnectedness between the relationships of the spectators

and the racers because the event lasts an entire weekend. All participants such as racers, administrators, spectators and supporters reside at the actual event. The drag racing event provides a public space where both spectators and racers can participate, but also a private space where participants can sleep, eat and perform their regular daily routine inside the event. Therefore, drag racing can in one sense be seen as a public sport, and in another a private event.

Like most subcultures drag racing has its own set of values and norms. The race car itself generates a specific associative field of representations of masculinity and feminity. Drag racing creates an arena crossed or marked by kinship systems, social relationships and more specifically gender roles of masculinity and femininity. I will also provide a detailed description of the drag racing event I observed, including an explanation of spatial dynamics of the site so as to understand the context within which participants act and interact on and off the track.

The Drag Racing Event

This study focuses upon one drag racing event located in Northern Ontario. A thorough description of the event here sets the stage for my analysis in the following chapters. The explanation derives from my observations and from participant explanations of the event.

The event takes place on an airport runway owned by a paper mill that is situated in a small town. This town's population is usually miniscule compared to the amount of people that visit for the event. According to

the participants, the town's population more than doubles in size for this one weekend. Compared to international drag racing events where the participants are from different parts of the world, the small size of this community makes this event unique, because many participants (both racers and spectators) live locally or in nearby towns.

The event is coordinated by local race car and hot rod owner associations. Most of the proceeds from admission fees are used to cover expenses for the event; any profits are donated to local schools, hospitals, and organizations such as boys and girls sports leagues. Local businesses set up booths to sell their products or services such as t-shirts, car parts, or food items. Local organizations such as schools also benefit from this event through fundraising. At this particular event, a local elementary cheerleading team was selling snow cones to raise money.

Racers from interprovincial and international speedways and nearby towns gather to compete at this event for one weekend of racing. Racers begin to arrive on Thursday to set up their camping areas. On Friday and Saturday, there are qualifying races which place cars in classes based on speed. Sunday is 'race day' where all races are official and at the end of the day (around 5pm) a winner is announced. The event officially ends Sunday evening. Admission fees for racers are far more expensive than for those who are spectators. Racers pay $60 each day for admission whereas spectators pay $15 per day. Many people camp within the area of the event, paying a fee of $10.00 per night. Washroom facilities are provided. Many people camp in either trailers or tents.

Security and safety measures are ensured for each driver and camper/spectator through the use of security guards and safety regulations which are posted near the race car inspection building.

Also, paramedics are on hand during races to ensure the safety of each driver. Each competitor must undergo specific tests with his/her vehicle before they are admitted in a race. Safety tests are conducted on cars by certified professionals. Regulations are based on how fast the vehicle is. The faster the vehicle, the more regulations there are to follow for both the race car and the driver.

The rules and regulations governing the event are approved by the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA). It is regulation that if two people are driving the same race car, they have to drive in different car classes (See discussion infra chapter 3). The classes consist of speed times for vehicles. If a race car takes ten seconds to go one quarter mile, the racer is classified as Super Pro class. Overall there are six classes; Super Pro (10 seconds or less), Pro (10-10.99), Super Street (11-11.99), Sportsman (12-12.99), Street Modified (13-13.99), Street (14 -slower). There are gender constraints that prevent women from partaking in higher class races which I will explain in a later chapter. There are also socially organized spaces within this event.

Participants are arranged into specific spaces. There are three main spaces that are part of this event. Each space has its own activities, behaviours, social norms and values. The spatial differences are associated with a social hierarchy between the racers and spectators:

1. "The Pits" is the area where only competitors and their pit crews camp and park their vehicles. Each racer has a pit crew and the latter is usually organized around support people such as family and friends and automotive mechanics. Social interactions between these people are usually different from those between racers and spectators, and those among spectators[1].

2. "The Zoo" is where the spectators camp and park their vehicles. This area is a grassy field surrounded by trees with large lights in the middle used to survey the spectators. The Zoo and the Pits are separated by a long fence and security building. There is overnight surveillance of the space between the Pits and the Zoo. Surveillance of the Zoo is high due to an increase in violent behaviour in this space over past years. On Friday night there were many violent incidents and as a result, on Saturday police officers were stationed in the Zoo.

There is a fence between the Pits and the Zoo with an entrance in the middle and a security guard building. During the races, spectators are allowed to pass through the fence and watch the race at the drag strip. During the night, spectators are not allowed to pass. However, the pit crew and racers are allowed through the fence into the Zoo whenever they want. The main space where social interaction takes place is the drag strip.

3. The strip is a quarter mile long with three spectator stands to the west and one to the east. At the beginning of the strip is the burnout box.

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[1] detailed diagram is available as Appendix C

This is where drivers partially burn their tires so that they can have more traction during the race. After this, there is the start line and the 'tree'. The tree is a column of lights which start from yellow to green with red lights on the side. This tells the driver when to start the race. If a driver starts before the light turns green, he or she will receive a red light which means disqualification. Both spectators and racers participate in the event in one way or another in this area.

These spatial differences are important for understanding the social aspects of this event. Specific divisions such as age (old and young), status (racer and spectator), and gender (man and woman) could exist in all of the spaces (Mercier & Werthner 2002:115). However, there are different roles and norms associated with each division in different spaces. For instance, a woman who is a spectator between the ages of 16 to 25 often camps overnight in the Zoo. Through my observations, most women with these characteristics are seen as sexual objects by the men who mainly participate in the Pits. However, a woman of the same age who is a racer will stay in the Pits. This woman will be seen as a respected member who needs to be protected from the Zoo. To distinguish between and explore these spatial variations creates a better understanding of the social implications that constrict certain participants from specific spaces. Depending on where a woman participates, there are specific gender roles and norms that are associated with each space. An example of these variations is that most women in the Zoo are seen as 'bad girls' as compared to the women in the Pits who are viewed as needing protection

from the participants in the Zoo. This creates a different view for women in different spaces which will be discussed further in later chapters. A detailed explanation of the methods used in this study is important to understand how data are collected.

Methodology

This is a study in interpretive and critical sociology which includes an exploration of the experiences of women and gender roles for them in the context of drag racing (Jarvie 2006: 25). According to Schwandt, interpretive research creates an opportunity for both the participant and the researcher to develop their own interpretation of a particular topic or event (1994). This approach allows me to explore both the woman's own explanations for her participation in drag racing, as well as the cultural norms which are challenged through increasing their participation (Schwandt 1994: 118). I also used a critical sociological approach to analyze sport participation in three ways: the historical, the comparative and critical (Spickard et al. 2006). In Spickard et al's view, it is impossible to make changes in sport without first knowing the history of the sport and how the sport came to exist. A comparative analysis examines sport from perspectives other than the researcher's such as comparing theories or more specifically interviews that explore the sport participant's perspective. A critical approach "allows us to engage in examinations and discussions of contradictions and complexities in sport and society, thus moving us toward thinking and acting critically to create change where

necessary" (Spickard et al. 2006:xi). This analysis informed the types of questions that I asked during my interviews (discussed later in this chapter). The goal of this thesis is to provide an ethnographic account of the meaning of gender in drag racing. To best describe and analyze the experiences of women drag racers, I have chosen several methods of data collection.[2] Participant observations, in-depth interviews and case studies of media sources were used to collect information that surrounds this subculture.

Through participant observation, I explored many dimensions of gender relationships in one annual drag racing event. I conducted interviews with specific participants to examine in depth gendered experiences. The point is to examine the experiences of women in this sport by understanding the meaning they give to their own participation. I drew from media sources for a contextual analysis of themes. I utilized my past experiences and understandings of this event and the literature about women in male-defined sports to ground my research questions and observations. Each of these methods contributed a different type of data,

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[2] These research methods have been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. Attached are Appendices to this work including: Research Ethics Board Approval letter (B), Researchers Certification and an interview schedule (A). Also included, is an attached copy of the researchers Certificate of Completion of the Introductory Tutorial for the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. All information collected during the study will be shared only amongst researchers and be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years.

which creates a rich context for my exploration of women in drag racing. I will discuss each method of data collection, why each is helpful to this study and how each method worked in the field.

Participant Observation:

Participant observation is a type of data collection often used in ethnography. Ethnography is "an approach to field research that emphasizes providing a very detailed description of a different culture from the viewpoint of an insider in that culture in order to permit a greater understanding of it" (Neuman 2003, 534). A participant observer is a researcher who takes part in the study s/he is observing (Schwartzman & Strauss 1974). Through participating in a culture the researcher is able to become, in a sense, an 'insider'. This ethnographic approach allowed me to understand what it was like and what it meant to be part of the event I was observing.

I was a participant observer in an annual Drag Fest held in Northern Ontario that took place in August, 2007. I examined all social aspects of this event through participant observation. Other participants were comfortable interacting with me about their experiences because I was not an 'outsider'. This was useful because I was able to speak freely with participants.

This specific event was a convenient choice - it is in a nearby location and I expected that most interview participants would reside in close vicinity to the researcher. Although I initiated some conversations,

overall, my limited interaction with participants and their anonymity meant that there was minimal risk for the participants being observed (Schwartzman & Strauss 1973: 60). My past experience as a participant of this event was important in preparing to observe and analyze the event. Understanding what people meant when they spoke slang or words associated with the sport as well as understanding the social organization of the event was critical.

To be an ideal participant observer, I needed to make sure I could 'fit in' with the crowd of participants. In drag racing culture, what you wear, how you act, and what you say determines whether you are accepted by the people participating. I chose my clothing so that I would be seen as a drag racing enthusiast. I wore my 'High Octane' T-shirt along with Capri pants and flat bottom Mary Jane Shoes. I chose my words carefully. I used specific terms associated with racing and started conversations by asking questions about the racer's vehicles. The race car is an important part of the entire event (Post 2001). All of these features included with my 'easy going' personality, helped me pass as a participant observer because I was not seen as different from those I was observing.

My own understanding of this subculture helped me to locate and isolate meaning within the context of my observations. As I conversed with and heard other participants speaking to one another, I paid attention to the language that was being used including verbal and body language. The different styles of attire between genders and types of participants

were important to observe to better understand how each participant portrayed themselves within this event. Behaviour changes and differentiations depending on who the participant was and what s/he was doing at the time were important. The exciting, competitive noisy atmosphere brought participants into the event. This atmosphere also connected the spaces, even though each space had a particular purpose.

My exploration and interpretations of the 'signs of gender' examine body deportments, clothing customs, hair styles, and complex behaviours portrayed by the men and woman participants (Pronger 1990:54). Pronger explains the arena of gender and how it is identifiable through characteristics of feminity and masculinity (1990). When observing the signs of gender I also took into consideration that this may change within different spatial areas of the event. An outline of how masculine and feminine traits were categorized provided a basis upon which to examine gendered phenomena (Oglesby 1978:77). I paid attention to any expressions and behavior associated with stereotypically masculine traits in women, and vice versa. These "cross-expressions" are also important in understanding the gender dynamics of this particular subculture (Beggan & Allison 2001:1). This was equally important in understanding the gendered dynamics of the event when women racers acted more masculine than feminine in order to be seen as less threatening (see discussion infra chapter 2). Instances where the observed phenomena and/or behaviour are different from stereotypical gender roles were examined and identified.

Nancy Theberge examined adolescent female hockey players' view of traditionally or stereotypically masculine traits such as competition and aggression (2003). Theberge explained that the female hockey players "emphasize the importance of being aggressive, which they define as being powerful and sometimes fearless" (2003: 497) which they understood as key characteristics of ideal hockey players. Since there is already a 'masculine' based stereotype that surrounds male dominated sports such as hockey and drag racing, women may adopt and exhibit the same traits as they become part of the sport. I noted this behaviour when it occurred, as I believed it would enhance my understanding of gendered roles at this event. Perhaps, traits such as aggression and competition are not only masculine. Perhaps with women's increased participation in male dominated sports, stereotypes about competitiveness as masculine, which exclude women, may change. If stereotypes of masculine and feminine type traits around sports change, this could create new opportunities for women to compete as equal competitors and generate new definitions of the ideal athlete.

Interviews: Exploring the Person behind the Helmet

My interviewees included key informants who were selected through an analysis of the kinship and friendship systems that exist within this subculture. Open ended interviews and questions are utilized to explore each participant's interpretation of his or her own experiences according to methods explained by Schwandt (1994), Donnelly (2002) and

Greendorfer (1974). Open ended interview techniques are useful in how they bring participants' voices forward - their own words are treated . . . "as transparently meaningful and as evidence in themselves rather than as complex social constructs which are the products of pre-given discourses, in effect 'written' in advance as scripts" (McRobbie 1994:163). There were no leading questions to veer responses in any way. Each interview included an in depth session with a participant from the observed event (Schwartzman & Strauss 1973). I reflected on the data several times, so that new interpretations could be made. I asked each participant for contact information if there was a need for clarification.

As I conversed with participants I began to tell them about my study. They were really interested in what I was doing and introduced me to the female drag racers at the event. I chose these drag racers to be interviewed. I asked each interviewee if they would like to take part in my study. If they were interested, I gave each of them a letter explaining the study and a consent form.

I did not disrupt the naturalistic environment that is associated with this event. All interview participants were told that they were free to refuse to answer any question, or withdraw from the interview at any time. I intended to record each interview through a recording device (after asking permission) as well as taking notes. However, the recording device was not realistic within this type of atmosphere as noise from the race cars interfered with recordings. In result, observations were written in my own notes and quotations were identified as such. The research results will

not identify any of the participants of this study. All participants are identified by using letters such as Interviews(ees) A, B, C and D.

To parallel my own research with a useful strategy used by Stuart & Whaley, specific theory, contextual and characteristic questions guided each interview (2005). This approach is similar to the critical sociological method of analyzing sport participation as I mentioned earlier (Spickard et al. 2006). Stuart and Whaley divided their interview questions in three categories in order to address several aspects of their study.

For instance, the first type of questions set the base of the interview by relating and testing previous theories surrounding research in sport and gender. As discussed previously, the historical aspects of the sport are important in understanding the flow of gender changes and non changes within a specific sport (Spickard et al. 2006). Theories including feminist ideas of gender norms focused on questions concerning power relations, such as "Who would you consider more experienced? You or your father/ spouse? Why?"

The second type of questions which were used by Stuart and Whaley were contextual and examined the atmosphere and dynamics of the event. In my research I also explored spatial differentiations. This lends to the critical sociological perspective where conceptualizations of each participant are explored to include their perceptions instead of the researcher's interpretation (Spickard et al. 2006).

The last type of question explored the characteristics of participants such as ideas about feminine personality traits, competitiveness and

endurance and how they interpret their lives and participation in the event. Also, I asked questions that specifically explored gendered experiences drawn from my participant observation - for example, I asked the interview participants with whom they came to the event. In some cases, I was sitting at their camping area at which time I asked the interview participants with whom they came to the event and drew questions from the interviewing experience as well as the answers. Through a critical sociological perspective, this type of interviewing will examine the 'taken for granted assumptions of everyday life' and collectively contrast past theories with the interview responses (Spickard et. al. 2006:xi).

In total, four interviews were conducted for this study. Three were conducted during the event. One interview was conducted over the telephone, following the event as the interviewee was unavailable during the event. During each interview I took notes and used quotations to distinguish any response that was written verbatim. It was important for me to conduct most of the interviews during the event so that the experience was still fresh.

Three of the participants were female drag racers (interviews A, B and C). Few women participated as drag racers. Most women were supporters or spectators. It was important for me to understand why the women who did race chose to be different. To understand all aspects of women's participation, the fourth interview was with a woman who was a supporter of her male spouse who was a racer (interview 'D'). Utilizing a purposive sample, characteristics was distinct to certain participants that

determined whether they were asked to participate in an interview. When data were collected, I examined both the similarities and differences between responses.

Body language and the atmosphere of the interview were observed to examine compatibility and reflexivity between the researcher and the participant (Schwartzman & Strauss 1973: 60). Within each interview, I determined whether a certain question made the interviewee uncomfortable or whether more information needed to be drawn from her response. The interview was reflexive since if specific things happened during the interview, or if the interviewee was extremely interested in a specific question or aspect of the sport, I would then ask questions that were directly related to her interests and what was going on. For instance, during one interview, a loud car was turned on right beside the interview site. Instead of pushing the interview questions through, I waited for the engine to be turned off and both myself and the interviewee laughed and talked about our interruption. Considering that the person who started the car was her uncle, I asked questions that were directly related to her relationship with him. It was important for me to be reflexive so that the duration of the interview could move smoothly, just as if it were a 'normal' conversation. This reflexive approach to interviewing is seen as key to obtaining the full thoughts and opinions of the interviewees on a topic (Kerr 2007).

While all interview participants were female (3 drag racers), the perspectives of men who were participating as drag racers were included

within my ethnography. There were more men than women in the Pits, and the men's opinions were more public and/or made aware to me through casual conversing, so they were accessible through my participant observations. I observed both men and women as participants so that I could examine the gendered relationships within this sport. As I explained earlier, the gender separation between men and women within this event is used to explore the constraints and empowerment that surround the experiences of the female participants.

The focus of my participant observations and interviews is to understand and analyze the drag racing subculture through this specific event. Also, to understand who the participants were and how they viewed themselves within this subculture.

Case Studies

In addition to participant observation and interviews, case studies of women such as Danica Patrick and Shirley Muldowney were used to examine gender in the drag racing subculture through their own accounts as racers. These two women were chosen because Shirley Muldowney was an influential racer who changed views about women in drag racing (Post 2001:261), while Danica Patrick is a recently popular female Indy car racer who has been successfully competitive with her male counterparts winning the 2008 Indy Car Championship (Patrick 2006, Danica Racing). While Shirley Muldowney's experience establishes how women became part of the NHRA and competed equally against their

male counterparts, Danica Patrick's experience explains the gender roles and norms that are currently embedded in this subculture.

Limitations:

I realize that this study will not be representative of the entire subculture of drag racing. However, I intend to capture meaning through each participant's expression and my own observations of individual experiences. I have chosen to broaden my view of gender by examining my interview participants as small community racers and by also examining case studies of women racers internationally. These women's accounts of their experiences in drag racing will not only show gender roles and ideals, but will also give voice to women in this subculture.

My objective is not to be fully representative of the subculture, but to give voice to the experiences of women in society and in this subculture. To make their experiences the center of my research, I will associate meaning with their own accounts of the sport. An explanation of how I intend to analyze my data is important for organizing discursive and behavioral observations.

My ethnographic approach is embedded in all research methods used in this project. I used the case studies of women racers' autobiographies as factual statements of their experiences, and as a resource for an analysis of how the women were represented to the public. Since my interviews were conducted during the event, my experience as a participant observer was beneficial to each interview's

success. I could converse freely with each participant and react to events that were happening at the same time. Also, as I became interested in this subculture, many observations were taken from my daily routine outside of the event. I began to understand how the media portrayed women in drag racing even in a nearby bookstore (See discussion infra chapter 4).

Attaching observations from my ethnography to my interview research was a really important step in understanding the entirety of women's experiences within drag racing. I could then understand what kind of things affected women and their choices to race. Asking them questions that were related to ethnographic observations not only made them comfortable with me as an interviewer but also helped me understand the gendered differentiations of this subculture. In the following chapters, I will utilize specific analytical techniques to explore the collected data from my observations, interviews, and case studies.

Analysis

Discourse analysis "invites exploration of the purposive flexibility in people's accounts of themselves and others" (Kerr et al. 2007: 389). As I will not be fully aware of the meaning of these experiences from each participant's reality, I will associate my own meanings from my previous experience then pull out themes through the literature and case studies associated with this topic. New meanings arose as I analyzed my own observations in the context of case studies and other research on women

in sport. In some instances, re-analysis of my own observations and interview responses enabled me to re-analyze the experiences of the participants.

Masculine and feminine aspects of this subculture were explored by observing specific attributes of participants' behaviour and discourse around certain events, rituals, behaviour and language (Hall, 1980:157). These aspects will be explored through the meaning of traditionally masculine and feminine behaviours (Murphy 1984). Traditionally feminine behaviour existed within the private realm of society which created nurturing and supporting roles for women (Murphy 1984). Masculine traits can be seen traditionally in the public realm of society as aggression and competition (Murphy 1984). As drag racing has both public and private spaces, these gender roles can fully be explored through observing both male and female participants within each space. Gender roles perfuse this event within its spatial areas and affect women's choices and the ways in which they participate. An analysis of how these influence particular behaviour for men and women, as drivers, pit crew within the Pits and spectators within the Zoo, is important for understanding the gendered dynamics of this event.

Through this analysis, women's participation and experiences bring forward shifting gender norms within drag racing. It is important to analyze specific areas such as socialization, biographical and life histories to better understand the meanings and realities that are associated with women's individual experiences in sport activities (Jarvie 2006:25,

Donnelly 2002). Further, it is important to understand how women's participation could change the meaning of being a participant in this subculture (Greendorfer 1974).

Socialization creates a basis for how women understand their place in the world (Cunningham et al. 2004:861). Specific role models such as parents, coaches and older siblings can either constrain or create support for whether or not a person decides to participate in sport (Stuart & Whaley 2005:26, Oglesby 1974:123). Cultural attitudes and messages can focus on negative stereotypes of women in male-defined sports. Some characteristics seen as key to sport, are further defined as masculine or feminine. Competition, either winning against others or improving one's personal best, is central to many sports. Competition is viewed as inherently masculine and may exclude women within sports. In contrast to competitiveness, women are expected to express feminine traits, such as nurturing and supporting others' goal-seeking, rather than their own (Oglesby 1978:77). This may contribute to women's low participation levels as they move from childhood into adulthood (Hartmann-Tews & Pfister 2003:165).

On the other hand, women who further their participation in male defined sports may challenge traditional gender roles and create new social identities which society will have to recognize (Boyd, Greenhill & Tye 1997:213, Stuart & Whaley 2005:26, Kittredge 2002:163). Women's increasing participation in sports has created new opportunities for women's careers as athletes and media representatives (Staurowsky &

DiManno 2002: 128). For instance, compared to Muldowney, Danica Patrick has created a different identity for herself in the media surrounding sport participation in male dominated sports (2006) (See discussion infra chapter 4). Promoting herself as a feminine racer that is just as competitive as any man may influence other women to participate in the sport.

Much of the literature finds that support groups made up of friends and family, are important to both the participating racers and spectators (Stuart & Whaley 2005:26, Oglesby 1974:123). An analysis of kinship systems which involve specific support and motivation will be included. Social networks and their interconnectedness with kinship relations will be explored. This will be distinguished through the significant interactions and observations of the participants of this specific event.

Through my past experience as a participant in this event, I know that each racer is identified by the announcer when s/he drives to the start line. If more than one racer had same last name, I assumed some form of kinship. The organization of the participants including both the spectators and the racers will show a specific social network or kinship system depending on the age of each group member and their behaviour. During my interviews, I asked participants if they knew anyone else who was a participant and how they knew them (friend or family member?). A person's reason for participating in this event could be due to their own social relationships and networks.

I have relied on my knowledge of the social norms that are associated with relationships of participants within this subculture. As a participant, I was aware of the social norms that exist and made educated decisions about whether or not I suspected a social network or kinship system to be at work. Despite applying these social norms, I could have been mistaken about whether or not a kinship relationship existed. However, I will use specific examples to illustrate each relationship.

Specifically, ideas about the nuclear family, and heterosexual relationships will be examined as kinship through either blood or marriage relations. Social networks will be explored through specific dynamics of interaction between the participants. These were observed by examining the participants: conversing, physically touching (holding hands, hand shakes), walking beside and then following, and sitting beside each other. Each unique observation will be identified in detail.

Kinship and social relationships will be explored because of the importance of support systems for all participants in sports and subcultures (Stuart & Whaley 2005:26, Oglesby 1974:123). I explored social relationships to compare how women participate differently depending on how their relationships define gender roles. For instance, Danica Patrick (2006) explains that having the support of her parents is directly related to her success as a race car driver.

I examine women's invisible experiences that are now only becoming recognized in drag racing. From looking for an autobiography of a woman automobile racer, to exploring their role in the history of the

sport, by my own observations and interviewee comments, I found that women are only partially visible in drag racing as equal competitors with men.

Chapter Structure

In the following chapters I will discuss women's participation in sport. Please note that each chapter will include an overview of the literature about the topic, my own observations, and comments made by the interviewees.

Chapter one examines the history of women's participation in drag racing. Examining socialization and gender in subcultures is important for understanding the lived experiences of each participant.

Chapter two explains the pressures that women endure while being a participant. Spatial differences within the event create roles and norms for each gender within an area. The spaces where women primarily participate define how they are viewed by other participants and how they portray themselves.

Chapter three distinguishes the reasons why women participate and what keeps them interested in the sport. Since drag racing is portrayed as a masculine sport, where do women fit? Do women thrive on competition in the same way as male racers?

Chapter four explores women's participation on an international level. This chapter answers the question: does women's participation in male defined sports change the entire social organization of this

subculture? This chapter discovers what drag racing means to the women who race and what this could mean for other women in society. The question of whether drag racing creates an arena for redefining gender and creates opportunities for women is answered.

Chapter One

What Car Do I Drive?

I originally chose this title as a way to express the cultural norms directly related to drag racing. The race car is one of the most important aspects of drag racing, because cars place racers in specific speed classes or spatial group within the Pits (hot rodders vs. family cars). However, I soon found that asking what kind of car racers drive parallels asking about which social role a woman finds herself while participating in a drag racing event. Women have participated in drag racing almost as long as men have but in different roles.

Within this chapter, I will explore the role of socialization in the drag racing event. Since women participate in many different ways; supporter, spectator, and racer - it is important to understand why they participate and what factors shape their involvement.

As children grow, our parents, school, media, and other social institutions teach us how to act, speak, react and so on (Hall 1980). Societal norms and values are communicated and social and gender roles are taught. The socialization of gender norms create specific ideals (masculinity and femininity) for boys and girls, which affect the areas in which they participate within society. Understanding how a person explains their worlds has a lot to do with his/her social location (Hall 1996, Kerr et al. 2007). One's socialization as a child, trends, defining events within society at the time, and class position will influence the path they take. Socialization may also shape how meaning is made in one's own

life and how others populate a shared world. Socialization influences one's own interpretations of gender norms (Pronger 1990). Although there are changing values and norms within our society today, especially regarding gender roles, many people still understand what it means to be an 'ideal' boy or girl, man or woman. Feminist theorists identify specific roles with which women are expected to conform from the time they are children to when they reach adulthood (Hall 2003).

Conceptualizations of Women in Sport

Socialization shapes how we understand the world we live in. As Patricia Murphy explains: "Through the process of socialization, individuals learn how to be "appropriate" members of their societies; thus, an important part of socialization . . . is gender socialization - learning how to be an appropriate male or female" (1984:188). Despite normative gender modeling, gender is a continuously changing societal norm. It is a binary view of the world in which specific behaviours and characteristics are constructed differently for men and women, depending on their cultural and historical context (Nelson & Robinson 2002, Jarvie 2006).

However, gender stratification has an inflexible dimension. As Brian Pronger explains gender is a myth: "Masculinity and femininity are interpretive contexts that assign value to gestures and attitudes that are in themselves valueless . . . The interpretation of a gesture as masculine is an invocation of the mythic world of gender power" (1990:50). His exploration of gender as power explains how women and men are

separated by the ideas or myths of how each gender is supposed to act and speak in society. Ideas of masculinity and femininity do not exist naturally in Pronger's view, but in a social context of power for men to be empowered and women to be devalued as productive people within society (1990).

Similar to Pronger (1990), Duquin and Oglesby view gender as a method of separation between men and women within the realm of sport: "Traditional sport has been a social mode (a socialization process) for the particular stylization of sexuality which is normative in our society . . . females come to learn that correct and coordinated movement patterns are associated with males and that uncoordinated and inefficient movement patterns are associated with females" (1978: 76). Gender socialization within sport activities teaches men and women how to act and behave 'normally' within their own sport and whether to participate in a sport depending on its masculine and feminine requirements. A sport that is constructed as masculine is usually not welcoming to women participants (See discussion infra chapter 3 and 4). This is helpful in understanding gendered experiences within drag racing because the 'ideal' type of racer is masculine.

Sport as Masculine

The definition of the ideal racer as male permeates the entirety of this subculture. It is commonly assumed that the race car driver is male. This raises questions such as: Where and how do women participate in

drag racing? When women are racers, how does their participation affect notions of the ideal racer in a (masculine) sport? If there is a place for both genders, where do they participate within this subculture?

When you look at a race car, you cannot tell the gender of its driver, but the car itself exudes masculinity. There are no identifying features that would help you construct the gender of the competitor under his/her helmet and racing suit, strapped into the driver's seat. However, there are assumptions that underlie who could be driving the car. There are gender specific sports that associate traits and presuppose who should participate in particular types of sports (Stuart & Whaley 2005:26, Kittredge 2002:163, Brooks 2001:1). The significance of auto racing is that gender norms are still created without obvious visual representations of the racers. The masculine view of the race car is explored in Tom Wolfe's book, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (1965) in his own interpretation of car culture in the 1950s and 60s.

The race car is symbolized as powerful through the loud noise of its engine (Wolfe 1965). Most male drivers were also expert mechanics, the idea being that the man with the most powerful engine which can be called 'boss', gave this man power within the sport through his own competitive nature and his knowledge of cars (Wolfe 1965). The car is seen as an object under masculine control through technical expertise which creates power for men in automobile type sports (Wolfe 1965).

When exploring the actual mechanics of the race car, it seems that there are gendered roles. Reuel Denney (1957) examined the creation of

the automobile as distinguishing specific characteristics of who the driver should be. An example is the family man driving a van instead of a sports car which signifies a specific role for the man and the car (Denney, 1957: 139). He explained the difference between the mechanics and driving the car as a strict personalized sphere between professionals and amateurs (Denney, 1957: 142). This is similar to the experiences of women in drag racing as they try to be appreciated as serious competitors and are compared negatively to men because they may not know the mechanical parts of the race car.

Automobile culture in general, has created its own notions of gender norms as a basis for organization and space (Inglis 2004:200). This theory discusses the man as the subject and the woman as the object (Wolfe 1965: 82, McRobbie 1994:14). Men have traditionally controlled automobiles as driver, or as an expert mechanic, or both. Women have traditionally been passengers in the cars and supporters of their husbands rather than drivers. As men traditionally had power over women's lives and their cars, the ideas surrounding the car reflected these power relationships, where the car is signified as a feminized object.

Wolfe explains the importance of a beautiful curvilinear body shape is ideal for an automobile: ". . . all that speed and power, and all that lovely apparatus, has tremendous emotional meaning to everybody in customizing" (1966: 82). This can be reflective of how a woman's body can be viewed and is something that should stay in the private realm so that her (or in Wolf's book the car's) beauty can be kept as a contained

object (Weitz 2003). This creates a power struggle between men and women where women seen primarily as objects, like a "feminized" car, cannot be simultaneously seen as worthy competitors. If the man drives and 'works on' (as a mechanic) the car, he has control over it, therefore if women are seen as passengers and as the car itself, so can men potentially have control over her success. This objectification is common in car culture, and does create some barriers to women's participation as drag racers. However, there are other aspects of male power in drag racing, as well as signs of their disruption, as can be seen in my interviews with drag racing women (See discussion infra chapter 4).

In light of the masculine cultural expertise about cars, women racers like Shirley Muldowney were subject to close scrutiny because they weren't mechanics and thus considered amateurs compared to professional male counterparts who were mechanics (Post 2001). As most women were not yet experts because they could not race without the assistance of a man (who were mechanics), their gender roles allowed power to accrue for men as experts which made women less than equal competitors in drag racing. These gender roles make it exceptionally difficult for women to participate in drag racing: they are seen as unproductive and inactive within the sporting arena (Pronger 1990). Perhaps women's increasing participation in male defined sports like drag racing may change views of the ideal racer and redefine what was once entirely masculine towards a gender neutral sport. Since women have

been increasing their participation, gender differences may become invisible in some instances.

Nancy Theberge studied girls and boys participation in hockey and ideas surrounding power and competition (2003). When exploring the idea of team work, Theberge found: "A particularly powerful setting for empowerment are team sports in which opponents physically confront one another, such as football and ice hockey. Confrontational sports celebrate the force and power that is at the heart of the association of sport and masculinity. The team element of these activities is significant for providing the bonding and group association that reinforces members' identification with the activity" (2003:499). When associating this with the experience of women in drag racing in history as opposed to currently, this new idea of teamwork could create a possible avenue for women to be accepted and included in the sport of drag racing.

Whereas historically, women such as Muldowney were looked down upon because they had to depend on male mechanics, according to Danica Patrick (2006) a famous Indy Car driver, all professional racers today have a pit crew that consists of mechanics, sponsors, engineers, statisticians, and coaches, mostly men and some women, whom she considers her 'team mates'. According to Patrick (2006), a successful win is accomplished interdependently by the efforts of the racer and his or her pit crew. This idea of team mates or 'working as a team' can be seen as an important way for women to become included in the sport of drag racing. Identifying that both women and men racers have a pit crew

creates a common experience for each gender within the sporting arena. This could potentially create opportunities for women to not only have similar goals as their male counterparts, but to be considered as an equal competitor within the sport of drag racing (Lenskyj 1985).

Socialization of Societal Norms during the Drag Racing Event:

When exploring women's participation in drag racing, the social location of the participant is important. Just as the history of women in drag racing is connected with their potential increasing participation in the future, so is a woman's understanding of the sport arena and where she sees herself participating.

Depending on socialization and the life experiences a person may have endured, specific norms and values would have established a concept of what it means to be male or female and what implications there are for a person who does not fulfill those roles (Lenskyj 1986). This can be seen when examining a drag racing event. When the first race was about to begin, I walked around to look at the behaviour of the participants.

Socialization occurs in many different arenas as drag racing has its own set of social regulations, behaviours and gendered phenomena. Each participant is subject to these norms. Within my participant observation during a drag racing event, I saw instances that clearly identified these social norms and gendered spaces.

The burnout box is the area before the drag strip. As most racers line up before a race, they have to drive through the burnout box to get to the starting line. This area gives drivers a chance to warm up their wheels. Usually this is done by putting a car in the 'first gear' position and applying pressure to the gas pedal. The result is a large cloud of smoke which usually comes with the smell of burning rubber.

As I first walked by the burnout box, I saw a mother whose son had turned away due to his eyes burning. The boy appeared to be between the ages of five and seven. As soon as he turned away, she grabbed him and turned him around to stick his face in the smoke again. She wanted him to partake in the experience of smelling the burning rubber.

My observations revealed that the burnout box is a masculine space. Most of the participants who were in this space were men. As the smoke increased, most men appeared happy and applauded. This is an experience that clearly highlights the importance of each participant's masculine behaviour. To be part of this space a participant must enjoy the loud noise of the engines and the smell of burning rubber. The mother was trying to teach her son how to act within this masculine space during a race.

Wolfe explains the importance of the car as representing everything that a man would want in life: "I don't have to dwell on the point that cars mean more to these kids than architecture did in Europe's great formal century, say 1750 to 1850. They (cars) are freedom, style, sex, power, motion, color - everything is right there" (Wolfe 1965: 78). Wolfe's

exploration of the connection between cars and men explains the importance of the cars and what it means to drive one. For Wolfe, in men's lives cars deliver the freedom of the public realm. That is, freedom for men to go wherever they want within the public realm of society. According to Wolfe, women later developed a relationship with cars on their own through their increased participation within car culture. As dual earner families (both male and female within the public realm earning income) became more common, the place for women's relationship with cars began to change (Wolfe 1965). This kind of change allowed Shirley Muldowney to earn money for her family by street racing.

Although racing is coded masculine, the drag racing event also creates places for girls to perform their femininity. As I looked to my other side, there was a booth where a local elementary cheerleading squad was selling snow cones. They were all girls between ages ten and twelve. Perhaps the socialization of femininity and masculinity is encouraged in these two areas. The mother is teaching her son to be masculine and inhale the smoke. The girls are providing refreshments - clearly a feminine activity. Cheerleaders tend to support masculine professional team sports such as football (Gilbert 1998). This is where domestic roles such as preparing food and raising money for feminine sports like cheerleading begin to be taught to girls as part of 'acceptable' gender roles.

These are prime examples of how boys and girls are taught how to act and behave. They are also taught what to be interested in. This

establishes roles for boys and girls within the drag racing subculture. These spaces create norms for each gender to follow. Girls are pressured to be nurturers and supporters. Boys are taught to be racers: "The active-passive dichotomy has often characterized the difference between masculine and feminine. Men were expected to "do" things; and women "watched" (Murphy 1984: 188). Changes in a subculture such as the increasing participation of women as drag racers may contribute to shifting gender norms.

To understand how women began participating within the drag racing event, an exploration of the history of women in drag racing is needed. As the idea of the family was changing during the 1960's and later, so was women's place in the public realm. Women were mainly part of the private realm before this change took place. However during this period, both men and women had to work in order to provide for the family and pay bills (Muldowney 2005). The idea of the family changed with both men and women playing the public and private roles.

Nancy Cott explains social attitudes that "prescribed women's appropriate attitude to be selflessness" (2001:127). In this view, women are not supposed to pursue their own interests but be in charge of family life for the benefit of their husband and children, facilitating support and pursuit of their interests. This idea of femininity conflicts with women wanting to be serious competitors in drag racing. Competing as a race car driver requires an enormous amount of support. Before women became race car drivers, they still participated in the events as wives of the male

drivers. Wives provide this support for racing husbands as an extension of their domestic roles. As mentioned earlier in the introductory chapter, there are two realms of the drag racing event. Women traditionally were part of the private realm. They cooked, cleaned and supported their husbands as drag racers. Unlike hockey where the duration of the event is only a few hours, the drag racing event takes place over an entire weekend during which participants are required to have a place to sleep, eat, and fix their cars if needed. A level of support is not only needed from spectators but from family, friends and his or her pit crew for the duration of the event. For the male spouses of women racers, providing domestic support at the race is a gender role switch, rather than a gender role extension. As women became interested in drag racing, some decided that they would like to be a larger part of the sport (Muldowney 2005).

History of Women in Drag Racing

In the 1950's the Powder Puff races began (Post 2001). This gave women the opportunity to race against each other but not against men. This event was seen as something for the wives to do in their spare time and wasn't a 'real race' as it was not condoned by the NHRA. Since the participants were women, it was seen as an amateur event and was not equal to the men's event. This was something for the wives to do on the weekends, for fun, as it were. Women were not allowed to become part of the NHRA and race as serious competitors against men. The argument given at this time to keep women out of drag racing was that if they ever

had an accident . . . drag racing would be ruined (Muldowney 2005).

Perhaps this is one way for women to be protected by men. However,

there were many women in the 1950's who were trying to change this (see

discussion intra. chapter 2).

The roles of domestic housewife and caring mother were seen as

innate to woman's lives. Before the 1950's, "the home contrasted to the

restless and competitive world because its 'presiding spirit' was women,

who were 'removed from the area of pecuniary excitement and ambitious

competition'" (Cott 2001:129). Women's participation in sport was

restricted by the focus on women's role in a caring, nurturing home.

When women wanted to participate in outdoor sporting activities it was

simpler for them to choose a sport that was acceptably "feminine".

Women who choose to participate in male dominated or masculine

type sports endure many challenges. Kittredge (2003) studied women's

participation in team sports such as hockey. When women try to become

part of male-defined, public team sport such as hockey, they often

experience challenges of role conflict (wife and athlete) which may lead

them to abandon sport (Kittredge 2003). Stepping out of the primarily

feminine private realm towards the public realm creates a difficult social

division within a woman's life (Kittredge 2003). She may be pulled away

from sports such as hockey or drag racing due to her role in family life.

The struggle between being a housewife and a serious athlete creates

specific roles for women in society that can affect their participation in

sport where they may decide to no longer be an athlete because it is more

acceptable within society to be a housewife instead (Pronger 1990: 54, Kittredge 2003:164). Within male defined sports in particular, women experience gender constraints when they try to become equal competitors against men. They are seen as incapable of being athletes because they are women and/or men are seen as professionals and women as amateurs (Denney 1957, Pronger 1990) However, some women endure these challenges to create opportunities for women within sport. Muldowney created a path for women and made it legal for women join the NHRA and race with equal status. She first became interested in drag racing when she got married. Shirley's husband, Jack Muldowney (2005) loved to drag race. In fact, street drag racing was one type of income in their household. While specifically supporting her husband as a drag racer, Muldowney was also a mother and a housewife.

While Muldowney enjoyed driving, she experienced conflict whenever she participated in a race. Her husband *let* her drive his car once at a street race, where she won against a male driver. After this race, her interest in becoming a drag racer increased substantially. She enjoyed winning the race so much; she started making an income off weekend races (Muldowney 2005). This made her feel free and she decided it was not enough for a hobby; she needed to begin her racing career proper (Muldowney 2005).

Since street racing was more of an amateur racing event, her racing scores were neither taken seriously by the NHRA nor for that matter by her husband. She was supposed to be a wife and mother first

and then an 'occasional' street racer. The Powder Puff (Post 2001) racers still remained domestic, which made Muldowney's participation out of the norm, as she wanted to race professionally instead of being primarily a housewife and/or mother. Her husband did not support her decision to compete as a pro drag racer; they argued and later separated due to her need for success and his need for a more traditional wife (Muldowney 2005).

Historically, women have not been supported when they stepped outside of the boundaries created for them: "the socialization of women into "proper" feminine behavior and the stigma attached to being defined as unfeminine have often led women to exclude themselves from sport activity" (Murphy 1984:191). Stigma surrounding women's participation reinforces the idea that women are supposed to remain in the private family realm rather than participate in the male dominated public realm of sports.

Within Muldowney's time (1950's to 1970's), women were slowly becoming part of the public realm. However, much of their time was spent in the private realm, at home as a domestic wife. Women were encouraged to be nurturing instead of taking charge of their own lives. After the Second World War, much was changing in society, "for the first time, men as well as women were encouraged to root their identity and self-image in familial and parental roles" (Coontz 2001:201). Since women and men were sharing some familial roles and bringing in income, new opportunities were created for both genders. Changes within society

created opportunities for men to become part of the family and private realm as parents and for women to become part of the public realm by earning income for the family (Coontz 2001). However, within drag racing, there were many regulations and norms that did not change to facilitate the newly defined roles for men and women.

When Muldowney first decided to participate as a competitor in a professional drag race, she was not supported by the NHRA. In fact, she had to ask for signatures from other drag car racers for approval. Most of the drivers did not want to speak with her until Connie Kalitta, a male driver, became interested in her success. Once she had his support, she was able to get the acceptance and signatures from the other drivers.

Although Muldowney depended upon Kalitta's opinion and influence to begin her racing career, she later became an NHRA champion in the Top Fuel Car series without the help of any man besides her mechanic. This was influential for other wives of drag racers and any other woman who decided to compete, according to my interviewees comments. Muldowney gave other women the chance to compete equally against their male counterparts. Even during my participant observations, most men mentioned Muldowney as an influential woman in drag racing. This not only changed women's participation in drag racing, it had some influence on the way drag racing was defined.

Ideas of femininity and masculinity can change, with women's participation in today's culture. Angela Mcrobbie (1994:159) examined the changing fads and popular culture of youths who challenged traditional

ideals of masculinity and femininity. According to McRobbie (1994) changing fads create opportunities for new definitions such as that of masculine and feminine ideals to be recreated to fit a modernized view of the 'independent woman'. Although McRobbie's study focused on teenagers, the same could be said for women's participation in drag racing. Since drag racing is part of popular culture, much of the media representations and knowledge surrounding women's participation can have an affect on the changing gender norms within the sport.

Autobiographies like Shirley Muldowney and Danica Patrick create opportunities for other women to follow their paths and create newly defined modern roles in drag racing. For instance, current female racers such as Melanie Troxel and Hillary Will proclaim; "Muldowney arguably is the most significant female sports figure of the last century, having competed not only against women, but also against men – and with great success. She opened the door for women in drag racing decades ago, and many women today are able to walk through that door when given the right opportunity" (Margolis 2006:1). However, the representations of women within popular culture have been conflicting.

Current Women in Drag Racing

Women's lack of representation and support in books about racing culture, create invisibility for women not only in sport participation, but in society as a whole (Jarvie 2006:287). Unlike Rudi Volti's book *Cars and Culture: The Life Story of a Technology* (2004) where women are

conspicuously absent, woman's involvement in auto racing beginning in the 1950's is evident in *High Performance: The Culture and Technology of Drag Racing 1950-2000* written by Robert C. Post (2001). Post examines women's struggle to become legitimate competitors and to become more generally, visible in drag racing since the 1950's (2001: 260).

The literature about women in sport and the experiences of women such as Shirley Muldowney and Danica Patrick provide a better understanding of women in drag racing. It was interesting for me to ask why women were still competing. Shirley Muldowney was an influential woman during her time and was one reason why women participated. However, much of the literature about women's sport participation examined the many pressures that excluded women from the public realm of society. Given the emphasis in the research on pressures to abandon sport, it was interesting for me to ask women why they continued to participate either as racers or as spectators.

Most women I interviewed explained their interest in this sport as being family oriented. In interview C, a woman racer explained: "that's why people participate in this sport, it is a family sport, you can bring your family wagon here and race, you don't have to spend a lot of money if you don't want to." Perhaps the idea of being part of the drag racing event meant that each participant was part of a close knit group and/or subculture that creates togetherness for each person.

All women racers and supporters explained that they were participating to be part of the event, to spend time with family and friends. One of the women interviewed explained that her family only came together for this one weekend out of the year. It was really important for her and her family to participate as racers together. It not only brought their family closer, it showed others competing that their family was a 'force to be reckoned with'. In other words, the whole family was there to race and all were competing together as a unit against the rest of the participants.

The idea of coming to the drag races to be with friends and family is important in understanding where women are placed within the event. Most women racers were spouses or mothers of racers or both. In the interview above, the woman at the race who had her family racing together, did not mention her mother who was not a racer until I asked. Her mother still participates in the sport in a supporting role for her family. Most racers and their families camp for the night in a camper, trailer or tent. As the concession stands were only open during the races, most people cooked their own meals. Her mother cooks and cleans for the family while they race. The family is made up of a one mother, a father and two daughters. I interviewed one of the daughters which I will refer to as interviewee 'A'. She explained to me that her mother didn't want to be a racer, she liked taking care of them, and that was how her family was.

I asked her if her mother actually liked drag racing. She explained to me that her mother would probably rather be on a "beach somewhere

instead" but because her whole family meets at the drag race event, it was worth it for her to come. When I asked her if she had to help her mother at all, she replied: "no, all I have to do is race".

This family's structure is reflective of much of the research about women's participation in sport. As Cott (2007) discusses the structure of the nuclear family, she explains that the socialization of children and their relationships with their parents are influential to women's participation in gender defined places such as sport. Traditional roles for women create their space as domestically supporting others in the family. Perhaps the interviewee's mother was not interested and that was the only reason why she did not race. Perhaps she liked to cook. Perhaps she sacrificed her own specific holiday or hobby for the sake of the family being together, focused on one activity for the whole weekend. However, the point here is that the interviewee did not replicate her mother's mode of participation in drag racing. This can be analyzed further by examining another female racer who I interviewed.

Another of my interviewees was a mother of one boy and one girl. I will refer to her as Interviewee 'B'. Within our conversation she explained to me that drag racing was an expensive hobby and because of this she tried to socialize her daughter into a feminine sport that was cheaper. She entered her daughter into dance classes instead of racing. Her son was still encouraged to participate in drag racing, despite its expense. In one sense, she was socializing her daughter into feminine and her son into masculine sports. However, the fact that she was a drag racer herself

created interest for her daughter. By the time she was old enough, her daughter began drag racing. This is a less common way for girls to become interested in and begin drag racing.

Most of the female racers I interviewed explained that they were interested in drag racing because of their father. Just as Muldowney's father encouraged her to create her own goals and not to settle for a domesticated life, most of my interview participants explained their own relationship with their fathers. An interviewee explained: "He used to take me out in his car"; another explained that "he taught me how to drive" and yet another explained "I used to play in the garage while he worked on his car". They all identified their fathers as key persons who created their interests in car culture and, as they got older, drag racing.

These women seemed to have the same interests as their fathers in drag racing. They all want to drive fast and participate as a racer and not as a spectator or domestic supporter. This active 'take charge' attitude used to be distinguished as masculine behaviour. Now that gender roles are shifting within society and this subculture, new definitions are emerging. As new definitions of what it means to be an ideal racer are being created, this is providing women with opportunities to create their own identities within the sport. Perhaps ideas of masculine or feminine type sports, or male or female dominated spaces, will change to depend on the context of each participant's life and ambitions rather than constraints and negative stereotypical views.

Conclusion

Drag racing began as a primarily masculine and male dominated sport. Many social changes are reflected in drag racing. When drag racing first began, gender roles were created for both men and women, these norms still exist today. But after the 1950's, society and then drag racing changed and created new opportunities for women in the public realm.

Women such as Muldowney were extremely influential in creating a place for women as equal competitors against men in drag racing. Within my interviews, I found that many of the female racers still entered the sport through their relationships with male racers such as fathers or husbands. However, with increasing participation and more women in drag racing, girls such as interviewee 'B''s daughter will become interested through their relationship with both their father and mother.

Although there have been new opportunities created for women who participate in drag racing, they still experience gendered constructs within their lives as drag racers. The drag racing event is divided into specific spaces which have gender roles within them for both men and women. The next chapter will examine women's lived experiences within a male dominated sport and in particular a drag racing event.

Chapter Two

Rolling up to the Start Line

Patricia Murphy's (1984) theory regarding the organization of the
sport event and society examined how specific spaces define gender. She
explains: "The social organization of gender in a society, because it
defines the proper spheres of social activity for men and women, will have
a significant influence on men's and women's participation and
performance in the social organization of sport" (191). This theory
explains women's roles as primarily attached to where they are and how
they interact with others at any sporting event.

As explained previously, the drag race event is divided into two
main spaces, the Zoo (for spectators attending the event) and the Pits (for
racers and their pit crew). Each space has its own activities, behaviours,
social norms and values which create different ways for women to
participate in this sport. Although women's participation in drag racing as
racers is increasing, most racers are still men, and most women in the
"Pits" participate as supporters. Although there are fewer female than
male racers, women participate in many other ways at the drag racing
event. Women are defined in certain ways according to how they
participate in the event as racers, spectators, "party girls", supporters, and
administrators.

This chapter will explore these two spaces and the ways in which
women will participate differently depending on which space they are
associated with. I will explain which ways there are to participate in each

space and whether these define gender roles for women and if women are constrained or empowered within each space.

In the Zoo, a woman's behaviour, attire and language determines how she is viewed by others. One way women participate in the Zoo is as 'Party Girls'. These women sexualize themselves through their behaviour and language. Women also participate as spectators of the race in this space. These two classifications of women's participation are signified by how they are viewed by the other participants within the event.

The second spatial area is called 'The Pits'. Women who are administrators of the event, supporters of racers and racers themselves, camp here for the weekend. Women who participate in this area are viewed differently than those in the Zoo. There are specific gender roles for women who participate in the Pits. Even women who step outside of traditional boundaries and participate as racers, are more respected than the women who participate in the Zoo.

Women who participate in each area may be seen as either conforming or nonconforming to the gendered social norms of this event. This can be a complex performance for women: perhaps a participant could be nonconforming to the dominant gender role at the event, but conforming in their social relationships within the space where they primarily participate. This is a complex shift, not a simple choice for women between two pathways. It is important to recognize that women may conform in some ways and not conform in others and may participate in both simultaneously. The point here is to understand whether a woman

follows a norm or challenges a norm or does both. For instance, some women in the Pits may be seen as nonconforming because they are racers and have a 'take charge' attitude and act more stereotypically masculine than feminine. However, the same woman may be seen as in need of protection from the participants in the Zoo through the use of surveillance and security to separate both areas.

These factors are important to understand women's experience within the drag racing event. What empowers or constrains a woman may be based on which space she participates in. These factors not only contribute to role development within socialization of women in the drag racing subculture, but also role regulation within their participation.

Cultural attitudes contribute to the exclusion of women as active participants in male defined sports. Laura Mulvey examines spectatorship and women's role in sport participation as defined by who bears the right to take part in an activity and who does not (as cited by Hall 1996). Mulvey explains her understanding of how men and women are portrayed in a film: "On the one hand, the male characters were positioned as the bearer of the look (the active eye) in the film story, with the feminine coded as visual spectacle (passive object to be looked at)" (as cited by Hall 1996:318). In drag racing, the dominant role of women is to remain in support roles such as the wife or mother of a racer. Women in supporting roles are expected to sit on the sidelines and passively watch the race instead of partaking in it, as well as providing meals and other domestic support to the racer(s). This creates a negative contrast, in terms of

gender role conformity, with women who actually decide to participate in the event as racers. Women racers are not conforming to their traditional role. This creates many pressures for women who participate as racers, including role conflict.

Jarvie (2006) explains that women experience role conflict when trying to balance two roles at the same time, such as being a mother and having to stay at home, and participating in sports and committing time for practice and races in the public realm. This may also contribute to women's low participation levels in sport as they become older from childhood to adulthood, marriage and motherhood (Hartmann-Tews & Pfister 2003:165). A sport like drag racing may become an important part of women's lives when they are young (between the ages of 12 and 20) however, this may change as a woman ages (Stuart & Whaley 2005:25). Social roles such as being a housewife or mother may create too much stress to cope with the demands of a sport, and a woman may decide to no longer participate due to role constraints (Jarvie 2006:287).

Women who further their participation in male defined sports may challenge traditional gender roles and create new social identities which society will have to recognize (Stuart & Whaley 2005:26, Kittredge 2002:163). For instance, Kittredge (2002) explained the idea that female hockey players needed to be 'ultra-aggressive' or more masculine in order to be recognized as athletes and 'real' competitors. Boyd and Greenhill (1997) studied female taxi drivers taking on masculine roles and behaviours in order to receive more respect from men. They saw that one

way for women to participate in male dominated spaces was to act more masculine and create a new identity for themselves instead of fulfilling feminine gender role expectations. As many female taxi drivers experienced disrespect from customers and fellow drivers, they decided to act more masculine: they were rude, aggressive, and used foul language to gain more respect. In Boyd and Greenhill's (1997) discussion, this behaviour seemed to benefit the women. The women were treated with respect by the male customers and they felt safe because they were less likely to be robbed if they acted more masculine than feminine. Through this method of participation, women were more respected as 'one of the boys' and were not seen as threatening normative gender roles. This can be used to understand women's experience in drag racing.

As women begin participating in male-dominated sports, they may take on more masculine roles and behaviour. This may be a way for women to 'fit in' to create their own place in the sport (Kittredge 2002). Taking on the opposite gender roles may lead to the acceptance of women in male dominated sports (Kittredge 2002). They may be seen as less threatening if they are acting the same way as a male participant. However, those who retain their feminity through their actions may be seen as nonconforming with, and even challenging the regular organization of gender roles in the event.

To understand this, it helps to ask why women are not supported when they step outside of the boundaries that society has created for them. As I observed at this event, there were conflicts between women

who participated in different spaces. I classified these women into five categories; Party Girl, Spectator, Supporter, Administrator and Racer. Women were key players in associating and portraying themselves within either spatial area. Even their clothes spoke volumes about who they were and what spatial area they were associated with. Each are pressured to act and behave in specific ways within their spatial area.

The Zoo

The spatial area called 'The Zoo' received its name through many events that have happened over time. As more people became interested in this specific weekend long event, the mix of people created conditions that could lead to violence, including excessive drinking. As this is where most spectators stay overnight, many physical and verbal fights occur each weekend. At night, there was always a large social gathering of 60 or more people - or as some participants called it a 'party' - in the Zoo area. Most people were extremely intoxicated. According to the participants in the Pits, it is called the Zoo because most men and women who participate in this space are seen as acting and behaving like 'animals'. Women, like men, are seen as irrational by the way in which they portray themselves within this space.

Women participate in two ways within the Zoo. The first is the 'party girl' who doesn't watch the races at all, but participates by drinking alcohol all day and 'having fun' or 'partying' in the camping area. Most of her friends are interested in the drag race as a party and not as a sport. It

is more of a social gathering than anything else. The second woman is a spectator who may have similar behaviour as the party girl, but she actually watches the races and participates by the drag strip during the races. The differences between these two kinds of participation were fewer than the similarities. The way in which the women were viewed by the rest of the participants, those in the Pits and the Drag Strip areas, is extremely important to the understanding of women's roles within this space.

The clothing that the participants were wearing could be associated with their specific socially distinctive style and self identity (Hall,1997:323). Stuart Hall (1997) explored representations of self identity which can be displayed through a person's actions and clothing. Clothing can be used to distinguish someone's social class, interests, gender, sexuality and age generation. Obviously these distinctions are based on my own preconceived notions and understanding of this subculture. Furthermore, this can be examined through my observations of the women in the Zoo area such as "party girl".

Depending on the gender of the participant, certain ideas about sexuality may be circulated through specific behaviour and attire which portrays the participant in a specific manner (Winship, 1980:217, Rinehart, 2005:233). For example, Rinehart (2005) discussed advertisements for competitive sailing which portrayed women as sexual objects. The women in the advertisement were portrayed as 'sexual conquests' for the male sailors instead of equal female sailors when they wore the ship's

insignia on their outfit which revealed their sexuality in a feminine and passive way (Rinehart 2005:315). The women were portrayed as a decoration for the ship rather as equal to men. This reiterates Mulvey's observation of the 'passive eye', objectifying women in films or advertisements only segregates them from men (Hall 1996). This type of gender stratification was observed in the Zoo. The 'Party Girl' portrays herself sexually by her attire and behaviour. She wears a combination of revealing shirts and skirts throughout the day and evening. She drinks alcohol for the entire day and tries to keep the attention of the male participants. This woman is not expressing a domestic femininity. Her femininity is not displayed by nurturing or care giving aspects of herself but is displayed by her own sexuality. Her sexual portrayal of herself as well as her behaviour is seen as normal feminine behaviour by the participants in the Pits.

Party girl's behaviour is different from the norm and has masculine traits such as aggression. Party girl's behaviour contradicts: "The traditional feminine ideal (which) generally d(oes) not stress aggression, competition, muscles, or sweat" as these are primarily seen as masculine traits (Murphy 1984:196). Women who are supporters within the Pits usually behave more traditionally feminine than the party girls in the Zoo who behave aggressively, and thus, are seen as stepping outside their role. This kind of behaviour creates power struggles between the Zoo and the Pit areas.

For instance, one party girl was trying to jump over the fence to get into the Pits. Although she was interrupted by a security guard she still displayed her aggressive behaviour by interrupting and repeating herself and saying "Hey baby, wanna party" over and over. While participants from the Pits can go freely in and out of each area, the participants from the Zoo cannot. A reaction to this is aggression used by this party girl. Her behaviour exemplified social struggles between the Pits and the Zoo, occurring at the event.

This party girl was not following the normal gender roles or regulations for the event. As most people from the Pits would follow and stand in line with all rules and regulations, the party girl was challenging this by climbing over the fence. A man who was challenging these rules by jumping over the fence, would be treated differently. The security guard may have been aggressive and may have arrested the man. Perhaps the woman's behaviour was not seen as aggressive by the security guard because her appearance portrayed her sexual femininity. Danica Patrick uses her sexuality to seem less threatening, rather than showing her competitive, more masculine behaviour as a racer (See discussion infra chapter 3 and 4). This can be paralleled with the party girl's behaviour, although she was acting more masculine (aggressive to the security guard), her appearance made her seem less threatening, in line with the more feminine norm of women in the Zoo.

Party girl's aggressive and loud behaviour got attention from the male participants. For instance, another party girl who had jumped across

the fence undetected, came and sat on a man's knee who was sitting at his campsite. The other men at the campsite explained to him "you know what she wants" assuming that her behaviour meant that she was looking for a sexual relationship with the man. Party girls choose to portray themselves as sexual conquests for men rather than 'real' participants of the drag racing event which is similar to the previous discussion of female sailors who were portrayed in advertisements as 'sexually available' instead of equal to male sailors (Rinehart 2005). Within these instances, women rather than equal to men are portrayed or portray themselves as sexual objects. This type of segregation is seen as normal because the women, although not supportive, are still submissive to men's participation.

In one view, party girl is acting outside of the traditional domestic feminine and nurturing norm for women. This could perhaps mean progress for women's expression of sexuality. However, the second point is that the role of party girl, while it is not traditionally domestic, may promote another stereotypical view of women as sex objects. There are other spaces where women can challenge the constraints of traditional gender roles. This will be discussed when examining women who are administrators later in this chapter.

Similar connections may be made with the woman who is a spectator. However, some women who are spectators only participate during the daytime. They are usually local women who park their vehicle in the Zoo and watch the races during the day and at night drive home.

Some of these women dress similarly to those in the Zoo. The same portrayal of sexual availability could be seen in the behaviour of these women. However, most spectator women are multidimensional types who also participate as party girls, domestic support, drag racing enthusiasts and so on. Due to the variety of these women and the accessibility of them within the event (since they were only there during the races), more observations are needed to classify the social dynamics and gendered phenomena in this woman's participation. As she enters the Pits and walks to the drag strip, she is there for the purpose of watching the races and not really to be part of the weekend event. This woman participates as an external that visits the event, watches the races but does not establish her own place within the Zoo. She is taken more seriously by those in the Pits than party girls because the spectator is actually interested in the drag race itself. A similar space that mostly consisted of the participants from the Zoo was the dance.

There was a bus that drove participants from the drag strip to the dance. The dance was in a local ice arena near the event. When I first walked into the dance, I saw three tables full of shot glasses filled with different types of alcohol. They had been pre-poured in preparation for the event. There were over 100 people. Some were sitting, others were dancing in front of the live band. There were mostly women who were dancing. A lot of men sat and conversed with each other.

At the dance, women would display themselves for the men by dancing and winking their eye at them in a sexual manner. This type of

behaviour was also typical in the Zoo. Also, the displaying of alcohol promoted the abuse of it, and many people who came from the dance, went to the Zoo afterwards to further their abuse of alcohol.

The dance as well as the Zoo was surveiled. There were two police officers watching all the participants' behaviour. The band commented to the audience that the people who were from out of town were "acting crazy" because they didn't have to see anyone again. This could explain women's behaviour within the Zoo area compared to that of the women in the Pits. Perhaps the women in the Zoo did not have any social roles or relationships to maintain with the other participants and therefore would not have any regret for their behaviour.

Maglin and Perry's book (1996): "*Bad Girls Good Girls*": *Women, Sex & Power in the Nineties* examined the gender ideologies and criticisms surrounding pornography. They explored the idea that women's sexuality could be analyzed in two different ways. Women's sexuality could be defined as submissive to men, and in another definition, as a free act of her feminity (Maglin & Perry 1996:191-2). The women in the Zoo could also be viewed in two ways. They could be seen as making themselves sexually available to men as a defining feature of hegemonic power relations between men and women participants (Maglin & Perry 1996:191). However, they could also be viewed as being free of the pressures of dominant traditional roles of domesticity and having fewer rules and obligations than the women in the Pits (Maglin & Perry 1996:192). From my observations I could examine both portrayals of the

party girls. In one instance, they are being surveiled and are seen by male participants as sexually available, in another, they are less restricted than the women in the Pits which is viewed by 'Party Girls' as a free act of their own sexuality.

The women in the Zoo are peripheral to or on the margins to the social norms of the drag racing aspect of the Pits. The closer and more involved the women in the Pits become; the more rules and norms there are for her to follow. Basically the participants in the Pits are less free and participate in a more focused environment. Women in the Pits are usually seen at other racing events and therefore may have an obligation to act certain ways in order to follow the norms of the event. There are more regulations to follow in the Pit area because it is the main area that is located in front of the drag strip. Many regulations regarding racing rules, track rules, pit rules such as where to park your vehicle and so on are all designated to the Pit area. Therefore, there are extreme differentiations between the constructs of this space and therefore between the women in the Zoo and those who participate in the Pits.

The Pits

There are three variations of women's participation in the Pits. The women who are supporters mainly consist of the spouses or mothers of the racers. Women who are administrators or workers organize the event and keep up with the maintenance of the event area. Women who are

racers are usually independent of domestic roles, however this does not always happen.

Most women who participate in this event were supporters of a racer whether that be a husband or child(ren). This is the most traditional role for women in drag racing. Currently most women still participate as supporters in drag racing. Women are expected by society and the participants at the event to remain in their domestic role. Since this woman is in the Pit area for most of the event, she cooks and cleans her trailer or tent area during the races. Although this woman is not prevented from watching the races, she spends most of her time doing domestic work rather than watching the races. Most of these women are constrained to their role of domestic femininity and do not spend a lot of time watching or participating in the races (Kittredge 2002).

Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998) examined the gender dynamics surrounding windsurfing events. They also saw that women participate in different ways within the space of the event. One type of woman in particular is the 'windsurfing widows' which are similar to the supporter women in drag racing.: "Many windsurfing widows of all ages did not participate in the sport, yet their leisure revolved around supporting their male partners: accompanying their partners to the beach, watching them, and supplying them with food and drink" (Wheaton and Tomlinson 1998:256). This is similar to most women who participate in drag racing and remain as domestic supporters of the male racers. The windsurfing widows disinterest in the sport, is similar to that of the women supporting

racers. Perhaps there are other reasons why women participate in this particular way.

This could be partially because drag racing has been known as a masculine and 'male' sport. Women are simply not expected to participate, and may be actively discouraged. Perhaps women are not interested in this sport, or don't enjoy the noise and smoke from the racing. Perhaps they have a duty to their family to take care of them especially if younger children are attending the event (Kittredge 2002). As mentioned by Wheaton and Tomlinson, the windsurfing widows were not interested in the event besides supporting their family and spouses who competed (1998). For instance, interviewee 'D' was a young woman who supported her spouse as a drag racer. When I asked her why she came to this event, she said: "he can't take care of himself, he would probably eat hot dogs all weekend . . . he's an idiot" as she laughed at the thought of him coming to the event without her. She explained to me that she needed to take care of her spouse as he participated as a racer in this event because he was incapable of taking care of himself.

Interviewee 'D' explained to me that she was originally interested in this particular drag racing event because her mother was an administrator when the event first began. She explained to me that her mother no longer participated. As Kittredge (2002) explains, women who have family responsibilities as they age, tend to spend less time participating in sports. This could be because women are creating their own families and are expected to focus on filling domestic roles. Interview 'D''s experience

shows the possibilities of shifts in women's roles in drag racing. Although her current role is 'traditional' in that she provides domestic support for her husband, a racer, her initial interest and reason to participate in the sport derives from her mother's participation. This may raise the possibility for women to see themselves in a role other than the supportive role. Women may shift in and out of these roles and go back to their traditional roles; I understand this as reinforcing their prior roles of traditional femininity.

Women further participate as administrators and cleaners. Women cleaned the outhouses every morning, mid day (between 12pm-2pm) and evening. As these women cleaned the outhouses, the men who were in charge of maintenance would drive around and collect garbage bags from the disposal bins. Mostly, men drove buggies to pick up the bags and pick up the women after they were finished cleaning. These chores for both men and women portray typical masculine and feminine roles (Pronger 1990). As cleaning the outhouse is a domestic chore, taking out the trash is a 'hands on' or masculine chore for men. Also, exploring the importance of men as the driver further defines women's roles in this event. As men are primarily seen as the 'driver' and women as the 'passenger' it clearly identifies how this space organizes gender around driving vehicles in both site maintenance and on the drag strip itself.

Women who were administrators organized and regulated the event. One woman in particular was in charge of many activities at the drag strip. As explained to me by two male spectators, there was a woman lining cars up for the race and telling others (men) what to do, so

far as watering down the drag strip and so on. She did some maintenance

duties like the male workers, but mostly was there to make sure

everything was organized and all areas of the drag strip were taken care

of during the event. When I asked the two male spectators what they

thought of this woman being in charge, they called her a 'wingbat' and

explained to me that she didn't know what she was doing because she

seemed to over-react to situations. They were responding to a particular

incident where the woman had quickly drove her quad down the drag strip

to pick up a piece of a race car. This was seen as overreacting in the

spectator's point of view.

This is a typical reaction towards a woman who has a 'take charge'

attitude. As Danica Patrick explained, as she gained more independence

in her sport, many men called her a 'bitch'. This is an example of

resistance to women's participation in drag racing. An alternative view is

that the woman in charge actually didn't know what she was doing. She

could have been inexperienced or was making mistakes and that was why

the male spectators called her such a name. However, because her

position or part in this sport consisted outside the normative role for

women, she could have been scrutinized beyond the extent that a man

would have been. This can be understood through Pink's (2003)

explanation of media representations of female bull riders who are seen

as ruining the sport (See discussed infra chapter 4).

The women who step the farthest out of the feminine gender roles

in drag racing are racers. The woman who is a drag racer competes

directly against all of the male competitors. They sometimes own their own race car. Usually their car is shared or co-owned with either their husband or father. Interview 'C' was a female drag racer who raced her father's car in a slower class than he did.

Both interviewees 'B' and 'C' drove the same car as a man, and drove in a slower class. This creates not only a class system between cars but also between genders. When I asked interviewee 'C' why she had to drive slower, she explained to me that "it was his car". However, interviewee 'B' explained to me that "it was his first girl", insinuating that she was second to the car because her husband drag raced before he met her. As mentioned in Chapter 1 the car is sometimes viewed as a feminine object. In the experience of interviewee B, she was being compared to a car and was valued less in her own opinion. If women are valued less than the actual racing car, how can they be seen as equal competitors against men? This can be understood as a way of minimizing women racers' effects on the sport. Higher speed classes retain an elite masculine space for men as professionals, which exclude women as amateurs. Racing at lower speeds keeps women in second class, less central and less visible than male racers.

However, there are positive and empowering experiences for women moving from traditional roles and creating their new identities. As Interviewee C explained: "A lot of women think that because there are not a lot of us, we are not welcome. First I was my dad's girl and once they see what I can do, they see me as a racer." This exonerates women's

competitive nature within sport where they are eventually recognized and respected by men as professionals rather than amateurs who race because they are attached to a male racer (Kittredge 2002). Interviewee 'B' won against all men in her class and was a regional champion. She raced and won! This gives hope to women's participation as equal competitors in this sport. If women can win, there is no reason why they should be devalued as serious athletes. Despite these examples of women creating a space for themselves in drag racing, there are still traditional gender roles that are taken on and fulfilled. Interviewee 'C' explained that she did not stay at the race event overnight because she lived nearby. She told me that she invites some of her fellow male drag racers back to her house and she cooks them all dinner. This could be seen as role conflict, however both do not occur at the same time. Within her 'role switching' she is respected by her male competitors because she still retains her traditional feminine domestic role after the race and seems to conform to the norm. She may be seen as less threatening. As explained previously, women who behave in more masculine ways are respected in male dominated spaces (Boyd and Greenhill 1997). Perhaps when women go outside the male defined space, women are expected to maintain more traditional gender norms. Traditional roles of women in drag racing still exist today according to the experiences of these women.

Although women create new opportunities for themselves in sports such as drag racing, at the end of the day, many remain in their domestic roles. Perhaps with more women winning, there can be hope for women

to be seen and treated as equal competitors. Within this event there are many ways in which women can participate. There was a clear difference between those who participated in the Pits and those in the Zoo.

Although both party girls and racers seem to have a 'take charge' attitude and aggressive nature, there are clear differences between the two. When I asked the female racers whether they would go to the Zoo, they said "only to party". When I asked if they would camp there over night, they said "no it's too crazy".

Basically it seems that because most women in the Pits still somewhat remain in their traditional domestic roles, they are seen as potentially vulnerable and requiring male protection from the people in the Zoo. The Pits seemed like the area where people were serious about the racing and event overall. As most men and women explained to me the difference between the two areas, the reason why they needed to be separated was because the race cars had to be protected from vandalism and theft. Although there are role dynamics which contribute to the separation of the Zoo and the Pits, most participants explained that because the people in the Pits were all there for the same purpose (racing), everyone understood and trusted each other to make sure their belongings, vehicles, trailers, etc. were not damaged or stolen.

From my past experience, there are negative views that are associated with the Zoo. Surveillance of the Zoo is high due to the increased violent behaviour in this space. There seems to be a struggle

between these two spaces. The activities and organization of each create competitive norms and distinct social differences (Pronger 1984).

Women can participate within these spaces in different ways. Each way that women participate includes a set of norms and roles that need to be either followed or broken. As some women remained in traditional feminine roles, women such as party girls and racers seem to challenge these roles. Although many women who are racers, also participate in a domestic way, there still may be empowerment for women in drag racing. With more women participating and winning as racers, opportunities for women to be recognized within drag racing as equal competitors compared to men can exist. Understanding how women's roles are affected by how they portray themselves and which spatial area they participate in, helps explain women's opportunities and constraints in the drag racing event.

In the next chapter I will focus on the women who are drag racers. I examine differences between male and female racers, how they are viewed in society and within this event. There are many views of women and men as athletes. The gendered perceptions of athleticism and competition within these views will be explored. This is important so that I can create an understanding of what opportunities and constraints there are for women in drag racing.

Chapter Three

Ready, Set, Go!

In the previous chapters, I explained how women become part of male dominated sports and discussed the role classification of women in different spaces within drag racing. These are equally important ways of understanding where women situate themselves through different kinds of participation. My central interest in this ethnography is to understand the experiences of women as drag racers and illuminate their reasons for participating and what keeps them interested in drag racing.

In this chapter I will discuss why women participate as drag racers through the experiences of my interviewees, as well as through Danica Patrick's experience as a professional Indy Car racer. Firstly, the social relationships within women's lives and in particular within the drag racing event are examined as one motivation for women's participation. The second motive is 'beating the boys'; ideas of masculine and feminine norms within sport are explored and the question of 'who' is capable of being a professional competitor is posed. The last motive is women's own interests and enjoyment of the sport, as racers. It is important to understand why women want to be part of a sport and why they continue participating. The reasons why some women become drag racers and do not participate in traditional domestic support roles are extremely important in understanding how gender roles change within drag racing.

Although some interviewees switched from racer to domestic supporter within the event, some veered completely away from traditional roles and only participated as racers. To understand why women chose to participate in different roles is beneficial in associating women's interests with increasing participation and the creation of new opportunities for women in drag racing. This chapter will explore how women are coming into their own as drag racers and explain how women themselves have created opportunities in this sport through redefining notions of femininity and masculinity.

Within subcultures like drag racing, there are a set of rules and norms that both men and women have to follow (Hargreaves 2000). The rules and norms are specific to each gender and segregate them, making men powerful, public athletes and women domestic, private wives. Considering that more males participated as spectators and racers, men were seen as 'belonging' to the sport, while women were 'outsiders'. If women who were attached to a male participant were involved in the sport, this attachment made their interest appear fully dependent on men. (Lenskyj, 2003). According to Lenskyj (2003), specific definitions of gender roles create constraints on women who want to participate in male-dominated sports. This may cause a woman to either challenge traditional norms or discontinue their participation because she may be discouraged by other participants. Interviewee 'D' explained to me that she would like to be a drag racer. However, in her own view, she would not be supporting her spouse if she was a racer as he was incapable of taking

care of himself. Therefore she decided not to participate for the 'better of her family'. To interviewee 'D', domestic support and responsibility to family was more important than pursuing her own interests in drag racing. Her experience clearly explains the connection to Lenskyj's (2003) idea of gender constraint causing women to remain in traditional selfless roles and for the betterment of the familial norms.

Jan Felshin explained "the social dynamics of women in sport as an anomaly. The anomaly results from the culture's conception of sport as masculine and women's involvement in it as inappropriate" (as cited in Murphy 1984:191). Murphy explains that women are seen as nonexistent or incapable of being equal to men when participating in sport. Women may be pushed away from sports because they cannot be seen as equal. As mentioned earlier, Interviewee 'D' may not see herself as capable of participating in another role or may be discouraged. This creates power struggles when both men and women decide to participate as competitors in sport.

Jarvie (2006) explored struggles between gender and age groups in sport participation through a Foucauldian analysis of power relations in social practices. Jarvie (2006) explains that gender stereotypes lead to gender segregation. In this case, stereotypes classify women as unequal to men and as amateurs in the sport. As mentioned in a previous chapter, men's control over the race car as ideal racers and mechanics creates power over their female counterparts. Interviewee 'A' explained that she would not be part of the race if her father did not participate because she

needed a mechanic. This is one instance where women are dependent on men and therefore have less power over their own participation because it is strictly dependent on men's participation as mechanics.

Brian Pronger explores the segregation of gender within subcultures of sport. In his own explanation subcultures: "have cultivated sporting styles, rules, and regulations that make it virtually impossible for women to participate. Rather than taking advantage of the many similarities of male and female physical capacities, sports have developed to emphasize the differences, thereby reproducing in that athletic/social sphere the mythic discourse of gender difference" (1990: 178). Gender myths create ideas of masculinity and feminity which segregate men and women through their sport participation where commonalities are not visible between genders (Pronger 1990). Furthermore, the differences between being masculine or feminine are what segregate women from sport participation. This clearly identifies the arena in which women are trying to participate and how they are constricted by the gender roles and norms that surround male dominated sports.

Feminist theories focus on how gender specific power relations result in oppression that excludes women from sport participation and push them back into the domestic, private realm of sport and society (Elling & Knoppers 2005: 258). Within drag racing, some women use the same car as their father or spouse and they are pressured to stay in a lower speed class than the male participant to whom they are related. Faster speed classes are more prestigious in the NHRA. These women do

not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts and therefore

will not be seen as equal competitors. This reinforces the tendency to see

women racers as 'amateurs' in the sport. Women are forced to achieve

on a limited basis and therefore are oppressed within their gendered role.

Society constructs identities for women through the pressures of

social stigmatization (Jarvie 2006:287, Brooks 2001:2). There are specific

pressures for women to remain in their traditional roles (Brooks 2001:2,

Greenhill & Tye 1997:213). Women who stay within their traditional roles

are more accepted than those who do not conform. As previously

mentioned, if a woman races and then cooks for her fellow racers after the

event, she is respected because she shifts back to her traditional feminine

role. Her participation in a masculine event is less threatening if she still

fulfills a domestic role. Male defined sports such as drag racing usually

condone these norms, however they are sometimes not visible depending

on the context of the sport (Nelson 1991:5, Stuart & Whaley 2005:27). For

instance to condone norms of domesticity, Interviewee B attempted to

push her daughter towards more feminine type sports such as dancing,

while encouraging her son to take part in the more expensive, drag racing

sport. However, her daughter became interested in drag racing and in

result, Interviewee B allowed her daughter to race against the boys. This

may not have been visible to other people within society; however the little

girl may now have mixed views of her place within society, and in

particular, in this event. It is important to understand whether women's

participation in such male-defined sports could challenge these definitions.

Given the reality of these pressures in women's lives, it is important to explore why women choose to remain in the sport.

Social Relationships

Social relationships within women's lives are interconnected with their participation in sports like drag racing. These relationships may provide women with the support they need to continue participating. Danica Patrick (2006) explains that her parents are key people who she solely depends on for her success in Indy Car racing. According to her, she would not be able to participate without their support. Support groups are important for both the racers and spectators participation in sport activities (Stuart & Whaley 2005:26, Oglesby 1974:123). Stuart & Whaley examined women's sport participation 'expectancy' (the amount of time that women participate in a sport) and the factors which contribute to whether a woman will participate for a longer duration in a sport (2005). They found that women who had support groups such as family, spouses, peers and coaches, participated longer in sport compared to those who were not supported (Stuart & Whaley 2005).

A significant role for women has been to maintain the family, not only physically, but emotionally and socially as well. Now that women have become part of subcultures such as drag racing there have been new ways in which women can in one way remain part of the public realm and in another, continue to be defined in terms of a key part of family relationships. Stuart Hall (1996:45) examines the family as a multidimensional connection where both traditional and modern views can

be explored: "It is traditional and modern at the same time. So when people draw on kinship as a source of identity, they evoke both old and new forms of relating, as well as the tension between them." In this view, the family creates a space where cultural norms and roles can be acted out, and either accepted or not accepted. This could potentially sway a woman's choice of how or whether to participate in drag racing. If her family understands gender norms as something that has to be strictly conformed to, then perhaps the woman will remain a supporter of her husband or children who race. If her family understands these norms as changing and adjustable then she may be supported to be a racer and challenge norms. The family plays a key role in why a woman participates, and whether she challenges or conforms to the roles within drag racing.

From most participants' point of view drag racing is a family sport. This is due partly to the affordability of participating in the event. The cost of racing in the event was really important to whether people could afford to participate. Most participants drove their 'family car' which was the vehicle they drove everyday. Those who drove faster cars usually spent more money and time preparing for the event. The camping fee was $10 a night, however if the participant was racing it cost $60 each day because more space was needed for the camper or tent, and the race car. Obviously it was cheaper for spectators, pit crew, and supporters because they only had to pay the $10/night fee. The racers invested more money in the event and therefore were seen as serious participants of this sport,

rather than others who invested some time but not money into the event.

Although it costs more to be a racer, Interviewee 'A' expressed that she felt a closer connection with her family when she was a racer because her family members supported her, and raced with her. When I asked interviewee 'A' why she was part of this event, she explained to me that the only reason why she came was so that she could spend time with her family. She explained to me that this was a family gathering for many people, as she pointed at various campsites and listed the other families. She explained that she doesn't see her family any other time of the year besides during this event. I asked Interviewee A if she would still race if her family wasn't there. She explained to me that although she enjoys drag racing, if her family wasn't there "It would take the fun out of it". Specific role models such as parents, coaches and older siblings can either constrain or create support for whether or not a person decides to participate in sport (Stuart & Whaley 2005:26, Oglesby 1974:123). Through this interview, I understood the family as a close knit social network where everyone involved has a purpose and no one person can participate without the support of everyone else in the family. In this case, family support as well as the goal of spending time with family, is one reason why women participate in sports like drag racing.

Women's participation in the public realm, specifically in sports such as drag racing, is interdependent with their family connection. Perhaps women's increasing participation within drag racing has created a new view and definition for the family. Instead of drag racing being

discussed as male dominated, it can be described as a family event where anyone within the family could participate: wife, husband, child – the youngest age permitted to race is 12. Thomas Wolfe explains the change in family life which could have created a place for women and children as racers in the sport: "Family life was dislocated as the phrase goes, but the money was pouring in, . . . Right at the heart of it, of course was the automobile" (1965:85). This understanding of the car as at the centre of popular culture, at the centre of family units, means that racing did not have to develop as a masculine sport – all individual family members could be seen as having opportunities to race.

The event I was observing included three "junior class" drivers (ages 10-15). When I asked interviewee 'B' the same question, she also expressed the importance of family, as well as friendship. She explained to me "you meet new people every time and you can hang out with your old friends that you don't usually see in other places." The importance of friendship within any subculture is usually identified by its participants (McRobbie 1994). For women, this could mean that as more women participate, more friendships are made. Social relationships such as those with family members and friends create a specific atmosphere for the drag racing event. This could give women the personal empowerment to keep participating in the sport. As one participant may be familiar with others, it is easier to participate because they provide support and a collective energy (Jarvie 2006). The participants in the event form a community of common interests and support for the people within it.

Interviewee 'B' explained to me that the drag racing event and all its participants make up a large community. Since most of the people are from nearby towns or are regulars in this event, the same values and norms are understood by all participants. This means that particular language, behaviours, and rules or norms are known by each participant and all are expected to follow them.

In Nan Mooney's autobiography, she comments on her entry, as a female jockey, into the horse racing subculture: "The course of my seduction has been long and slow. In more than two decades, this horse racing has become my heartbeat, my high altar, my childhood dream" (2003:3). According to Mooney, her participation in the sport was her life, her inspiration to succeed and she was seduced by every part and person included in it (2003:129). Perhaps the reason why women participate in drag racing is because community and social activities is an important aspect of their lives. Within drag racing there are mothers who are in charge of their children and campsite, the men are mechanics, there are entertainers who are drag racers and so on. Each participant has its purpose within this community and there is a consensus of the acceptable and unacceptable behaviour that is strictly defined by gender (Hall 1996). Defining appropriate behaviour by gender could be limiting for women's participation as actual racers.

As women have been key supporters in the family, they are constrained to traditional roles. However, for women who do not follow the norm, and attempt to race themselves, their families are their most

important supporters (Patrick 2006). Even if female racers are not fully accepted by the drag racing community, their family could support them enough to stay in the sport. Understanding this, it is also important to understand the dynamics around women and men's sense of athleticism and competition in sports like drag racing.

Competition and 'Beating the Boys'

Within sport there are stereotypes which focus on feminine and masculine aspects of an athlete's physical capabilities. Brian Pronger (1990) explains that these are unnecessary and should not be used to differentiate women from men in the sport arena. Within this section, the different social constructions (if there are any) of men and women as competitors in the drag racing event will be explored.

At the beginning of a race, two cars drive to the start line while both of the drivers are announced. At times, when the male drivers are introduced they are announced with their occupation to follow. An example of a male participant announcement is: "Here is Jack Hurdle from Duck Bay, Jack has been a millwright for 20 years at our mill." For male participants, they are defined by how they participate within the public realm such as work and sport. However, when some women were announced, their education, or relation with a male was also announced. An example of an announcement of a female participant was: "In the right lane is Jane White who just finished her Bachelor of Psychology last year. Jane's father is driving the 72' Elcamino in Pro Class". As each gender is

announced publicly, their roles as participants in the race are defined by their participation in other spaces within society. For men, individuality and public places defined them, and for women, private places and relationships were announced. Also the announcement symbolized the race car as masculine property because it was mentioned in association with the male driver. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, viewing the car as a masculine object identifies power relationships between male and female participants.

These announcements code men and women differently based on gender within the drag race. As men are viewed as serious competitors, women are viewed as amateurs and as related to serious competitors and are treated as such. It cannot be announced that the woman is competing because she has the same desire to win, and fascination and skill with driving, the same as a man. Women are introduced by their relationship to a man as if to say that the only reason she is competing is because of her father's interest in the sport. There have been many portrayals of women as incapable of 'serious' athleticism (Lenskyj 1986). Perhaps this is because women and men who compete in male defined sports are still caught up in traditional stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. Furthermore, the physical capacity of women's athleticism has been viewed as being less than that of men's capacity.

Drag racing does not seem to be a physical sport. However, there are physical aspects entailed in the strategy of winning a race. Within a

drag race, three physical skills are extremely important; speed, consistency and reaction time.

When I interviewed participant 'C' I asked her if she thought there was a difference between men and women in the physical aspects of their drag racing performance. She explained to me that most women have better reaction times than men. This is a positive outlook on women's athleticism. If women are either seen as equal to, or better than, men within one aspect of a race, this could shed new light on women's capabilities.

Perhaps what empowers women to participate further in drag racing is the importance of the perception of different physical capabilities or strengths of each gender. If women hear that other women are mainly better at reaction times, it may help them strive towards improving reaction times and empower them to stay in the sport. Another stereotypical trait that is needed for athleticism is competitiveness. Competitiveness is seen as mainly a masculine trait and not accessible to women (Murphy 1989). However, by exploring the experiences of female drag racers, we can create new definitions of traits usually defined as masculine, such as competitiveness.

When drag racing first began, competitiveness was understood as a primarily masculine trait. Traditionally, competitiveness has been viewed as inherently masculine, while nurturing has been viewed as feminine (Oglesby 1978:77). In contrast to these gender norms, women, like men, are often attracted to a sport through its encouragement of

achievement and the challenge of competition (Kittredge 2002:164). As Kittredge explains, female hockey players thrived on competition and it was why they participated in the sport (2002). With women's increasing participation in sport, competition has become an arena for both genders (Levy 2002). Susan Levy (2002) researched female mountain bikers and their personal understandings of competitiveness. Levy (2002) found that most female athletes viewed competitiveness as self-fulfilling and increasing their perceived competence of mountain biking. Danica Patrick explains that competition and achievement drive her to keep participating in the sport; to beat the boys and to have a successful career (2006:28). Through my interviews I explored whether competition was a reason women chose to participate in the drag racing event. Many of my interviewees shared Patrick's view, and all of the female drag racers that I interviewed explained to me their idea of competition in drag racing. Even if women express their own competitiveness, competition can be a gendered arena especially in male dominated sports. Kittredge explained that her female hockey players liked 'beating the boys' – one reason they played was to show the men that women could beat them in the game (2006). The idea of 'beating the boys' puts gender right into the competition. Some women explained their own gendered experience of competition and having the save competitiveness as their fellow male competitors.

Interviewee 'A' saw competition as something that was needed to push her to participate. She explained to me that there was a difference

between her car and the cars of most male drivers. She explained: "it's a little scary when you are lined up beside a blower, as his car rolls to the start line, my car shakes, that makes me wanna beat him!" This is an inspiring experience for women as the physicality of the car is expressed as an empowering push for women within a drag race. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, adolescent girls who play hockey viewed competitiveness as part of being fearless (Theberge 2003). Interviewee 'A' experienced competitiveness when a larger and louder engine in a fellow male competitor's car drove to the start line beside her. She wanted to win to show that she was still an equal competitor against her male counterpart. It was the entire aspect of being fearless that kept her participating in the race. The reason she races is because she wants to beat the men who have cars with larger, noisier and more powerful engines, to prove that it doesn't matter, skill is the most important factor to win a drag race. These are the women who compete because they are being pushed. Although her car was smaller than his, she still wanted to race.

This is similar to understanding women's participation. As women participate within male defined sports like drag racing, they are constrained by gender norms and may be pushed away from the sport. However, new attitudes about women and competitiveness have provided a space for women to create opportunities and empowerment for themselves and other women to compete against men. Competition between family members is another reason why women participated in

drag racing. It connected social relationships to their drive for competition.

Interviewee 'C' explained to me that she likes having competition between her father and herself: "That's what makes it fun, we compare times and who ever wins gets bragging rights." She explained to me that the reason she raced was partially because it was just plain fun, the community was important to her, but also to win against her father. Even though she explained to me that she viewed her father as more experienced in the sport, he was someone to look up to and that his achievement created a goal for her to strive for.

As women participating and winning in this sport provide empowering role models for others, so can men in this interviewee's experience. This is also inspiring. The view that a woman can look up to a male or female racer provides new definitions of feminine and masculine type sports. Stereotypical views seem to be non-existent in this experience as both men and women are inspiring and empowering for women drag racers who have the drive to compete. Since most female racers liked 'beating the boys' (Patrick 2006), they proclaimed their own sense of competitive nature within drag racing. Women, like men have the same drive for competition within the drag racing event. The stereotypes that women are not capable of having a drive for competition are incorrect (Birrell 1978: 143).

Karen Stoffer, another female racer, proclaims; "For me, it wasn't that I wanted to be a woman in drag racing, I wanted to be involved with the sport because I loved it ... you're not racing against another woman or

another man out there...when the helmets are on, you're racing against another competitor" (Margolis 2006:2). An empowering way for women to view themselves in drag racing is not by gender specific roles, but by viewing themselves and any other racer as competitors. The idea is that in drag racing, the norm of 'female' or 'male' racer does not exist on the drag strip to some racers. In Stoffer's view, two competitors roll up to the start line and race as equals.

Women set goals which come from their own competitive natures. Their success helps them become a professional instead of an amateur (Levy 2002: 107). In time through women's increasing participation, stereotypes such that athleticism and competition are only masculine traits will change not only in the female participant's views, but also society. As women are coming into their own in the sport of drag racing, and are creating their own identities, they are choosing to race because of their own genuine interest in the sport. Some women, like men, have independently developed their own interests in the sport of drag racing. Some have the drive not only to compete but to be part of the event: to be a key player in the event or to actually strive to win because she 'needs' to make a place for herself within the event. This can also be associated with wanting to create a place for all women within the sport. Achieving these goals is important for the racing women I interviewed. Interviewee 'B' actually told me that she was "addicted to drag racing". She said that she becomes excited and can't sleep before a race. She also explained to me that she has a 'tree' (the light mechanism that tells a racer when to

start) from the strip, in her garage at home, to practice her reaction times. She explained to me: "my husband thinks I'm crazy... we spend all our extra money on drag racing." Puzzled with the notion that a person could actually be addicted to drag racing like a drug, I asked her why?

She explained to me that it was the entire event. "It's the speed, beating the boys, family and friends, and it's just fun, I am addicted."

The idea that a woman could be addicted to drag racing leaves me with the notion that perhaps women create their own definitions of competition and endurance and set their goals high so that they become addicted to achievement and to being part of the event (Birrell 1997). As previously mentioned, this can be seen in the experiences of female horse racers, except the word seduction is used with the same premise (Mooney 2003). Perhaps interviewee 'B' is describing not only that she is addicted but also thinks that social relationships are important. In her view, social relationships create a sense of community and belonging including her family and friends. Since she is addicted to the sport already, she perceives drag racing as a family event where she not only competes but also spends quality time with her husband and children, thus fulfilling both domestic and competitive roles. As women are winning against men, the sport may seem more enjoyable which would lead them to seek more events to compete in. Interviewee 'B' explained to me that her family did not take vacations, they went drag racing. Through this woman's experience, drag racing has been redefined as not only a family space, a

friendly gathering, or a place to compete, it is a place where she spends most of her daily life thinking about and longing for the next time she can race. In her view, it is not just one reason, all aspects of the sport create an 'addictive' atmosphere where new opportunities can be made for

women and they can still be a collective part of the family and community of the drag race.

The point here is that perhaps drag racing is an arena wherein women might create their own identities as they move from their place in the private realm to the public realm of the sport. As more women participate, it empowers others to follow. More than one of my interviewees explained that they found it easier to be empowered because other women they knew participated as drag racers. Drag racing allows all participants, including the racers and the spectators, to form social relationships which empower participants and makes the achievement of goals more accessible within this sport.

It is important to remember that all participants in the event eat, sleep and converse within this one weekend. It is different than many other sports which are based more on the individuality of the athletes and the spectators. Drag racing is different because it creates a place for people to spend a limited yet intense amount of time together and interacting with each other and their surroundings. Drag racing may provide a communal, weekend environment - different from watching a game or tennis match - that creates specific opportunities for women.

The organization of this event creates a flexible place where rules and norms can be changed. The image of the ideal racer is based, in part, on the images associated with the car. The gendered image of the driver is not based only on an image of the athlete, but on the image of the car as a feminized object under masculine control. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Thomas Wolfe examines the car as a symbolization of a female body and also as an extension of power for men (1965). This creates a view of the car as a masculine machine which creates power struggles. As many women explained, it was first assumed that they were male racers, because spectators could not tell. However, as soon as people started realizing that the driver was not a man, it was a woman, their idea of the ideal racer may have shifted. Perhaps through the increasing participation of women in drag racing, not only will women create their own identities, they may redefine the sport and establish a new view of the race car. As more women become known as professionals, others within society could change their own view of women's place within this sport. When a female driver wins a race, the gendered view of the ideal driver as well as the gender associations of racing cars could change. Within this chapter I have discussed the roles for both men and women within the sport of drag racing. As more and more women find reasons to participate and compete, new opportunities will be created. The particular women who remain part of the sport because of their own drives and interests empower other female racers.

My interviewees explained to me that one of the reasons they raced was they had seen other women racing. Interviewees 'B' and 'C', explained another reason for their participation. They told me that they participated because other women raced whom they could identify with, their sisters, friends and such. They explained to me their thoughts on seeing these women racing: "well if they can do it, so can I" (Interviewee B). As drag racing creates an arena where goals are seen as achievable, a participant can actually form a social relationship with a professional drag racer which creates empowerment for the sports followers. Perhaps with more women deciding to participate in drag racing and moving from their traditional feminine roles to create their own identities within sport, other women may decide to follow.

Conclusion

The drag racing event has created an arena for women to succeed at a sport as well as challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Support groups such as family, peers, coaches and role models empower women to participate in sport. The more women are supported through social relationships, the longer they are expected to participate. As there have been increasing amounts of women in sport, female athletes and racers are creating their own identity through setting goals and competing against men.

As more women are expressing their own competitive nature, the idea of being respected as a professional drag racer has become more real. Competitiveness has been researched for both male and female

athletes. Women, like men, strive for their own competitive goals which gives them a sense of self fulfillment.

With women's increasing participation, perhaps drag racing may no longer be considered a masculine defined sport but will be seen as a family sport. As traditional ideas surrounding the family are gradually changing, new roles for women could create opportunities for their involvement as professionals within sport (Pronger 1990). Families provide support for women to further their participation in sport (Patrick 2006). In the next chapter I will examine what women's increasing participation and recognition, means for women in drag racing and in society. Through Danica Patrick's experience as an Indy Car racer I will explore whether the image of women has been redefined.

Chapter Four

Who's Winning?

In this final chapter, I will discuss whether definitions of femininity and masculinity in drag racing are changing through women's increasing participation in this sport. I will examine my own experiences while researching women in drag racing to discuss whether women and men are equally visible within the history of drag racing. I will also examine the autobiography of Danica Patrick and how she is portrayed in the media surrounding automobile culture, as well as her experiences as an Indy Car racer and whether they coincide with my interviewee's experiences. Finally, I will discuss where this leaves women in drag racing.

It is important to understand not only how women became recognized in the sport through experiences like those of Shirley Muldowney, but also where they have moved within today's society through the experiences of Danica Patrick. Understanding just how much drag racing has changed through women's participation may shed light on where women may be seen in the future of drag racing or in Patrick's experience, Indy car racing.

As explained in Chapter One, women's lack of representation in media such as books and magazines as having roles in the public realm, creates invisibility for women not only in sport participation, but in society as a whole (Jarvie 2006:287). Patricia Murphy examined the organization of gender within sport by considering whether media and

books reflected women's gendered experience as participants in male dominated sports. Murphy explains that: "The social organization of sport can be viewed as providing, through its images and structures, a mechanism for maintaining and legitimizing a particular organization of gender in society" (1984:191). The overall lack of representation of women in sport contradicts the discussion of women's involvement in auto racing beginning in the 1950's (Muldowney 2005). One author who recognizes women's experience in drag racing is Robert Post who examines women's struggle to become legitimate competitors and to become more generally, visible over a time period in drag racing (2001: 260).

This troubles the idea that women could view the experiences of others such as Shirley Muldowney and Danica Patrick to lead the way for their own participation. If the sources are not available, how is it possible for these women's experiences to be heard? And how can other women become empowered as racers if they cannot even read about the successes of Muldowney and Patrick?

McRobbie examined *Just Seventeen* magazine which explored the lives of young women. She compared this new magazine to an earlier magazine, *Jackie* (1994). McRobbie explained that women in today's society are no longer accepting traditional values and will find their own ways to express themselves and participate in society. When explaining young women's attitudes towards their representation in such magazines, McRobbie states: "They do not want to be

represented in a humiliating way. They are not dependent on boys for their own sense of identity. Magazines (like Jackie) which continue to offer this passive stereotype of femininity will simply lose their readers" (1994:164). This shifting attitude of younger women shows they will, to some extent, leave limiting media representations behind them. This is an empowering view that women will seek their own interests despite male dominance, lack of representation, and cultural norms of femininity and power. They will follow their own paths and create their own opportunities in sports such as drag racing.

Danica Patrick is a popular, well-known Indy Car racer (2006). Danica Patrick first became part of automobile culture through her father (2006). She describes her relationship with her father as a child as one reason why she decided to be a race car driver (2006:xii). Her father was interested in automobile culture ever since she could remember (2006:xii). Most of the time they spent together was in his garage, while working on a vehicle (2006:xii). She explained that because he pushed her to be part of automobile culture, this gave her the strength to move forward with her career (2006). His 'don't give up' attitude encouraged her to keep reaching her goals.

As explained earlier, drag racers need support groups such as family and a reliable pit crew. Patrick explains that the support of her parents is key to her success in Indy Car racing. Although she may meet constraints, as long as she has their support, she will keep going.

However, there have been many issues revolving around her career that has made it difficult for her to succeed.

I first saw Danica Patrick on television when she was not well known as an Indy car racer. She introduced a group of 'male' shows based on cars called 'Power Block Television'. From my own experience watching this set of shows, Patrick introduced a set of informative and mechanical shows which were hosted by male mechanics. She mainly said: "Welcome to Power Block, next we have Stacey (a male mechanic) on Trucks! (television show)" which was the only time you would see her. The division between introducer and host is like the amateur / professional division women as racers face through competing in lower speed classes, or being seen as amateur because men have more power over the car as racers and mechanics. In this analysis, Patrick could have been seen as an amateur because she did not know the mechanics of a car and therefore was not an actual show host, she only introduced the shows. However there could be specific positive reasons why she chose to do this as part of her racing career.

Perhaps this was a way for Patrick to become known as a legitimate racer. As these shows were geared towards men as racers and racing fans, this may have helped her become recognized and popularized within her racing career. This could have been a way for her to subtly address gender segregation to her own advantage. If more men were familiar with her from her experience as the Power Block host, perhaps this would extend to her racing career. Her

experience introducing the 'Power Block Television' made her well known within the automobile culture.

Firstly, I thought that this was an important step for women to become recognized in automobile culture. If more experiences of women who race become available for others, it could not only change gender norms in automobile culture, but could empower other women to take chances and create opportunities for themselves. However, there are contradictory messages within Danica Patrick's autobiography.

Books about male auto racers, such as John Force, portray an 'ideal (male) racer' wearing his racing suit and helmet, representing his identification as a racer. Shirley Muldowney's book cover displayed herself as a racer; she wore racing attire, and stood beside her race car (2005). However, when I picked up Patrick's book, I saw that the photo of Patrick was not like the other front cover photos of male auto racers *nor like Muldowney's*. She was wearing a black dress with her body placed in such a way as to symbolize her own femininity and sexuality. Since Muldowney has retired from racing, *she was not writing this book in order to gain acceptance or popularity as a racer.* Thus, the book cover did not have to portray Muldowney as feminine, or less threatening. Or, Muldowney could have been trying to portray herself as fitting directly into the mold of 'racer' - wearing a racing suit - and avoiding constructs of masculinity and femininity (See discussion Chapter 2). Comparing these two women racers, Patrick's identity as a female racer was expressed primarily as a 'woman'. Perhaps this

portrayal made her less threatening as sexualized woman rather than a serious competitor (2006). On the other hand, Patrick could benefit from portraying herself in a sexual way. Angelle Sampey, another professional female racer, "agrees with Patrick's use of her sexuality in obtaining more exposure and for financial gain" (Margolis 2006:2).

Robert Rinehart (2005) examined the difference between male and female skate boarders and how they were portrayed in the media. Both had unique styles and skills, however the women were seen as sexual objects instead of real competitors. In Rinehart's study, it didn't matter how skilled women portrayed themselves, they were seen as marketable, feminine and sexual objects. Perhaps Patrick did not have a choice. She needed to make herself well known, and as a result, portrayed herself in the only way that would allow this.

Standard representations of femininity are often used as a marketing strategy, portraying women athletes as sexual objects, thus opening another gender-based avenue to attract sales related to the sport (Brooks 2001, Hartmann-Tews & Pfister 2003). Christine Brooks (2001) examined the use of a sexual appeal strategy in order to promote a sport. She explored protests surrounding a uniform rule designed by the International Beach Volleyball Federation (FIVB) to "use the female players as sex objects to attract an audience" (Brooks, 2001:1). Using women's bodies as sexual commodities creates gender inequality and further oppresses women's experience in sport (Hall 2004:161). Within Brooks' study, it was explained that female athletes

who did not want to be sexualized in advertisements did not receive the same sport coverage or sponsorships as those who did sexualize themselves. This pushes women to sexualize themselves in order to be recognized: "Their federation, I suspect, has a shrewder idea of what makes television audiences tick. If the beach volleyballers want to keep their clothes on, fine. But they should not then start bleating when public interest in them starts to disappear" (2001: 7). The use of women's sexuality as a marketing ploy explains one possible motive for displaying Patrick in a sexualized manner on her book cover.

The way in which Patrick was portrayed on her book cover expressed her sense of femininity but did not display her as a serious and professional Indy Car driver. This is similar to serious female volleyball athletes who were portrayed in a sexual manner as *beach* volleyball players instead of 'real' athletes in Brooks' study. Sexualized and commoditized images such as Danica Patrick's little black dress, represent women as objects rather than portraying them as athletes. This may deter women's choices to participate as racers. Similarities can also be drawn between Danica Patrick's book cover and women's experiences as bull riders.

Sara Pink (1996) examined the early retirement of Cristina Sanchez a female bull fighter, specifically referring to how she was viewed by society and other male athletes. Bull fighting is primarily a male dominated sport which requires an athlete to first ride the bull and then kill it by plunging spears into its head. In Pink's perspective,

although Sanchez was equally as competitive as her male counterparts, she was considered an oddity and novelty by the media, rather than actually being a 'normal' part of the sport of bull fighting.   Sanchez, in Pink's perspective, became a 'media bullfighter' as her career as a live performer was paralleled by the production of a vast number of media representations of her. Her participation in the sport was not accepted by society and male competitors, and therefore her further participation 'fought' or challenged the gender norm of female athletes as novelty to bullfighting.

Pink explains this further by examining how Sanchez was viewed by other bull fighters: "Her opponents insisted that the gender role segregation of traditional bullfighting culture should be maintained and that the central representation of the bullfight—the performance itself— should not be altered by the participation of a woman" (Pink 1996: 432). Other spectators, athletes and media representatives even argued that it was morally inappropriate for women to perform as bullfighters, insisting that a woman's correct place in the bullfight is in the audience or the chapel, playing a supportive role to the male performers (Pink 1996). This can be paralleled with Shirley Muldowney's experience while trying to have women's participation legalized within drag racing.

Muldowney had to challenge the embedded gender constraints within drag racing that restricted women from sports participation in the public realm because women were seen as incapable of athleticism compared to men. Muldowney endured pressures which constrained

her into a supportive role for her husband. However, she later

challenged these gender roles by creating an opportunity for women's

participation to be legalized by NHRA within drag racing.

Many women who decide to participate in male dominated sports

experience the constraints of traditional gender roles which are

embedded in sports. Kittredge (2002) explained the importance of 'ultra

masculine' behaviour for female hockey players, as being a way for

women to 'fit in' and to seem less threatening to the sport. This could

be similar to Patrick's cover being 'ultra feminine' and therefore

displaying herself in a way that seems non-threatening because she is

still displaying her femininity and does not seem to be trying to change

the sport. This parallel could distinguish how women may try to 'fit in'

instead of challenging norms in sport. They may either act more

masculine to seem like 'one of the boys' (hockey players) or portray

themselves in a feminine way and be seen as a woman who is just

doing this as a hobby rather than participating in a sport as a serious

competitor. An example of this is the Powder Puff races of the 1950's.

As previously mentioned, this event was only for the wives to do

something on the weekend, not to become serious racers like men

(Post 2001). Since automobile sports were defined and originated from

the participation of male athletes, the emergence of women as equally

competitive disrupts and for some, corrupts the importance of the sport

itself.

This is comparative to understanding why Danica Patrick and/or her publisher would put a picture on the front of her book to display her femininity. In one sense she could be seen as a novelty and as an object or as an amateur or even less threatening. In another sense, she could be displaying herself as feminine because she wants to change how the sport is understood. In a previous chapter, there were conflicting theories surrounding women's portrayal of their sexual femininity as 'Party Girls'. Some feminists theorized that displaying sexuality is a way for women to become free of social norms and restrictions (Maglin & Perry 1994). Patrick may want to show her femininity to create another view of a professional racer, a female racer as normal, rather than as a contradiction in terms. As described before, even though there is nothing in a racing suit that signifies gender, it still is seen as masculine. Patrick's way to challenge this could have been to display herself in such a way that centers her identity as a woman, and thus, at least momentarily, redefines the sport.

Displaying women as sexual objects is a common marketing strategy not only in the media but also at sport events (Rinehart 2005). In Rinehart's study, during a beach volleyball tournament, photographs displayed the female players in the most sexualized manner possible to advertise the sport. In larger, international racing events, women are commonly hired as 'Molson Girls' to sell beer by walking around the racing event with short skirts and t-shirts advertising 'Molson' products. Within some large racing events there are often corporations who use

women to advertise only beer products. Other corporations advertise services such as magazines and restaurants (maxim magazine and Hooters' restaurants) through the use of similarly sexualized 'girls' hired to advertise at the event.

The portrayal of women as sexualized objects seemed to permeate drag racing culture: Patrick's book cover and the use of 'Molson' girls at large drag racing events. At the event I attended, the presence of the 'party girls' as well as hosting a dance as part of the race event emphasized women's sexualized roles. I asked my interviewees what their thoughts were regarding the sexual portrayal of women in drag racing.

Interviewee 'D' explained that the portrayal of women as sex objects reflected male interests: "Of course, that's what interests these guys". From her response, it can be explained that the sexualized view of women by men within drag racing is completely accepted. However, Interviewee 'A', explained her view of the portrayal of women as sexual objects: "what was the point in gaining rights for women if all they want to do is walk around like sluts and degrade themselves to bring them back when we were less than men, I don't get it." Interviewee 'A' viewed the acceptance and portrayal of female racers as sexual objects, as placing women back in time, before the 1950's when their primary role was to support their husband and remain in the private realm of society.

Danica Patrick's popularity as a racer allows her to lead the way for others to follow (Fordham 2007). Patrick's career has created opportunities to change the way women are viewed in racing by

challenging constraining views of femininity which is not done by her book cover. However, if you take the outside cover off and read Patrick's autobiography, there are empowering experiences for women who follow in her footsteps (Margolis 2006). Currently, Patrick is working towards becoming a member of National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) which is the most watched racing event out of all others (Margolis 2006). At the moment, there are no women participating in NASCAR (Margolis 2006). Currently, there are many debates surrounding the difference between drag racing and NASCAR racing. Some male NASCAR drivers are trying to devalue the sport of drag racing in order to exclude women from NASCAR (Margolis 2006). As discussed in an earlier chapter, when women first participated in the Powder Puff races, the same type of criticism was used to keep women from participating with men as equal competitors.

In Patrick's view, women participate in sports to 'beat the boys' (2006). Since there still are not a lot of women within racing, to say that you are competing mostly against men would be correct in her experience. This is the same attitude that was prevalent in my interviews as well. Women's take charge attitude has created opportunities to succeed where few women have succeeded.

In her autobiography (2006), Patrick explains the gendered challenges she experienced in trying to join the 'boys club' of professional racing:

"Though she had done extremely well in England, placing second in the Formula Ford Festival in 2000, this wasn't enough to garner the support of the old boys club of racing in England . . . Danica survived England, which is an extremely competitive environment, one that is difficult for a strong, confident young man; for a young woman, it is almost impossibly difficult." Patrick's experience in England reflects the idea that racing is a masculine sport and is described as a limited club where only preferred members are allowed in. Even though Patrick's media representation is sexualized, she has created an image through Power Block and her new book cover of women as active drag racers.

Since her efforts in England, Danica Patrick has become more of a part of Indy Car racing than any woman before her, winning the Indy Car Nationals in 2008 (Fordham 2007, Danica Racing 2008). An article from Maxim magazine (2007) examined Danica Patrick's success as a female Indy Car racer. Maxim is a magazine that sexualizes women and focuses on current popularized women for a male audience. The magazine can either be seen in printed format or online through www.Maxim.com. Articles which examine popularized women as 'professional' in sports are included (Krassas et al. 2003). In contrast to this view of women, Maxim includes articles and advertisements which clearly display women as sexual objects. For instance, the article about Patrick was set beside a page portraying a woman selling cigars. The woman was wearing hardly any clothes and

her body was contorted in a sexual manner (legs wide open and head looking behind her). However, in this issue, in contrast to her book cover, Patrick was shown as a racer in her regular racing attire.

While on one page the magazine had a half naked picture of a female model selling products, on the other was an article and picture which displayed Patrick as a racer, wearing her racing suit. The article explained her potential success as a NASCAR driver. Is this a promising place for women? Although women are still being sexualized, perhaps this can change with more women participating in male dominated arenas. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of these two images may be one way to reassure the male readership that women racers are not so threatening, that they are still, like the women in the advertisements, sexual objects. As previously mentioned, McRobbie (1994) concluded that the content of magazine articles over time displayed changes in women's roles in society. Patrick's portrayal as a respectable professional racer rather than a sexualized woman may be taken and built upon by other women who are beginning their careers in racing (Fordham 2007).

Patrick's experience in Indy Car culture inspired me to ask female drag racers if they experienced gender stratification in their experience as drag racers. Interviewee 'C' explained to me that racing is an equal competition between men and women but some men were more experienced than she was. This was a common experience for the women I interviewed. Interviewee 'A' also viewed herself as an

equal racer against male competitors. However, she explained that some men have participated as racers in the sport for longer than her and therefore would have more experience. Interviewee 'B' explained that some men took the sport more seriously than other competitors and because they spent more money, they were seen as professional. This idea of professionalism has been explained when discussing more men having mechanical knowledge of the car and in this instance, men are more professional because they are more experienced as racers and in some cases, spend more money.

Through both Patrick's experiences and my interviewees' experiences, women seem to be perceived as amateurs in the sport compared to men. It makes sense to think about it this way because some men have spent a lot of time competing in this sport. Perhaps when women spend more time, they would also be experienced. However, it is important to question whether women will gain experience if they continue to compete in lower speed classes than men. Perhaps experience as independent women is more accessible for women internationally, who race in the highest speed classes like Danika Patrick and Shirley Muldowney.

I questioned my interviewees about the influence of women racers, such as Danica Patrick and Shirley Muldowney, on their own participation as racers. According to most men that I conversed with, Shirley Muldowney was an influential woman who changed the sport. The women whom I interviewed, however had different views about role

models or people to 'look up to' in their sport. The women I interviewed explained the importance of both international female and male drivers as to why they are interested in the sport. But they also explained that they looked up to women who were closer to them such as mothers or friends who raced or provided support, more than women like Shirley Muldowney and Danica Patrick. The importance of true immediate role models reflected the closeness of social relationships within the drag racing group.

Today, there are many female role models who empower more and more women to participate in sports (Shakib and Dunbar 2004). In a recent study comparing male and female adolescent athletes, parents who were the same gender as their child were more influential role models than those who were not (Shakib and Dunbar 2004). Therefore, in the case of Interviewee 'D', perhaps she participated because her mother's participation as a drag race administrator was especially influential for her.

Earlier studies have reported that males are the predominant role model for both genders in sport (Lamb, 1976). In a study of adolescent sport participation, fathers were identified as a significant influence in sport for both boys and girls while mothers were not (Greendorfer and Lewko, 1978). Contrasting Interviewee 'D''s response, Interviewee 'A' saw her father as a role model based on his participation as a racer in the sport. Her mother was a domestic supporter who seemed to be non-influential in Interviewee A's sport participation.

Division surrounding who is the influential role model is apparent in the experiences of both Danica Patrick's and Shirley Muldowney's autobiographies and my interviewees experiences in drag racing. Both Patrick and Muldowney, had influential males as role models (father, husband) rather than females. However, some women I interviewed stressed the importance of both genders as their role models.

As previously discussed, Nan Mooney a woman horse racer, found that her grandmother was the most influential person who gave her the knowledge and access to the sport of horse racing (Mooney, 2003:122). Although her grandmother had spiked her interests in horse racing, once she became a racer, she looked for another role model. As she was racing, she found a male racer whom she admired for his outspoken behaviour and successful races (Mooney 2003:123). In this case, the female horse racer had two role models, as she gained knowledge about the sport from her grandmother who was not a racer, she sought a role model who was an actual racer and envisioned herself being as successful in the future. Depending on what part of her life she explained, her needs for a role model changed - whether the person was male or female was not addressed. Perhaps gender is not always used to determine a role model; only the context of an athlete's goal for the future decides who will be her role model. However, perhaps female racers as role model's are not apparent because there are still more men who participate than women.

Women explained the importance of influential race car drivers of both genders. As I asked women if they looked up to anyone in drag racing, Interviewee A explained to me that she found a racer like John Force to be an influential person. Her father was also an influential role model in her life as she explained that he was the reason she participated in the sport. While she was explaining to me how much she enjoyed his races, she asked her father about his memory of meeting John Force. She explained to me that "he (her father) has a white hat with John Forces' fingerprint which is really awesome!" The hat was a novelty but an important thing to have because it was touched by a famous drag car racer. Perhaps both men and women can be used as novelties to sell merchandise or to promote the sport. However, there is gender segregation between women being portrayed in a sexual manor as part of the merchandise (women sailors) rather than men controlling what becomes merchandise (a hat that had no significance before it was signed by a male racer). Nevertheless, it can be assumed Danika Patrick would have the same control over merchandise since she recently won the Indy Car Championship - she sells her own t-shirts and other racing merchandise from her website which displays her logo for 'Danica Racing'. What is important is whether women like Patrick empower others to follow in their footsteps.

Conclusion

Both Danica Patrick and Shirley Muldowney are influential women within automobile culture. Muldowney legalized women in the NHRA and was one of the first women to win the Top Fuel International race. When exploring women's increasing participation in sports like drag racing, it is important to ask whether this will change the definition of the sport itself as being either a masculine or feminine space. Where do women fit in the equation and what this means for women's future participation? Danica Patrick has explored other arenas and countries such as England to further women's opportunities for equal competition against men. Patrick has shifted the 'lens' for women to be seen within auto racing as feminine but also as having a competitive nature the same as any male racer.

In the forward of Danica Patrick's book, Bobby Rahal explained Patrick's overall experience as an Indy Car racer: "Being a woman in this extremely male-oriented sport has had a huge impact on the sport. There is no doubt that her presence in the IRL (Indy Racing League) has brought a new fan base to the sport. Not just young girls who have their own aspirations of someday driving like Danica but also older fans who love this young girl on the track beating the boys" (Patrick 2006: xiv). Now that women have created a place for themselves in the drag racing arena, more women, as well as families, are becoming part of the sport as participants and spectators (Patrick, 2006).

Gender roles and norms have changed through the increasing amount of women participating. As Rahal explains in Patrick's autobiography: "it is that "C'mon, take a shot at me" thinking that spurs her confidence and allows her to sustain a challenge and come back harder. It's what I call fire in the belly. It's a hunger and need to be the best. That is Danica" (Patrick 2006: xi). Patrick's drive for competition is similar to that of interviewee 'A' who was 'fearless' against the louder and larger engine in the car she was competing against. Women claim competitiveness as their own personal trait, simultaneously maintaining femininity. Claiming competitiveness is one of the ways in which women can be taken seriously as professional racers.

All women who decide to become Indy Car racers, bull riders or drag racers (for example) challenge traditional gender roles and create opportunities for the future of women's participation in sport. Women who participate in male dominated sports and defy stereotypes are redefining their lives and creating their own identities within sport. Drag racing itself could change its merchandising and its stereotypical portrayal of both genders in the media. A result of this may be that the idea of a 'male dominated' sport may become non existent. Through women's increasing participation in sports like drag racing, the goal of becoming equal to their fellow male competitors is accessible. The focus of gendered traits and roles will no longer be separated and defined as either masculine or feminine. Perhaps drag racing creates

a specific arena where all that matters is how fast you drive and not

who you are underneath the racing attire.

Conclusion

15 Seconds of Fame

Since a drag race only lasts a few minutes, racers who win call it their "15 Seconds of Fame", a play on Andy Warhol's famous quotation (McClurg 2006:22). However, women racers have been trying to create even a 15 second place in drag racing for themselves since the 1950's. This play on words speaks about the short duration of success a racer has, and reflects the intense, brief burst of competition during a race. As mentioned previously, female racers consider themselves competitors first.

Examining the experiences of women in drag racing has made it clear to me that women are both empowered and constrained by gender roles within male defined sports. Within the history of the sport, women began in a traditional role as supporting their husbands who were drag racers. As ideas of the family changed in the 1950's women gradually became part of the public realm of society, including sports. Women such as Shirley Muldowney created legal, equal arenas for women to compete against men. My participant observation and interviews with women racers were based in the literature regarding women's experiences in male-dominated sport, gender norms in sports and the experiences of early women drag racers. I observed one drag racing event and explored the spatial differences which define women's participation within them. My interviews explored the experiences of four women in the event, three as racers and one as supporter. The

opinions of men were identified through conversations within my participant observation.

This study directly facilitated an understanding of women's gendered experience in the drag racing event. Open ended questions examined how each woman saw herself in the drag race and whether she was empowered or constrained in her view. As many women explained to me that they were interested in this study, it can be said that they also enjoyed the overall experience of the interview.

I reviewed the history of women in drag racing, as they moved from supporting their partner to racing themselves. For instance, Shirley Muldowney began as a supporter of her husband within the drag racing event. Some of the interviewee's shared experiences with other women who have participated in drag racing. Some interview participants explained to me that they also had family relations with a man, either a father or husband, which influenced them to participate as racers.

Men were important in the lives of these women for two reasons. First, men have been part of drag racing since it began. This would be why it is considered a male defined sport. The second reason is because the socialization that occurs during the drag racing event affects how boys and girls understand their gendered places in the drag racing event as well as in wider society.

The interviewees explained to me that their fathers empowered them to create their own identities within drag racing. As mentioned,

role models such as parents are influential to whether a woman would decide to participate in a sport. It was their parents who empowered them to challenge traditional roles and compete against the boys and win. Shirley Muldowney however, had the support of her male colleagues, instead of her father and husband. Women's relationships with their role models vary depending on the context of their experiences. As women decide to participate because of the support of their parents and because women before them did so, they also create their own roles within the drag racing event.

Until very recently, most of women's experiences as drag racers have been invisible within the media and books surrounding the culture. Danica Patrick's and Shirley Muldowney's autobiographies, however, describe key experiences which show how women can be empowered to move from traditional roles of femininity (daughter to racer and wife to racer) to become professionals in drag racing.

The subculture of drag racing is multidimensional and creates places for women to become included in different ways. Most participants explained that the social relationships they have with other participants including family members, old and new friends, and fellow competitors provide support systems for the racers. For instance, women who are supporters take care of the domestic responsibilities during the race whereas women who are racers, utilize this support system for empowerment and winning the race. According to some racers, the entire event is based on social relationships that are

detrimental to their own participation. As previously mentioned, the atmosphere and the social relationships which are created during the drag racing event, are the 'heart' of the racer and is what drives her to succeed. The drag race event and the people who participate create a phenomenon which draws women to this space and to participate. The atmosphere of the event, the other participants, the spectators, and social relationships keep women interested and participating in the sport.

Although seeing women as competitive contradicts traditional gender norms, women racers historically and presently have proclaimed their own drive for competition. While 'beating the boys' is seen as a goal for some women to push the boundaries of mainstream gender roles, others create a gender neutral view of competition which excludes stereotypes of feminity and masculinity. For instance, a current racer saw the race as, having two competitors; the gender of the racer did not matter. The two competitors were there to drive fast and to compete as equal professionals rather than focusing on gender differences.

Women racers had varied experiences of male and female role models. There have been studies that have shown both sexes as 'better' role models than the other for women in sports. Within my research I found that some interviewees had role models who were the same sex, and some the opposite. As there are more men racers than women racers in drag racing, perhaps women choose men as role

models by default. However with women's increasing participation maybe more women racers will be role models.

Also, when comparing whether international racers or local racers were sought as role models, there were differentiations. Most of the women I interviewed stated they were more influenced by local racers, but also recognized successful international racers such as Danica Patrick, Shirley Muldowney and John Force. This reflects the importance of social relationships in this specific event, as well as the influence of popular culture (international drag racing) on women's participation. Although participants were aware of the successes of the racers on an international level, they felt that the close social relationships they had with local participants created more influential role models.

Since women are creating their own view of competition and choosing their role models depending on the context of their participation, they may create opportunities for themselves in drag racing. Also, if the availability of female racers as role models increases, women may begin to look up to professional female racers as frequently as they look up to males. Perhaps the idea of two competitors is something that will be referred to in the future. As more women become racers, there may be more opportunities for female role models on a local and international level of drag racing.

Women in male defined sports such as hockey, horse racing, bull fighting and drag racing, have begun to push through gender barriers

and create opportunities for themselves and others who follow. Although there are gender constraints in male defined sports that still exist today, women have begun to make a place for themselves in the sports by pushing for a change to be recognized as professional competitors against men. In drag racing women historically have established a place for themselves in the sport by moving against the norm. Currently, women have been testing the constraints that still exist and are pushing for equal membership in all areas of racing.

According to the experiences of past and current international racers and my interviewee's experiences, there is hope that women will increase their participation more every year and with changes in women's roles within mainstream society, gender barriers in sport could cease to exist in the future. Perhaps the focus on feminine advertisements which sexualize women in ways that create gender barriers in sport will slowly change. Like McRobbie's study of *Jackie* magazine (1994) which showed a changing view of femininity over time, the view of women as respected, professional athletes may develop within drag racing.

My research on women's participation is an explorative study of the issues surrounding gender roles in drag racing. This thesis explains why women participate and their experiences when they participate. Future research could focus on a more in depth analysis of specific female racers to explore the actual course of role changing and succeeding in male defined sports. To connect the affects of successful

female racers on other women's participation, would open understandings of how change can occur through sharing this type of research. It would also be helpful to study women's participations in drag racing at specific events in different locations.

Gender roles exist within drag racing and sometimes constrain women to be spectators and supporters rather than racers. As mentioned earlier, role models influence women's participation as racers. One of the goals of my thesis was to inspire women to participate in sports through the experiences of female racers. The experiences discussed in this thesis are to make their voices heard and will hopefully provide role models for other women who want to participate in primarily masculine spaces.

Another way for women's voices to be heard, is to promote research in these areas and publish articles which are accessible to any women with a computer or access to a library. As more women are made aware of the possibilities for their own place in the sport, their participation will increase. As women create their own place and identity within drag racing, gender norms that constrain women may shift, and provide opportunities for women and men to become equal competitors.

Since there are many gendered aspects that surround the drag racing event, it was important for me to establish a difference between the experience of being at the drag racing event and participating within the race itself. It is important to establish an understanding of what

participating in a drag race feels like when women move past their gender constraints and actually partake in a race.

When I asked my interview participants what they thought about during a race; if they thought of their parents, their siblings, their spouse, societal views, or even the other racer, they said none of these. They explained to me that the only thing they thought of was how fast they were going and their own achievements during the race.

At the beginning of this paper, I posed the question of whether gender exists at 210 miles per hour. Gender does still exist in many areas that surround the drag racing event. The social relationships and role models of female racers all depend on the context of their experience but include gender constraints. Women are empowered by these support groups and refute gender constraints so that they can participate against men. Even though gender does exist in most aspects, if not every aspect of the sport, my interviewees explained that when they physically drive to the start line, it doesn't matter if you are a woman or a man, a daughter or a mother, a father or a son. It doesn't matter how you were represented by the media or whether you dealt with many constraints to become part of the race. At the start line, there are two competitors with the same goal, to win the race no matter how fast you have to go, and gain your 15 seconds of fame.

APPENDIX A

Dear Participant;

This research project focuses on understandings of drag racing as a subculture. I would like to ask you the importance of the sport to you as a participant as well as any other views that you may want to add.

The research focus will be on women's experiences in particular and their emergence into drag racing. The particular event that I intend to draw upon is the Terrace Bay Drag Fest of August 2007.

All information collected during the study will be shared only amongst researchers and be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. It will be number coded and your name will not be used at any time in reporting or use of information collected.

Participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. There is not any anticipated risk to you as a result of participating in this study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact myself, my supervisor Dr. Rachel Ariss, or the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board at the numbers listed below. Thank you.

    Sincerely,

    Amanda Wicks
    (807)344-9140 / awicks@lakeheadu.ca

    Dr. Rachel Ariss
    (807)343-8792 / rariss@lakeheadu.ca

    Lakehead University Research Ethics Board
                    343-8283

Consent Form Example:

If you would like to participate in this study, please sign your consent at the bottom of the page.

I have received an explanation about the nature of the study and its purpose. I understand the following:

1. I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time.

2. There is no apparent danger of physical or psychological harm.

3. The data provided by my responses will be shared only amongst researchers, and be released only in aggregate form in the public domain. Data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years.

4. I will receive a summary of the project, upon request, following the completion of the project.
5. My responses will remain anonymous in published and/or presented research.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Interview Guide:

1) How old is the participant, and what gender is he/she, spectator or racer?
2) Did you enjoy the Terrace Bay Drag Fest?
3) Did you stay for the night, or did you come for the day? (if just for the day, ask q 4)

      -Where did you stay?
      -How was that? Would you rather the Zoo? (if said Pits, if not, the other way)
            -what do you think about the security between the two areas?
            -did you go to any of the parties in the Zoo?
                -(if yes) do you remember how people were acting? How? Were   they drunk? Was there any fights? Where they calm and relaxed?
            -did you go to the dance?
                -did you enjoy the music?
                -did you stay for long?
                -were lots of people dancing?
      -Did you camp beside anyone you knew? Who? How do you know them? (q4)

4) Who did you go with? (probes: family? Friends? Acquaintances? Nobody, you weren't there for long?)
5) How did you become interested in this event?
            -why did you go? Did you know someone who was racing?
            -depends on answer to question four.
                -are your friends, family really interested in drag racing also?
                -who was first interested?
6) Did you look at the hot rods at all?
      -did you vote for which one you liked the most?

7) Are you more interested in one type of vehicle over another? Why?
      -which type?
      -is there a specific class of race cars that you would rather watch? Or drive?
            -why?
      -did you stand by the burnout box?
            -why or why not?
8) (if racer)Do have a name for your car? (used to explore the meaning that is associated with the car).
      -why does it have that name? where did it come from?
      -do you care about your car? Is it just a big piece of metal? Is it your toy? Is it   your life? What does that mean?
9) (if racer) Are you a mechanic as well as a racer?

-who fixes your car when it needs it? Who adjusts it?

-why?

-is one more important than the other? (driver or mechanic)

10) Do you need sponsorships? (if not a racer, do you think they need sponsors?)

-why? Do they have enough money? Who sponsors?

11) Was this your first time going to this event?

-if not, do you think there has been any changes in this event?

-rules, women, cars, classes, amount of people

12) Do you think the competition is equal between the racers?

-between ages: do you think that certain ages prefer a certain type of vehicle? (muscle cars vs. import cars), do you think that different ages like different parts of the sport? (burnout box, hot rods, engines, alcohol run cars, dancing, concert)

-do you think that women have an equal chance to become racers and competitors? Do you know why most of the become part of the sport?

-family members? friends?

-why or why not?

13) Did you buy anything for this race?

-engine parts, camping supplies, clothes

-did you buy anything from the booths that were set up?

15) Do you watch television shows, read magazines, play video games that are associated with drag racing?

-which ones? Why? What's interesting about them?

-Is it for the mechanics? The girls/men?

-Is it because you like to spend time with family members or friends? (just watch it because of that reason)

14) Anything else to add? How was your experience as a spectator/racer? Did you find it a positive or negative experience? Why or Why not?

Lakehead

U N I V E R S I T Y

Office of Research

June 28, 2007

Tel (807) 343-8283
Fax (807) 346-7749

Ms. Amanda Wicks
Department of Sociology
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1

Dear Ms. Wicks:

Re: REB Project #: 0118 06-07
    Granting Agency name: N/A
    Granting Agency Project #: N/A

On the recommendation of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project entitled, "Changing subcultures from Old Roles to New Identities: An analysis of gender through the emergence of women in drag racing ".

Ethics approval is valid until June 28, 2008. Please submit a Request for Renewal form to the Office of Research by May 28, 2008 if your research involving human subjects will continue for longer than one year. A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project. Research Ethics Board forms are available at:

   http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~researchwww/internalforms.html

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Completed reports and correspondence may be directed to:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of Research
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1
Fax: (807) 346-7749

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,
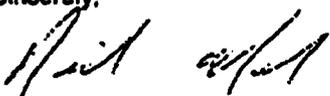
Dr. Richard Maundrell
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/len

cc: Dr. Rachel Ariss, Sociology
     Faculty of Graduate Studies
     Office of Research

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

Certificate of Completion

This is to certify that

Amanda Wicks

has completed the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics'
Introductory Tutorial for the
Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS)

Issued On: May 7, 2007

LEGEND

Crag Strip

Security Building

Spectator Stands

Admission Gates

Security Lamp posts

Safety Personel

Light Tree

Washrooms

Burnout Box

Concession Stands and Booths

Start Line

Campsites

Road

N
W + E
S

The Pits

The Zoo

SP

S

A

A
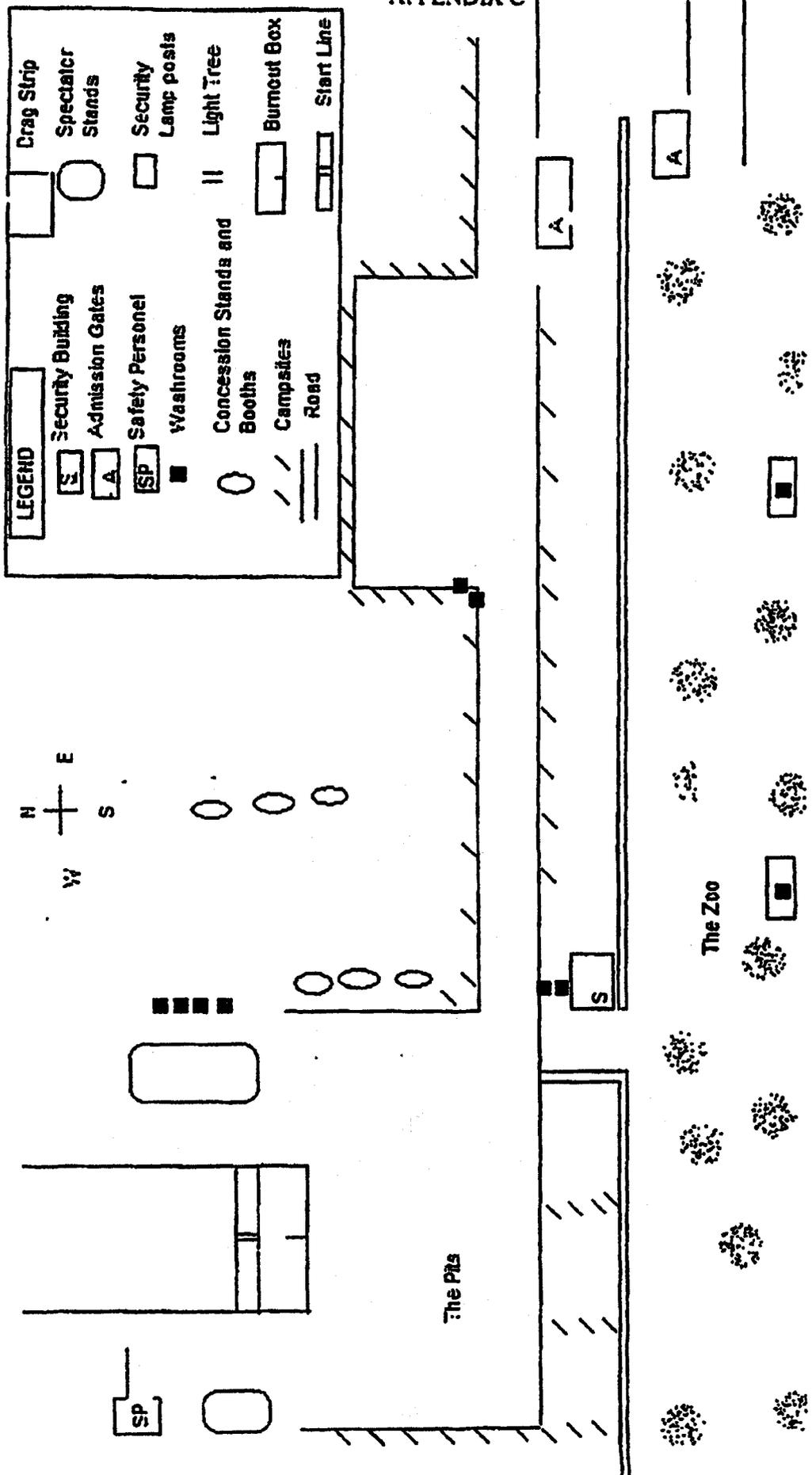
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