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   Brenda Gainer, York University
   Eileen Fischer, York University

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Women and Arts, Men and Sports: Two Phenomena or One?

Brenda Gainer, York University
Eileen Fischer, York University

Neither the performing arts nor sporting events are exclusively consumed by persons of one sex, yet there is both anecdotal and academic evidence that women are the dominant consumers of live arts while men are the dominant consumers of sporting events (Gainer, 1993).

The study reported here explores the extent to which rituals of attendance at sporting events or sports bars serve the same purposes for men as arts attendance does for women. It also examines the extent to which these rituals have unique meanings for participants.

A priori themes were developed from the literature. Existing theory and research suggests that women place greater value upon, and are more responsible for, maintaining social ties (c.f., Chodorow, 1978; Rosenthal, 1985; Fischer and Arnold, 1990; Gainer and Fischer, 1991). In particular, it is argued that women are heavily involved in the rituals of attendance at the arts. This is true in part because such activities allow them to build and/or reinforce close ties that connect them to their nearest friends and family, or those "bridging ties" (Gronovetter, 1973) that connect them to other, less intimate groups (Gainer, 1992).

The male-dominated rituals involved in the consumption of sports (such as attendance at games) has been argued to serve the markedly contrasting purpose of establishing power and dominance through reification of oppressive codes of class and sex (Deegan, 1989). Deegan recognizes, however, that participation in such consumption rituals may also be related both to the establishment of power and to the establishment of community.

Through a series of single-sex (both male-only and female-only) and mixed-sex focus groups, and ten individual in-depth interviews, the authors investigated respondents' views on both the practices and meanings associated with rituals where live arts versus sports were consumed. The a priori themes regarding establishing community and establishing power were found to characterize both arts and sports consumption rituals, though in different ways. Additional unique themes associated with the consumption of each ritual also emerged.