











Nonetheless, exams for Oxbridge men held significant meaning for the women in their lives by serving as a means to exhibit masculinity and thus to please relatives and female admirers (Deslandes, 2002, p. 570). In this context, exams functioned as an “opportunity to display one’s intellectual abilities and masculine prowess to potential financial dependents” (Deslandes, 2002, p. 570). Striving to please family and potential family relatives, Oxbridge men also dealt with the dilemma of satisfying or disappointing one’s father. As male students expressed

Both respect and disdain for this central figure in his life who occupied, simultaneously, the role of stern disciplinarian and task-master, breadwinner, and paragon of masculinity... concerns about pleasing one’s father represented an ultimate expression of the precariousness of the undergraduate’s position as a man. His financial dependence, professional uncertainty, youth, and need for familial approval made him dread this man but also yearn deeply for his support. (Deslandes, 2002, p. 571)

Clearly, the centrality of family and women in the process of exams produced a great deal of anxiety for Oxbridge men.

Outside of the familial context, exams also presented a unique opportunity for community building among the men themselves (Deslandes, 2002, p. 558). The exam process served a vital role in the formation of masculine identities at the universities as the experience prepared undergraduates to act as “one great band of brothers” in the world (Deslandes, 2002, p. 558). By drawing on their mutual experiences, largely unique to Oxbridge men, they were able, both during and after graduation, to refer to that sense of commonality that was so integral to the perpetuation of elite, male status (Deslandes, 2002, p. 558). This opportunity for camaraderie as presented undergraduates with an opportunity for social bonding as well as a chance to celebrate their successes and mourn their failures in a collective fashion (Deslandes, 2002).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the importance of scholarly excellence as demonstrated through a performance in exams held significance for each individual Oxbridge man. “The end of the undergraduate academic career, punctuated as it was by final examinations, meant ‘farewell’ to a familiar way of life. As part of the maturation process, undergraduates were aware that the completion of exams and a degree signaled the arrival of their obligations... and responsibilities as adult men”. To perform successfully in competitive exams foreshadowed a successful future as a man; to fail as a student fated oneself as a failure as a man. Thus, “academic exercises, within this context, became gauges of professional masculinity which could measure the candidate’s competitive spirit, endurance, stamina, strength, diligence, ability to overcome adversity and rise to any challenge, [and] gentlemanly proficiency” (Deslandes, 2002) as they proved their academic ability, which signified their success as leaders.

### **The Importance of Athleticism and Sports in Masculinity**

Just as competitive examinations supplied Oxbridge men with “a chaotic opportunity for men to test their physical limits once again”, sports and athleticism served as a critical factor in Rhodes’s search for exceptional men academically and physically fit to conduct international relations (Deslandes, 2002, p. 559). Described as a process whereby “the puny youngster [was] converted into the muscular man”, the competitive nature of examinations shared an inherent connection with the competitive nature of sports for both Oxbridge men and Rhodes Scholars (Deslandes, 2002, p. 559). Rhodes stipulated in his will that applicants hold a “fondness of and success in manly outdoor sports such as cricket, football and the like” (Schaeper & Schaeper, 1998, p. 16).











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