

Parody of the Gay Games: Gender Performativity in Sport

DEBRA SHOGAN AND JUDY DAVIDSON

In this article, the authors suggest that within the confines of conventional sporting contexts (including the Gay Games), politicized gender parody is difficult to achieve. They ruminate on the possibilities of queering sport and gender within a new, hypothetical sporting event for the Gay Games: drag. Debra Shogan (debra.shogan@ualberta.ca) and Judy Davidson (judy.davison@ualberta.ca) are with the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta. When Debra and Judy are not loudly disrupting certain cherished notions within sport studies, they live quietly with their girlfriends, pets, and gardens.

Sport, like most cultural practices and institutions, continues to be organized according to a male-female classification. Even the Gay Games, while transgressive in many ways, organizes its events into men's and women's competitions. In this paper we consider whether it is possible to disrupt conventional gender classification in competitive sport and we focus on the Gay Games as a site where this kind of disruption might be expected to happen.

Despite the myth of the 'natural athlete', there is nothing 'natural' about sport skills. Sport, like other cultural endeavors, is wholly contrived. "Sports are institutionalized competitive activities that involve vigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by individuals whose participation is motivated by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors"

(Coakley 21). Sport skills materialize in an athlete's body as particular movements, gestures, and comportment as a result of controlled and monitored repetition. Highly skilled athletes repeat sport skills over and over again until they are embodied. When skills of any kind are embodied, they acquire the feeling and appearance of being natural.

Like sport skills, gestures and comportment of femininity and masculinity in a given culture are naturalized as a result of a "*regulated process of repetition*" (Butler 1990, 145). As Iris Young notes in her essay, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment and Spatiality," "many of the observed differences between men and women in the performance of tasks requiring coordinated strength are due ... to the way each sex *uses* the body in approaching tasks" (142). Young cites the 1966 work of Erwin Straus who commented on the "'remarkable difference in the manner of throwing of the two sexes'" (137). Straus observed that "girls do not bring their whole bodies into the motion as much as the boys. They do not reach back, twist, move backward, step, and lean forward. Rather, the girls tend to remain relatively immobile except for their arms, and even the arm is not extended as far as it could be" (142).

Boys, as David Whitson points out, "are encouraged to experience their bodies, and therefore themselves, in forceful, space-occupying, even dominating ways ... assertiveness and confidence, as ways of relating to others, become embodied through the development of strength and skill and through prevailing over opponents in competitive situations" (23). "Boys are taught that to endure pain is courageous, to survive pain is manly" (Sabo 86); that their bodies are weapons (Messner 1992, 64); that "to be an adult male is distinctly to occupy space, to have a physical presence in the world" (Connell 14).

These accounts of feminine and masculine comportment are not accounts of 'natural' differences. Indeed, as Michael Messner comments, "throwing like a girl" is actually a more anatomically correct motion for the human arm. Throwing "'like a man' is a learned action ... an act that ... must be learned" (1994, 30). To say that someone throws like a girl is to critique his or her poor throwing technique while to say that someone (always a girl or

woman) throws like a boy is intended to compliment her. A girl or woman who throws like a boy has properly practiced the skill, while a girl or boy, woman or man who throws like a girl has not had this practice. Throwing like a boy does not, however, mean only that the thrower throws correctly. Throwing like a boy also means that the thrower throws in a way that is consistent with bodily comportment and movement disciplined through repetition of conventional masculinity. Since this is the case, a girl in sport must not only practice sport skills, she must practice conventionally masculine skills.

While many females have not had opportunities to practice and then embody gross muscular play and sport skills, feminine gestures and movements are not merely the result of a lack of practice of forceful space-occupying movement. There is also a "specific positive style of feminine body comportment and movement which is learned as the girl comes to understand that she is a girl" (Young 153). 'Throwing like a girl', then, is not merely the result of not practicing to throw 'like a boy'. Throwing, walking, sitting, standing, and gesturing like a girl are produced by repetition of techniques which discipline femininity and make femininity feel 'natural' and 'normal'. In "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," Sandra Bartky details some of the disciplinary practices or technologies which go into producing femininity: practices that produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine" (65). Practices familiar in North American culture are those which produce particular ways of walking, standing, sitting, getting in and out of vehicles and which over time produce particular facial expressions. Practicing femininity requires an "investment of time, the use of a wide variety of preparations, the mastery of a set of techniques and ... the acquisition of a specialized knowledge" (Bartky 71). Much of this specialized knowledge is an embodied knowledge about the manipulation of a variety of cosmetic tools including "the blow dryer, styling brush, curling iron, hot curlers, wire curlers, eye-liner, lipliner, lipstick brush, eyelash curler, mascara brush" (Bartky 71). These gestures, movements, and expressions are embodied as a result of daily, disciplined repetition. And, like the embodiment of sport skills, improper or inadequate performance of required

feminine skills feels 'wrong' or 'unnatural' to the performer.

While most girls and women are not formally trained in conventional femininity unless enrolled in, say, charm schools, organized sport is a central context within which conventional masculine gestures and movements are practiced and normalized. According to Whitson, "sport has become ... one of the central sites in the social production of masculinity" in societies with longer schooling and a decline in value attached to other manifestations of physical prowess (19).

Conventionally feminine girls and women are ill equipped for sport because they have not practiced sport skills *and* because they *have* practiced feminine skills. Boys who have practiced conventional masculinity but who have not practiced sport skills will do better than girls who have practiced 'femininity' and not practiced sport skills because to practice masculinity is to practice "forceful, space-occupying" movements – movements which are also important for sport participation. A boy who is not skilled at conventional masculinity may have similar difficulties in a sport environment to those of a feminine girl, while a girl who has practiced sport skills and also practiced feminine skills is faced with a situation with which a masculine boy in sport is not. She must contend with a conflict between the requisite skills of conventional femininity and the requisite skills of sport.

At this point we wish to acknowledge that our discussion has taken for granted that there are two sexes, male and female, that are knowable apart from gender. Not only does this ignore medical evidence of the existence of at least five sexes – what Anne Fausto-Sterling in her *Myths of Gender* refers to as male, intersexed male, true intersexed male, intersexed female, and female – it does not account for Judith Butler's argument that what counts as a male or female body in the first place arises from repeated gender performances that establish the boundaries of what are regarded as "stable bodily contours" (1990, 132) for women and men. These performances produce particular notions of sexed bodies – permeable, penetrable females and impermeable, penetrating males – and notions of what counts as sexual practice linked to these notions of sexed bodies. One is either heterosexually male or female.

Commenting on the photographs of masculine and feminine

body posture by photographer Marianne Wex, Sandra Bartky notes that:

Women sit waiting for trains with arms close to the body, hands folded together in their laps, toes pointing straight ahead and turned inward, and legs pressed together. The women in these photographs make themselves small and narrow, harmless; they seem tense; they take up little space. Men, on the other hand, expand into the available space; they sit with legs far apart and arms flung out at some distance from the body. Most common in these sitting male figures is ... the "proffering position": the men sit with legs thrown wide apart, crotch visible, feet pointing outward, often with an arm and casually dangling hand resting comfortably on an open, spread thigh. (68)

Even though all human bodies have permeable orifices and appendages which can penetrate these orifices, the repetitive practice of openness and forcefulness of conventionally masculine comportment suggests a body that is impermeable, forceful, and strong. This is the case not only for the masculine straight man, but for the masculine gay man and the stone butch lesbian. Repetitive practice of the closed, passivity of conventionally feminine comportment suggests a body that is permeable and penetrable and produces what is understood as the body of the effeminate straight woman and the effeminate receptive gay man.

Parody of Gender

We take seriously Judith Butler's claim that gender is a "*corporeal style*, an 'act' ... which is both intentional and performative, where performative suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (1990, 139). Because gender is the effect of repetitive performance of a gendered script, it is possible to subvert the script by parodying gender. In particular, drag, as a type of parody, has the potential to expose the artifice of gender because it "plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed ... the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance but sex and gender and gender and performance" (Butler 1990, 137). Not all parody is subversive, however. In Butler's terms, "successful" parody, that which is

“effectively disruptive [and] truly troubling” (1990, 139), not only reveals the original to be a derivation, but reconfigures that derivation. Indeed, as the examples that follow illustrate, parody of gender can serve to consolidate firmly held beliefs about the naturalness of gender, rather than disrupt them.

In order to inquire whether conventional gender classification used at the Gay Games might be disrupted by parody of these classifications, we take as a starting point a recent parody of the Gay Games by students from the Faculty with which we are affiliated.¹ Each fall, students in our Faculty spend a weekend together to learn more about program offerings and to foster comradery. New students are involved in various activities including impromptu skits with themes provided by senior students. At a recent orientation, one of the themes offered to a group of new students was “The Gay Games.” What ensued was a parody of the Gay Games – an imitation for comic effect or ridicule of what some thought an athletic competition involving gay men might look like. This parody of the Gay Games was amusing to many because of a shared notion that gay men are effeminate and that they could not possibly engage in or take seriously constitutive skills of ‘masculine’ sport requiring aggression, contact, speed, and strength. The parody occurred in a context in which confusions about gender could be fostered (Butler 1990). The confusions did not subvert gender, sexuality, or athletic identity, however, because the actors in the skit assumed themselves to be ‘real’ or ‘normal’ men engaged in a parody of ‘abnormal’ men attempting sport skills. That the undergraduate students read this skit as parodic exemplifies that playing with identity does not necessarily create new ways of understanding or taking up gender. Indeed, in this case, because conventionally masculine and athletic identities were assumed to be ‘real’ or ‘natural’, playing with identity by the actors in the skit confirmed the perversity or deviance of those who do not get identity ‘right’. Therefore, in Butler’s terms, the parody was not necessarily successful.

¹ Debra Shogan (1999) took up this example in a previous work. Here, we elaborate the gender and racial effects of this parody.

This parody of the Gay Games has triggered questions not only about parody of gay athletes assumed to be 'feminine' males but also about the possibility of parodies of 'masculine' males and 'masculine' and 'feminine' females in sport, and parody of the Gay Games by athletic women and/or lesbian athletes. In addition, this parody of the Gay Games in skit form allows us to consider later in the paper whether parodies by 'queer' performers of gender might disrupt the actual Gay Games. As we take up these questions, we struggle to find ways to foreground the contingency of bodies as we discuss the parody of gender. There is no other option but to refer to female and male bodies even as we agree that what counts as sexed bodies would be different in the context of a range of gender performatives.

Parody of Feminine Males in Sport

Presumably the purpose of the skit theme "The Gay Games" and its enactment was the impersonation of the stereotype of a gay man – 'feminine', unfamiliar and uncomfortable with attempting 'masculine' sport activities. This skit induced laughter because it occurred in a context in which confusion about gender could be fostered. However, it was not subversive "parodic laughter" (Butler 1990, 139). By juxtaposing a stereotype of gay men with 'masculine' sport skills, masculinity, femininity, and sexuality were confused, but in a manner that consolidated rather than subverted the assumed naturalness of these categories. This is because participants considered the actors to be 'real' men engaged in a parody of those pretending to be masculine. The queer scholar in attendance also enjoyed a parodic laugh but for her it was because the 'real' man was revealed as a parody of himself. By assuming his own identity to be original while impersonating a gay man who he believed to be a copy of original femininity, the 'real' man was revealed as "an inevitably failed [copy] ... [and] laughter emerge[d] in the realization that all along the original was derived" (Butler 1990, 139).

Would the effects of a parody of a 'feminine' man participating in sport be different if performed by a gay man in drag while engaged in a 'serious' athletic competition? A picture from our local newspaper (*The Edmonton Journal*) shows a man in drag competing in the 'wild drag race' event at the Gay Rodeo. He is

dragging what appears to be a full-grown steer while wearing a chiffon dress, gloves, a crown, and sneakers. Is this a 'feminine' man participating in sport, a parody of a 'feminine' man in sport, or a "casual and cynical mockery of women" (Frye 137)?² Perhaps it is a spoof on 'masculine' men. Since the subversiveness of parody depends upon a context in which subversive confusions can be fostered (Butler 1990), it is possible for the man in drag participating in the gay rodeo to be 'read' as a spoof on rodeo, an insult to women, a spoof on the artifice of gender, or as a consolidation of gayness as perverse and what rodeo 'really' looks like when 'real' men participate.

Parody of Feminine Females in Sport

It is also possible that the drag queen at the gay rodeo might be read as a parody of women in sport, although such a parody is likely to be subversive only if it is clear that women's sport is what is spoofed – something like the representation of a women's baseball game which appeared on the cover of the *Harvard Lampoon* (1975) in which the female catcher had her baseball cap on backwards to accommodate her catcher's mask and her breasts on backwards to accommodate her chest pad (Figure 1).

When conventionally masculine men or athletic women parody feminine women performing sport skills, it is unlikely that this parody will create new ways of understanding or performing established identity categories. When a feminine woman is represented as throwing, running, climbing, swinging, or hitting 'like a girl' by masculine men or athletic women, this parody consolidates the notion of the physically limited (in terms of traditional sports skills) feminine woman. Moreover, when athletic women have some investment in their own femininity, at least outside athletic performance, a parody of feminine women performing sport skills is more like a joke on themselves because it draws attention to inconsistencies in their femininity. This is

² Butler writes that a feminist analysis which "diagnoses male homosexuality as rooted in misogyny ... is a way for feminist women to make themselves into the center of male homosexual activity (and thus to reinscribe the heterosexual matrix)" (Butler 1993, 127).

particularly the case if a dark-skinned female athlete parodies a white feminine woman attempting sport skills since included in constitutive characteristics of conventional femininity in this culture is light-colored skin. As bell hooks notes, “dark skin is stereotypically coded in the racist, sexist, or colonized imagination as masculine. Hence a male’s power is enhanced by dark looks while a female’s dark looks diminish her femininity” (180). While parody of white female athletes by dark-skinned athletes might expose the artifice of femininity and the racist assumptions configured in femininity, the parody also runs the risk of reconfiguring the dark-skinned woman as ‘deficient’ as a woman, that is, as conventionally masculine.

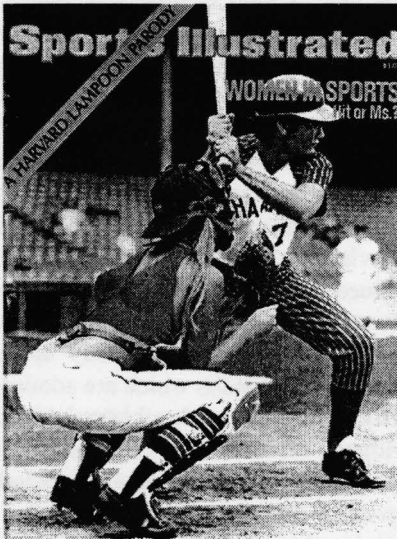


Figure 1: Parody of women in sport?
© The Harvard Lampoon

A parody of conventionally feminine women in sport by athletic women might open up the possibility for a subversion of femininity and masculinity. Members of the Beehives, a women’s hockey team with “big hair” (Roxxie 14), parody both ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ sport by representing themselves as hyperfeminine in appearance while performing a sport which requires skills of conventional masculinity. As one player reported, “the big hair thing flies in the face of how hockey players usually define themselves – macho,

virile, all of that. Beehives are a contradiction in terms: we are ... women with a femmy icon who can REALLY play hockey” (Roxxie 15).

Parody of Masculine Males in Sport

Parody of conventional masculinity by a male who takes his

masculinity seriously is not subversive of gender because, in imitating himself, a masculine male is indistinguishable from himself. This is because it is difficult to recognize the repetitive performances which go into solidifying identity as performance when someone's identity matches the expectations for that identity. The performance does not look like a performance because it "effects realness, to the extent that it *cannot* be read ... where what appears and what it means coincide" (Butler 1993, 129).

Men in drag and conventionally feminine women *are* in a position to subvert the perceived naturalness of masculine men and create new ways of understanding and participating in sport because the "artifice of the performance can be read as artifice" (Butler 1993, 129). Since in most contexts neither men in drag nor feminine women are perceived to be able to perform sport skills, when they exaggerate the masculinity of men in sport, it is possible to disrupt the assumption that masculinity 'naturally' coheres to male bodies.

White masculine males and black masculine males might parody each other, making it possible that some might notice that masculinity is racialized. As Richard Majors argues in "Cool Pose" (1990), black 'cool pose' is a performance which white males are likely to fail to copy. Because virtuoso performances cultivated by black male athletes are valued widely by sport enthusiasts, impersonations of black male athletes by white men, unlike other stereotypical impersonations of blacks by whites, may appear respectful – like any attempt at modeling skills which are admired. On the other hand, impersonations of white male athletes by black males are open to a kind of ridicule captured by the phrase, "white men can't jump." Since jumping is a skill that females are thought incapable of, there is the potential for a black male parodying a white male athlete to effeminize this performance and perhaps induce a subversive confusion of white masculinity with conventional femininity.

Parody of Masculine Females in Sport

The parody of gay men in the Gay Games prompted us to wonder what might have happened if the theme "Gay Games" had been given to athletic women with the expectation that they parody lesbians in sport. Like conventionally masculine men attempting to

parody masculine men, an athletic woman looks 'real' as she attempts her parody of the lesbian or dyke in sport. An athletic woman looks like an athletic woman as she attempts a parody of 'the dyke in sport' because the assumed characteristics of a lesbian in sport – aggressive, strong, skilled – are also characteristics of an athletic woman.

While a gay man in drag can use sport as a context to parody gender and sport and create new possibilities for understanding and participating in sport, it is much more difficult for a lesbian to use sport as a context to subvert gender. Typically, since 'drag' on a female body is thought to consist of 'masculine' attire and bodily comportment, a lesbian in drag is indistinguishable from a lesbian in sport and from the more general category, the athletic woman in sport. A lesbian athlete may, however, consider herself to be in drag when wearing 'feminine' apparel. She might wear a pink tutu while running and winning the 200 meter sprint event, something which occurred at the 1994 New York Gay Games. By doing so, stereotypes of masculine lesbians in sport may be subverted.

Parody by athletic women of other athletic women might, however, expose the racialization of femininity. A white female athlete impersonating a black female athlete may attribute athletic skills, for example, jumping ability and exaggerated physical strength (and hence masculinity), to the black athlete which she might not attribute in the same measure to herself as a white athlete, thus underlining her own ambivalent relationship to the constitutive demands both of sport and of femininity. An impersonation of a white female athlete by a black female athlete, on the other hand, might attribute a 'femininity as incompetence' to the white athlete, thus distancing her from conventional (white) femininity and exposing a break in the presumed continuity between female sexed bodies and conventional femininity. For those who equate white femininity with femininity, the parody is likely to reconfigure popular cultural notions that, as a black woman, she is not 'really' feminine.

The Context for Sport Parody

There are numerous examples from popular culture of celebrities

troubling gender. For instance, Dennis Rodman, bad boy of the National Basketball Association, displays multiple tattoos, dyed hair, and manicured and polished nails while he is competing. Off the court, Rodman cross-dresses or wears flamboyant clothes. He talks openly about going to gay bars and his fantasies about sex with men. Shortly after the release of his book *Bad As I Wanna Be* in the spring of 1996, Rodman appeared for a book signing in Chicago dressed in a silver halter, neon pink boa, large silver earrings, and wearing pink lipstick, pink fingernail polish, and silver hair. Later that summer for a book signing in New York, Rodman arrived in a horse-drawn carriage escorted by four women in tuxedos. He was wearing a blond wig, a white wedding gown, a nose piercing, and bright red lipstick.

It is quite a different thing for Dennis Rodman than it is for noncelebrities to play with gender while they are competing. Pushing limits of identity is open to athletes like Rodman, whose worth as a professional athlete makes it possible for him to engage in practices disruptive to established identity categories without losing his spot on the team. The Beehives, the cowboy in the Gay Rodeo, and the sprinter at the Gay Games are in a position to parody gendered, sexual, and possibly athletic identity while they are competing because pushing the limits of identity is in part what the team or the competition is fostering. Most athletes, however, must comply with more than the sport skill requirements of 'the athlete'; they must also comply with expectations associated with their gender and race or not be regarded as good teammates. Moreover, disruption of some identity categories is very difficult to accomplish by parody. For athletes with disabilities, for example, the limitations imposed by impairment may make it difficult to parody able-bodied athletes in or out of competition.³

Earlier we said that we struggle with how to talk about parody of gender where gender is understood to include sexed bodies. We indicated that it was necessary for us to presume female

³ We are grateful to Kathleen Rockhill (1996) for this point from her presentation, "On the Matter of Bodies: Thinking through Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity in Relation to Sexuality, Race and Dis/ability."

and male bodies in order to write about parody as a subversive disruption of masculinity and femininity and what comes to count as male and female bodies. This paradox is central to parody as well since parody also must take up and hence legitimize the very terms it attempts to subvert (Hutcheon 1989, 101). As Linda Hutcheon indicates, transgression is authorized by the norm it seeks to subvert and "even in mocking, parody reinforces ... it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence" (1985, 75). In this instance, conventional notions of dimorphic sexed bodies remain authorized by the transgressions of masculinity and femininity we describe.

We are interested in pursuing the possibilities for the disruption of what counts as sexed bodies in this discussion about the effectiveness of parody. We have been using parody of the Gay Games in skit form to notice how possibilities for subverting gender may or may not work. We now wish to consider the effectiveness of parody to disrupt the acceptance of male and female competitive categories and hence male and female bodies at the Gay Games.

Parody at Lesbian and Gay Athletic Events:

Queering the Gay Games

Disruptions or parodic reconfigurations of gender and/or sexuality often rely on a reading by a straight audience, or the coded reading by a lesbian/gay audience within a heteronormative context. The success of these parodies depends on where the parody is taking place and who is reading it in what context. We think the Gay Games provides an interesting homosexualized context where exposing sex as a discursive effect is difficult, even within a supposedly "queer" (read: lesbian and gay) event. We are not trying to configure the Gay Games context as outside of discourse, nor are we suggesting that it could be free from heteronormative imperatives. It is, however, a public time and space where homo is expected, not hetero, and we think this may add a twist to how a gender parody might work.

Disrupting gender within a homosexual context, as opposed to a heterosexual context, might transgress the reliance (or lay bare the power function it serves) of the homosexual on the gendered heterosexual. A conventional notion of gay or lesbian still needs the

heteronormative function of the traditional gender dyad of male and female. Even though homosexuality operates as heterosexuality's constitutive Other, the construction of male and female as discrete categories locks an understanding of homosexuality (as same-sexed) into the heteronormative logic of reified ideas of male and female difference. For this reason, the Gay Games' strategy to replace "straight" athletes with "gay" athletes does not always shift naturalized dominant gender discourses.

We want to suggest, though, that a *queer* disruption to gender and sport within a specifically lesbian/gay context is possible and desirable (even though it may be fraught with several tensions that could be politically troubling as sex/gender discourses do not operate indistinguishably from race, class, and/or physical ability). For the subject to be queer, it cannot be purely oppositional, which effectively reinscribes the dominant notion (in this case, straight athletes) in its reversal: "The subject who is 'queered' into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds *takes up* or *cites* that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition. This kind of citation will emerge as *theatrical* to the extent that it *mimes and renders hyperbolic* the discursive convention that it also *reverses*. The hyperbolic gesture is crucial to the exposure of the homophobic 'law' that can no longer control the terms of its own abjecting strategies" (Butler 1993, 232).

One of the reasons the parodies of gender outlined in the earlier part of the paper may fail is that the sporting context itself was not problematized. In the rodeo, baseball, hockey, and track examples in which gender was spoofed, the logic of sport as a masculinist enterprise stayed intact. The examples take for granted the immediate and apparently 'natural' associations of sport with conventional masculinity. Perhaps one of the reasons that it is difficult to conceive of a masculine female (the lesbian) parodying gender within an unproblematized sporting context is that sport colludes to produce and prop up those typically masculine attributes of overt aggressive physicality and demonstrations of brute strength and skill. Even though gay athletic events may be gender-bending to some extent, the structure of sport itself remains untouched by these parodic moments.

To the extent that sport is used as the medium with which

participants play with gender, parodies of gender will be limited. One exception to this might be the flamingo races which have become a gay swim meet tradition:

The earnestness of the gay swim meets is usually given its antidote in the camp of the pink flamingo relay, now a standard event at these competitions. The point is for two swimmers from each team to don plastic pink flamingo hats; while one swims the arm pull of the breast stroke, the other does the kick while grasping the legs of the first; at the other end of the pool, they exchange hats and another two complete the race. Over the years this relay has grown into a camp extravaganza, with teams in radical drag making grand entrances. (Pronger 275)

This swimming event, while 'bastardizing' the breast stroke to some extent, feminizes the activity (maybe akin to "swimming like a girl"), relegating it to the trivial, whereas serious, 'proper' swimming happens in the actual tournament. We know not to take the athletic aspect of the flamingo race seriously, perhaps just the campy drag aspect. The 'real' swimming competition comes later, proving that fags can be as 'manly' as 'real' straight boys. Because gender parody must be read within the confines of a traditional and conventional frame of masculinity (sport), the space to maneuver subversively within gender performatives is restricted and circumscribed. Consequently, it is our contention that sport might have to be called into question alongside gender and sexuality for drag to work as a disruptive parody in sport.

The masculinities produced through sport participation have been extensively studied and theorized (Messner 1992; Sabo; Whitson). However, sport analysis and criticism does not necessarily problematize the constitutive values and constructs of sport (such as aggressive, violent, muscular prowess, and physical skills) or how conventional masculinity is constitutive of sport. This is demonstrated in the types of sports which are considered 'truly' masculine: violent sports such as football, hockey, and rugby are considered more virile than gymnastics, diving, or figure skating. Consistent with heterosexist masculinity, male athletes in 'feminized' sports are often represented as and perhaps are even expected 'to be' homosexuals. This representation is affirmed when

considering media coverage of the announcements of the HIV-positive status of certain elite athletes. For example, basketball player Magic Johnson was constructed as hyper(hetero)sexual, whereas diver Greg Louganis was assumed to be homosexual. Or as one gay male athlete suggested, "Swimming is not a butch enough sport to discredit accusations that you're queer" (Pronger 32).

In his discussion of understanding how Australian pro rugby player Ian Roberts was able to come out and maintain his star status and success, Toby Miller suggests that perhaps 'being' gay (and male) can be assimilated as long as conventional masculinity is not threatened:

The 'buff-bodied' gay man became so powerful a stereotype by the 1980s that having bulging huge muscles, a classic 'V-torso', 'washboard' abdominal musculature, and bulging biceps actually suggested to some that a man was homosexual. Of course, this new stereotype led to ... an over-compensation, by men, against older categorisations of effeminacy and physical weakness. Hence many gay men bought into aspects of dominant masculinity, appropriating conventional signifiers of male power and so destabilising its 'straight' monopoly, but also typifying such forms of life as the 'acme' of maleness. This hypermasculinity hardened emotions and bodies – a tribute to the very models that had traditionally excluded and brutalised gays. We could view this development either as countering prevailing ways of seeing gay men or as a gruesome throwback to racist and fascist imagery (a particular affront to gay black men). (198)⁴

Perhaps in certain contexts, it is not 'being' gay that is troublesome. It is the disruption of the heteronormative gender discourse which cannot be tolerated. Ian Roberts does not threaten the very basis of rugby or rugby culture as he maintains the norms of brute strength

⁴ David Halperin does an interesting alternative reading of the gay male bodybuilding imperative. He suggests, interpreting Foucault, that it is a form of asceticism, an ethical self-fashioning that is distinctly queer, in that gay men bodybuild "differently," eroticizing certain body areas, making muscle as desire, using the body as queer erotic image. He argues it is different from 'straight' working out (115-18).

and physical violence inherent to the sport. If athletic women did not contradict the codes for heteronormative femininity which serious sporting participation demands they do, perhaps the lesbian specter would not loom over women's sport as it does. Or, perhaps if sport did not demand such masculinized skills and performances, might things look different?

The Queering of Sport – Drag Races



Figure 2: The Drag Races
© Darrin Hagen

The Drag Races did not involve high-speed cars. They were more like a Crossdresser's Olympics. Every May long weekend, Flashback prepared for the onslaught of madness. Before the Step-down, before the Crowning, before the queens painted, the staff would arrive, clean the club, warm up the barbecue, and fill up the dunk tank. The alley was blocked off at both ends. The beer cooler was stuffed with wading pools full of lime jello, and I was going over the list of events for the day:

Tug of War, Wet T-Shirt, Wet Jockstrap, Skiing for Five, Run Like a Girl/Boy, Waitress Races, Pie Eating Contests, Condom Blowup, Jello Wrestling (later it became Creamed Corn Wrestling), The Foxy Lady Rhinestone Turkey Baster Relay Marathon, The Squeeze-a-Snack Relay Marathon, The DQ Dunk Tank, The Lady Di Faint-A-Like Contest, and of course, The Drag Races, which involved running back and forth in the deep gravel in the alley, gradually layering on women's clothing from the Drag Pit. Naturally, maximum liquor intake was mandatory.

—Hagen 69-70; Figure 2

We propose drag as a new Gay Games athletic activity which consists of how well each athlete performs the complex physical skills of a gender arbitrarily chosen. The drag event would be a contest of feminized or masculinized physical skills, from walking to dressing to talking to dancing to lip sync to hair management. This would subvert the masculinized sport mantra of faster, stronger, higher (except perhaps when it comes to hair!) and underline Butler's assertion that while sex and gender may appear to cohere, it can be demonstrated that these categories are arbitrary and that masculine males and feminine females are unstable constructions (1990).

In this drag contest there would be no male and female categories. There would only be representations of the hyperreal status of masculinities and femininities, performed by drag athletes, judged for their parodic successes and technical prowess. Whether those kings/queens⁵ would be caught in variously sexed male or female or transitioning bodies would be irrelevant and immaterial to the judges. The skill with which various bodies and accouterments could perform highly stylized femininities and/or masculinities would be the relevant and very material focus of this event, which could be camped up, ironized, played with, and performed to a heightened and over-the-top best. Body size and type would not comprise the coveted edge, but rather how the diva employs the body in "perfected" gendered comportment. If all gender performance necessarily fails so as to prop up and reproduce the mythic ideal gender imperative, this athletic site could sever gender from its sexed anchor while the rules and objectives of the game could make space for a variety of gendered performances (Butler 1990; 1993).

One of the expressed aims of the Gay Games is to reconfigure sport and make it more participatory (Markwell). Part of the drag event evaluation protocol might involve audience

⁵ This is an example of how we continue to struggle with the difficulty of writing about bodies without sexing them. Even invoking the terms king and queen, although reversing the typical coherence of gendered comportment to sexed body, still primarily leaves the binary relation intact. This does little to push the discourse of gender in disruptive ways. Rather, it reinscribes the norm through its reversal.

approval and judgment. Given that in the Gay Games context, a homoerotic sensibility would likely prevail, certain butch and femme aesthetics might come to the fore, supplanting the more staid and contrived male/female distinctions of other more mundane ("straight") athletic events. This queer event, held in the lesbian/gay/trans context of the Gay Games, may also help resist the heteronormative impulse of some takes on drag in mainstream popular culture such as the films *Tootsie* or *Victor/Victoria*. Here, the threat of the homosexual plot is welcomed (Butler 1993).

Unlike the current configuration of the Gay Games' athletic events, there are no men's and women's competitions here, and drug testing takes on a whole new meaning and is limited to being able to stand up and perform on the day. There are no sex testing procedures, and transitioning athletes do not need documentation 'proving' their sex from presiding physicians and psychiatrists (cf. *Gay Games Amsterdam 1998*). There are no rules about what level of hormones an athlete is currently taking. What matters is what you look like and how you move: "Realness' is not exactly a category in which one competes; it is a standard that is used to judge any given performance within the established categories. And yet what determines the effect of realness is the ability to compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect" (Butler 1993, 129).

The name of the game is to take gender and sex to new places, to 'do' girls better than women, and boys better than men. No matter what morphological form you inhabit, camp it up *boyz* and *grrrls*! The only restrictions are on the wattage of your curling iron and perhaps, to discourage hypercommodification and globalization impulses, a very modest cap on the gender campaign budget.

Is "parodying the dominant norms enough to displace them? Indeed, [it calls into question] whether the denaturalization of gender cannot be the very vehicle for a reconsolidation of hegemonic norms" (Butler 1993, 125). We think this speculative enterprise can be critically queer. Gender is unhinged from a sexed body. It is performed as a constructed ideal which is complicated, difficult, and requires meticulous and repetitive practice. The performances would be read by a queer audience,

many of whom would still ascribe to and believe in a naturalness for sex, gender, and, probably, sexuality, but who would likely be literate to some extent in the camp, mime, and parody that gays and lesbians have used for years to identify one another and create cultures for themselves. The performances would be bound to fail, yet would have to be believable. And the rules of the game would not restrict the performances to a dominant set of masculine attributes and ideals, thereby allowing space for athletes to be read outside of those traditional sporting constraints.

Earlier in this section we alluded to some of the troubling aspects of this idea. How race, class, and physical ability get played out at a mythic event like this could easily reinforce hegemonic norms. Opportunities might exist for race to be parodied and reconfigured by drawing attention to racialization processes and effects without knowing necessarily how the actual body underneath is raced. But this runs the risk of reinscribing dominant racial discourses, perhaps unwittingly, while concentrating on gender. Additionally, we are concerned about the effects of codifying drag outside of its subaltern culture/practice. Darrin Hagen felt that one of his triumphs in Edmonton was to bring drag to the daylight, creating and performing drag in plays at the Fringe Festival held there each summer. We wonder what the effects of institutionalizing drag events at the Gay Games might be? Would drag become an "authorized transgression," losing its subversive edge (Markwell 117)? And what class configurations will be lauded in these drag performatives, and at whose expense (pun intended)? How many very skilled drag kings and queens can afford to fly to exotic destinations around the world to strut their stuff?

Whatever the outcome of this speculation about drag as a serious athletic event at the Gay Games, for "successful" gender parody to occur, the hegemonic understandings of the cultural practice of sport must be queered. The conventional masculine frame of sport restricts the critical force of most attempts of gender parody within an athletic or sporting context. For conventional gender classification to be disrupted in competitive sport, all aspects of gendered discourses must be up for grabs, including sport itself.

Works Cited

- Bartky, Sandra. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- . *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Coakley, Jay. *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies*. St. Louis: Mosby, 1994.
- Connell, Robert W. *Which Way Is Up?: Essays on Class, Sex and Culture*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1983.
- Edwards, Blake, dir. *Victor/Victoria*. 1982.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Myths of Gender*. New York: Basic, 1992.
- Frye, Marilyn. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1983.
- Gay Games Amsterdam 1998 – Friendship Through Culture and Sports*. Registration booklet. Amsterdam: no publisher, 1998.
- Hagen, Darrin. *The Edmonton Queen, Not a Riverboat Story: Inside a Dynasty of Drag*. Edmonton: Slipstream, 1997.
- Halperin, David M. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University, 1995.
- Harvard Lampoon*. "Women in Sports: Hit or Ms?" Fall 1975.
- hooks, bell. *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- . *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Majors, Richard. "Cool Pose: Black Masculinity and Sports." *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. Ed. M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990. 109-14.
- Markwell, Kevin. "Playing queer: Leisure in the Lives of Gay Men." *Tourism, Leisure, Sport: Critical Perspectives*.

- Ed. D. Rowe & G. Lawrence. Rydalmere, NSW: Hodder Education, 1998. 113-25.
- Messner, Michael A. *Power At Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*. Boston: Beacon, 1992.
- . "Ah, Ya Throw Like a Girl!" *Sex, Violence & Power in Sports*. Ed. M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo. Freedom, CA: Crossing, 1994. 28-32.
- Miller, Toby. "Scouting for Boys: Sport Looks at Men." *Tourism, Leisure, Sport: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. D. Rowe & G. Lawrence. Rydalmere, NSW: Hodder Education, 1998. 194-203.
- Pollack, Sydney, dir. *Tootsie*. 1982.
- Pronger, Brian. *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality and the Meaning of Sex*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990.
- Rockhill, Kathleen. "On the Matter of Bodies: Thinking through Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity in Relation to Sexuality, Race, and Dis/ability." Canadian Lesbian and Gay Studies Association Learned Society Annual Meeting. Brock University, June 2, 1996.
- Rodman, Dennis. *Bad As I Wanna Be*. New York: Delacorte, 1996.
- Roxxie. "Hockey Action: Beehives!" *Girljock* 9 (1993): 14-15.
- Sabo, Don. "The Politics of Homophobia in Sport." *Sex, Violence & Power in Sports*. Ed. M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo. Freedom, CA: Crossing, 1994. 101-112.
- Shogan, Debra. *The Making of High Performance Athletes, Discipline, Diversity, and Ethics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.
- Whitson, David. "Sport in the Social Construction of Masculinity." *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. Ed. M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990. 19-29.
- "Wild Drag Race." *Edmonton Journal* 3 July 1994: A5.
- Young, Iris. M. "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3 (1980): 137-56.