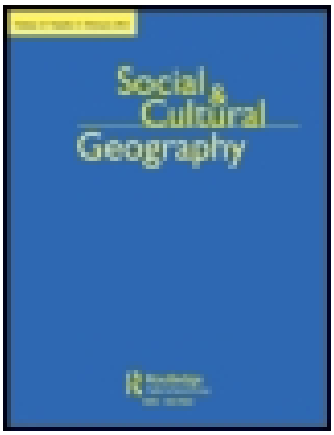

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Gay Games: Performing 'community' out from the closet of the locker room

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Matters of community, performativity, bodies, space, belonging, oppression, resistance and their relationship to culture are explored in this paper within the context of Sydney's 2002 Gay Games. I begin the paper considering how the everyday meaning and practices of sports produce spaces that are oppressive to many gay men. I then introduce the Gay Games as a site of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex resistance, established to rupture stereotypes of heteronormativity in sports. Drawing upon my own research of Sydney's Gay Games I next explore how willingness to participate amongst self-identifying gay men depends upon how they understood their performance within the context of the event. I conclude the paper by arguing that willingness to participate in Sydney's Gay Games illustrates fundamental issues about the connectedness of bodies and space through the discursive body as space and the material body in space.

Key words: sports, performance, community, bodies, gay, Gay Games, Sydney.

The Gay Games as a social space

A geographical analysis of Sydney's 2002 Gay Games VI, *Under New Skies* provides an opportunity to investigate the recent re-examinations of community as both a domain of social action, and produced by social action (Day 1998; Dwyer 1999; Liepins 2000). Adopting Liepins' (2000) reconceptualization of community as a social phenomenon, I examine the Gay Games as a social space or 'sportscape'. The games are analysed as temporally and locationally embedded within particular social terrains of discourse, and the outcome of a complex iterative process between four elements: people, meanings, practices, and space/structures (Liepins 2000). Important consideration is given to recent cultural and poststructural theories that discuss ideas of socially constructed discourses and multiple (and partial) knowledges (Butler 1990, 1993; Foucault 1972); the issue of heterogeneity or difference in social life (Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1987; Young 1990) and the interconnections between identity, space and place (Brown 2000; Gregson and Rose 2000; Massey 1993, 1999; McDowell 1999; Nast and Pile 1998; Rose 1995; Thrift 1996). This paper illustrates how these theories matter in mediating performance in and resistance to the Gay Games as a social space by gay men in Sydney.

The Gay Games demonstrate how sports' bodies and performances are set within historically and spatially embedded terrains of dis-

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course. Culturally constructed meanings and practices in sports act as a constraint for marginal groups. The works of Foucault (1972, 1977) and Butler (1990, 1993) have been particularly influential in shaping geographers understanding of how the body is produced by and exists in discourse and how the body is transformed through the vigilance and the self-discipline of the owner. Analysis of the Gay Games matters because it represents a site through which marginalized social groups attempt to challenge cultural norms that are oppressive and constrain the bodily performances of those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI).

The Federation of Gay Games (FGG) is the organization responsible for choosing the site of each Gay Games and upholding the fundamental principles of inclusion and participation. The organization produces texts through which they attempt to create a set of shared meanings about the games. The games are positioned as a site of 'celebration', 'affirmation', 'belonging', 'acceptance' and 'diversity' (FGG 2001). The FGG imagines both unity and difference in their sports 'community'. The Gay Games is positioned by the FGG as unifying people in their ability to participate in a festival of sports, whilst holding a variety of contrasting identities. These different identities include sexuality, nationality, ethnicity and ability.

Culture is important in re-examinations of 'community' because as a quadrennial, international social gathering, held within various 'meeting places', the games has no fixed territorial base and is comprised of multiple identities. Therefore, past approaches that attempt to conceptualize community as a relatively fixed object offer little insight into this event. The collective of the Gay Games does not have the social homogeneity that is envisaged to exist between members of a community defined in terms of 'the ideal of shared subjectivities' (Young 1990: 302). In the 1970s, Gay Liberation mobilized this expression of community, based upon shared sexual identities of men and women as either gay or lesbian, for projects of transcendence, countering oppressions, and liberation (Altman 1972). Conceptualized in this way, however, community has been argued to be alienating, because not all gay men and women may see themselves within the consensus of what is to be allegedly 'gay' or 'lesbian'.

Reappraisals of ideas about community have sought to embrace rather than to deny contrasting identities within collectives (Spivak 1987; Young 1990). Paralleling the theorization of new ethnicities (Hall 1996), queer theory suggests that the articulation of sexualities should be regarded not as an essence but a positioning, in which identities are made within discourses of a particular moment or culture (Hennessy 1994; Jagose 1996). The imagined 'queer community' becomes one that is theorized as a social grouping that is forged across difference, rather than a construction of community that subsumes difference (Doty 1993). Queer theory embraces Young's critiques that heterogeneity occurs within social groupings, and provides an alternative construction of an imagined 'queer community' in which identity is conceived to be fluid and without an essence (Halperin 1995). Instead, what unifies people is the politics of affinity (Hodge 2000). In the case of the Gay Games this involves an alliance forged through an ability to speak together in opposition to heteronormativity in sports.

As this paper demonstrates, the 'community' created by the Gay Games involves active bodily performances. The work of feminist geographers has shown that social relations, including importantly, gender relations and sexual identity, are constructed and negotiated spatially and are embedded in the spatial organization of places (for a review see Longhurst 2001: 21).

Both bodies and space are bound into power/knowledge relationships. Rose (1995: 335) argues, 'particular imagined spatialities are constitutive of specific subjectivities. Identities are in part constituted by the kind of space through which they imagine themselves'. Through participation in the games, athletes' mobile bodies create space through the performances of gestures that relate to identity. Moreover, these sports spaces in turn construct bodies with particular needs and desires.

Importantly for geographers, the work of Nelson (1999) argues bodies are not to be reduced to unreflexive performers of dominant discourses because this abstracts the subject from time and place. Thus, participants in the Gay Games are regarded as actively choosing to perform their identities in ways they see as challenging to heteronormativity. Geographical analysis of the games matters because the decision about whether or not to participate cannot be understood outside of place. The performance of identities must be historically and geographically embedded because temporally and locationally specific terrains of power and discourse shape individual performances of identity (Nash 2000). As this paper will show, potential participants in the games were actively aware of the types of spaces in which they would participate. Perceptions of the social interactions and cultural meanings of these places played a critical role in gay men's decisions to participate or attend the games. The particular meanings, perceived performances and spaces of a sports community also acted to exclude some potential participants from the 'community' of the games and unintentionally reinforced stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity.

The findings presented in the paper are based on thirty in-depth interviews, carried out four months before Sydney hosted the Gay Games in November 2002, with self-identifying gay men (differentiated by age, occupation, identification with the gay and lesbian 'community' and participation in sports). Whilst acknowledging that views of lesbian, bisexuals, transsexuals and intersex are equally valid and valuable in regards to 'community' and the games, they are positioned beyond the scope of this project. The focus of this paper is restricted to the reactions of gay men living in metropolitan Sydney. Participants were recruited through advertisements and 'snowballing' from gay and lesbian organizations and individual contacts. The interview material was recorded, transcribed and analysed using conventional qualitative techniques that involved processes of familiarization, indexing, charting and mapping (Ritchie and Spencer 1994). The quotations used in the text are verbatim. Participants' names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Sports bodies: Play it like a man! Take it like a man!

Given that sporting success plays an integral role in forging national pride and heroes, the archetype of the battler succeeding against the odds (Veal and Lynch 2001: 288), Sydney's 2002 Gay Games are particularly significant for Australian gay men's lives. In Australia, sports are endorsed as a privileged site through drawing upon a particular understanding of male sportscapes inherited from Victorian sociopolitical structures and the discursive regime Mrozek (1985) labelled the 'spermatic economy'. According to middle-class Victorian notions, physical and sexual capital, like financial capital, was regarded as finite, and therefore required regulation and discipline to guarantee that they were not squandered. In an era where sexual norms were regulated by a template of compulsory heterosexuality, when sexual capi-

tal was allegedly 'wasted' in all sexual acts performed for pleasure, supposed sociopolitical 'problems' arose, including homosexuality. Discourses in medicine and the church promoted sports as one mechanism to achieve a pedagogical and spiritual transformation of individuals from illicit, forbidden and wasteful sexual acts (Foucault 1981). Hence, since the 1830s sports were mobilized in a curriculum of physical and ethical regimens that diffused from English 'public' schools as a formal training in hegemonic masculinity, so-called 'muscular Christianity' (Hargreaves 1986; Stratton 1986). Through the participation in sport's orderly conduct and spirit, the body became the site of discipline, control and subjugation in the service of particular social relations, including the definition of homosexuality as perverse (Foucault 1977: 177).

Competitive sports performances have therefore shaped the meaning and practice of hegemonic masculinity (see Messner 1996; Miller 1990; Rowe 1997: 123). Victorian sports enthusiasts tried to construct sport as asexual and even antisexual. Ironically, in creating a respectable venue for male–male physicality and socialization, muscular Christianity set the terms for what remains the heterosexual masculine tradition in sports by providing ritual activities that counter-identified with femininity and homosexuality. Violent, aggressive, antisensual expressions of heterosexual masculinity were normalized. Any homoerotic overtones were countered through, for example, the repetition of homophobic practices (Crimp 1993). Open homosexuality was (see McKay 1991: 17) and remains stigmatized (see Kell 2000: 133). Alternatively, the parallel histories of sports and military cultures were drawn upon to transform sports fields into places of battle, where males kissing each other were legitimized through association with successful combat.

In Australia, as in North America and Europe, this definition of masculinity in sport was primed to change towards greater egalitarianism through various social movements of the late twentieth century that challenged orthodox ideas about gender, ethnicity and sexuality. Indeed, in the mid-1980s a handful of Australian professional sports clubs began redefining masculinity in sport by explicitly marketing the homoerotic aesthetic appeal of athletes to attract new fans (see Miller 2001; Rowe 1997). However, in the late 1990s the entry of the global corporate capitalism of communication industries took sport to a new level of explicit heterosexualization, spectacle and mythology (Burstyn 1999).

Schools sports' organizations remain crucial in the formation of meanings, expressions, spaces, structures and the training practices of hegemonic masculinity (Woog 1998). Such heterosexist exercises of territorialized power and regulatory practice produce sports spaces that often make gay men feel either constrained to perform by the 'rules' of heteronormative masculinity or to reject sports altogether. In addition, the heteronormative assumption of male sports still keeps most professional gay sporting identities in the 'closet' during their career (see Freeman 1997; Louganis 1995). Performance in sports cannot be separated from temporally and locationally specific terrains of power and discourse.

The Gay Games: performing 'community' out from the closet of the locker room

The Gay Games was established in the USA to challenge the hegemonic masculinity of sports. Founded in San Francisco in 1982 by Tom Waddell, a decathlete competitor in the 1968 Mexico Olympics, The Gay Games is a quadrennial athletic and cultural event. Tom Wad-

dell envisaged a sports environment free from the elitism, sexism, racism, heterosexism and nationalism that characterized his experiences of the Olympic Games. The concept was to organize an inclusive sports event, a space free from prejudice. Whilst anyone from anywhere was welcome to participate, the Gay Games were imagined as an opportunity for GLBTI sexualities to experience an affirming and empowering sports environment. Furthermore, the emphasis was not upon establishing champions and winning but the pursuit of personal bests (Krane and Waldron 2000; Pronger 1990: 25). All participants were winners in their own right.

Since 1990 the FGG board, comprised of fifty-five elected members, has selected cities with the well-established gay and lesbian organizations, facilities and locales required for hosting the event (Table 1). Loyal to Tom Waddell's ideals, the FGG promotes the Gay Games as welcoming all people 'without regard to their sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, political belief, physical ability, athletic/artistic ability, or HIV status' (FGG 2001: 1). Their purpose is three-fold: to 'challenge stereotypes', to 'create a safe and accepting environment' and to 'celebrate the diversity and scope of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community' (FGG 2001: 1). The FGG positions the Gay Games as a community, sustained by a pride and respect for difference, shared feelings of belonging and an ecstatic sense of oneness through performing resistance to heterosexism.

The Gay Games is an international 'community' inspired by the shared desire amongst organizers and participants for the affirmation of GLBTI sexualities in sports through creating a safe, but temporary space for their body cultures, a carnival space, complete with laughter, music and entertainment. The games also attempt to rewrite some of the rules of modern sports. Not only do certain rules applying to

Table 1 The Gay Games 1982–2002

Gay Games	Title	Number of athletes	Number of nations	Number of events
Gay Games I San Francisco	*Challenge '82*	1,350	12	14
Gay Games II San Francisco	*Triumph in '86*	3,482	17	17
Gay Games III Vancouver	*Celebration '90*	7,500	39	23
Gay Games IV New York	*Unity '94*	10,864	40	31
Gay Games V Amsterdam	*Friendship '98*	14,700	68	29
Gay Games VI Sydney	*Under New Skies*	12,000	71	31

Source: Krane and Waldron (2000) and Morgan (2002).

gender and clothing disappear, but also interpersonal relations are emphasized over competition. Involvement across a range of abilities disrupts conventional ideas that only the elite should participate in international events. The performance of GLBTI bodies in sports space exposes how many sports fields remain sexed as heteronormative and hypermasculine. A public, open and explicit display of GLBTI sexualities in sports spaces disrupts these naturalized rules. Hence, GLBTI bodies in sports spaces are important sites of transgression, resistance and emancipatory politics.

Although the rhetoric of the games is of unity and inclusiveness, the games offer a resistance of a particular type. The 'community' of athletes is highly selective. Despite the stress upon sports across the limits, participants have been predominantly North American males, from white, middle-class backgrounds. Important constraints over participation are leisure time and disposable incomes for sports, registration fees and travel costs. Equally, the sports disciplines represented are exclusionary, almost solely of European and North American origin. Tensions are created because orthodox understandings of competitive sports persist. Despite emphasizing personal best performances, national participation rates, record keeping and medal ceremonies imply that values of faster, higher, stronger and winning are still prized. A dichotomy is presented by the performances of participants in the Gay Games. On the one hand, sports practices of participants can be read as a site of resistance, on the other, rewards often exist to perform hegemonically.

Sydney's Gay Games 2002

In November 1997, Sydney became host for the 2002 Gay Games defeating Dallas (Texas), Long Beach (California), Montreal (Quebec) and Toronto (Ontario). The bid was initiated by Team Sydney, which since 1990 has acted as the co-ordinating organization for Sydney's gay and lesbian sports clubs. Presently, Team Sydney has an elected board of twelve people and represents some twenty-five sports with over 2,800 regular participants. The aims of Team Sydney draw directly from Tom Waddell's principles of promoting participation in an open and comfortable social environment and doing one's personal best. This is not surprising given Australia's first gay and lesbian sports clubs (Australian Free All Sports Association, from which Team Sydney is descended) was established to support fourteen athletes attending the first Gay Games (Team Sydney 2002).

Team Sydney's (1997) winning bid for Gay Games VI, *Under New Skies* (see Figure 1), fashioned Sydney as the gay capital of the Asia-Pacific region. Participation from 'regional countries' was integral to its pitch, demonstrating the limited numbers of participants from the Asia-Pacific region in the previous games in New York. The bid also relied upon positioning Sydney as a global gay-friendly city. A status attributed to Sydney's visible gay and lesbian spaces, the international prominence associated with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and the presence of well-established gay and lesbian organizations. Sydney was portrayed as a welcoming and safe place for GLBTI sexualities, a city receptive to pushing the boundaries of how GLBTI bodies perform in public spaces.

Immediately following the announcement of Sydney's winning bid, celebrations commenced amongst the thousands of supporters gathered in Taylor's Square, Oxford Street, often considered the geographical centre of Sydney's inner-city gay and lesbian space. According to Bronte Morris, a spokesperson for the organizers, the games represented a 'coming of age' for

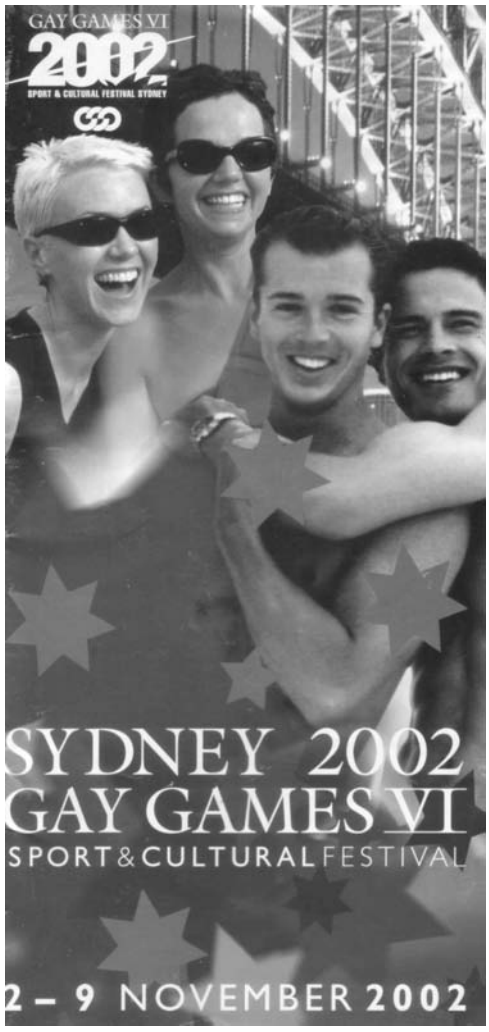

Figure 1 Advertisement for Sydney 2002 Gay Games VI (permission to produce granted by Federation of Gay Games).

Sydney as a gay Mecca and a safe and tolerant society (Bernoth 1997: 4). On the surface it appeared that the win was widely supported amongst Sydney's various GLBTI organizations. However, as the euphoria surrounding the win faded, different understandings of the bid and participation in the games emerged. Some political activists have questioned references to the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in the bidding process, arguing that is was a commodification or 'selling out' of gay and lesbian political 'heritage' (Hurley 2000), echoing concerns raised elsewhere about the relationship between marketing and identity-based communities (Chasin 2000; Markwell 2002). Of equal importance, as the next section shows, is that gay men resident in Sydney did not necessarily share a common understanding of the games, nor were they always sympathetic to the event. Willingness to participate was in part dependent on how the respondent read the performances of gay bodies in the games' sportscapes as either indicative of resistance, pleasure or social compliance.

Gay Games, 'queer space'

'Queer space' is a site that contests heteropatriarchical assumptions and practices (Ingram, Bouthillette and Retter 1997: 10). Queer space disrupts the notion of fixed, knowable and bounded sexual spaces, and the neat binary divide of 'heterosexual and homosexual' space. Instead, queer space rejects the binary division of heterosexual–homosexual and suggests that all space is sexualized along lines that are fluid and unbounded. The assumption that the sports arena is heterosexual, 'macho' space, silences the expression of other sexualities. The denial that GLBTI sexualities exist in sports makes them invisible within this dominant spatial understanding. The Gay Games can be understood as the claiming of space by people of GLBTI sexualities, through practices which, as Costello and Hodge (1999: 151) argue challenge 'the naturalness of heterosexuality and its space and resists the notion that we are "out of place" in a naturalized "straight" space.'

Participation in the Gay Games met with

least resistance amongst those who shared the FGG understanding of the games as a 'community' sporting festival that challenged several normative heterosexist assumptions about bodies in sports spaces. Understood as a gay and lesbian organized 'community' event, the sports festival was regarded as providing an important opportunity to touch upon all host city residents' everyday lives, rupturing homophobia in sports. Jack, a first-year university student, expresses how the games as a community sports festival could upset the balance of common sense:

> I think it is an important statement considering the amount of homophobia there is in sport. The linking of homosexuality to sport is quite a challenging thing for a lot of people.

Challenging stereotypes motivated the games participation of a number of gay men in this study. Terry, who is an active member of various gay and lesbian organizations, speaking from previous experiences as a spectator, volunteer and participant at past Gay Games, emphasized the rupturing of stereotypes of gays as effeminate:

> I think, ehh, I think the Gay Games has been a really interesting movement in that, in terms of challenging the stereotype which is in North America, and it is a North American-based organization, certainly of gays and lesbians not being involved in sport, ahh, so, you know, that is quite a powerful, to have these jocks to break that stereotype.

Clearly, those respondents who understood the games as a festival celebrating sport shared the FGG belief that it provided an important alternative source of visibility for gays in the host city. These respondents bestowed a cultural politics of resistance upon the Gay Games. For these respondents the games exemplifies the creation of 'queer space'.

Camp sensibilities are integral to 'queer space'. As Core (1984), Pronger (1990: 505) and Sontag (1966) agree, the value of camp is to undermine accepted values and truths. A camp appreciation of sport exposes the homoerotic desire of male–male physical interaction and sports myths of hegemonic masculinity. Queer sports geographies are produced in the shared humour, vocabulary and embodiment of camp. Respondents who played in organized gay and lesbian sports spoke about the transgressive quality of camp. Nic, a touch footballer, describes his experience as follows:

> Not everyone in gay sports plays camp or uses camp. It is very much dependent on the individual and the situation … say in rugby when a player has his bottom stuck up in the air, or when there is a mass of bodies on the group. It is very much a sense of humour thing—laughing at yourself or at a situation … it is definitely present in gay sports.

The transgressive quality revealed in Nic's reflection arises from exposing the desire that may arise from male–male physical interaction, a lust denied by hegemonic masculinity.

Respondents also reflected upon witnessing camp sensibilities at previous games that brought into question hegemonic masculinity including adorning athletic clothes with jewelry, men shaving their legs poolside and drag cheerleaders. The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an irreverent order of gay male nuns, have also made an appearance at previous games (Pronger 1990). The Sisters have plans to continue their own transgressive acts in Sydney by participating in track and field events. Camp performances help to unsettle the socio-cultural norms by which bodies and space are bound together.

Reading the games as a queer sports space was also meaningful for potential participants who were motivated by personal rather than political agendas. These agendas include fun, personal bests, sex and an expectation to

strengthen their own sense of pride and belonging through making new acquaintances and friendships sustained by shared experiences of the event. Importantly, these respondents had either participated in previous games or were regular participants in organized gay and lesbian sports. They spoke of the sports spaces of the games and their clubs in terms of personal achievement, enjoyment, laughter and socialization. These respondents were well aware of the very different sports spaces produced when rules of sport are redefined around participation rather than competition, and when emphasis on personal bests insures that members are comprised of many different sexualities, sporting abilities, as well as body sizes.

Ernest, who is actively involved with a number of gay and lesbian support organizations, succinctly explains his reason for participating in terms of fun and strengthening friendships:

> an opportunity to support a community event, to socialize, to play sports, to bond with team members, for fun. When you look at the entry fee of some 300 dollars it is expensive for three or four games of touch, but it's the support to the community through participation that is important.

Thomas, a self-identifying gay sports jock, who is actively involved in a number of gay and lesbian sports clubs, was also motivated by the pleasure of sharing in the feeling of belonging initiated by social sports. Thomas was particularly attracted by the possibilities for feeling part of an international citizenry of GLBTI sexualities through developing closer personal networks with overseas participants. Social sports were also envisaged to bring pleasure through the promise of casual sexual encounters, attributed to a literal ecstatic sense of oneness:

> The competitiveness of them isn't important … it's a whole different kind of structure and I think feeling behind the event … it's more of a social comp Gay Games—Social Comp Gay Games, that's what we should call them … Um, I think just meeting a lot of people around the world. I mean that's the whole thing that you always hear about the Gay Games is like, the amount of people that you meet, and you swap things over, and of course the other thing we all think is the amount of different people to have sex with—I think there's a lot of people out there planning to split up with their boyfriends or girlfriends for the week, just for the opportunity! Well, I'm not [laughs]—don't go there.

These participants positioned the Gay Games as a festival of sports that consequently produced an inclusive queer space devoid of boundaries that separated gays from lesbians, homosexuals from heterosexuals, muscular from flabby bodies, the fit from the slow. They spoke of the Gay Games as sustaining a queer social space through sports providing an affinity through which participants could enjoy sharing the freedom to express their sexuality without fear of alienation. As a queer social space they spoke about rupturing the heteronormative myths that sports performances are asexual and fall into neat gender categories.

Gay Games, 'hegemonic space'

In contrast, those respondents who knew little about the games, or who were not actively involved in gay and lesbian organization, or who had negative experiences in regards to gay and lesbian sports prioritizing winning over participating, read the games as creating a competitive rather than carnival sports space. These respondents focused on the rules of modern sports that emphasize winning, elitism and nationalism as well as their spaces that require specialization, standardization and isolation.

They often assumed the event was to be located at Stadium Australia, Homebush, the site of Sydney's 2000 Olympic Games.[1] Consequently, they read the games as retrogressive rather than transgressive in Australian gay politics. The Gay Games became a sportscape in which gay bodies display how they have been taught to perform hegemonically.

Resistance to participate arose when the games were envisaged as producing an elite and competitive sports space similar to the Olympics and Paralympics. In particular, for respondents with little knowledge of the aims and objectives of the Gay Games, Sydney's 2000 Olympics and Paralympics became the reference for reading the bodies and spaces of the Gay Games. Consequently, reconciling what these respondents read as an exclusive, elite and competitive event with gay and lesbian politics became a source of tension.

Luke, a sports fan, who admits knowing nothing of the aims and objective of the Gay Games, describes his concerns by drawing comparisons with the Paralympics. He describes the tension as follows:

> I think it's weird. I think it's completely weird and I don't completely understand it. It smacks of me, like you know how you have the Olympics and then you have the Paralympics and it kind of feels a bit like the Paralympics. The Olympics are about the sense that a bunch of athletes test themselves and push them to their absolute limits and beyond. And in a sense the Paralympics which exist, because people are differently abled and have different sets of challenges, and there's something quite authentic about having an Olympics for people that are disabled or differently abled … And when I think about that in relations to gays and lesbians I don't see the same fit, between sport and identity, in the same way between sport and being differently abled. There's a way in which that works, Gay Games for me doesn't … Yeah, there's no sense in which being gay or lesbian affects you're capacity to perform in sport, from my point of view.

Luke reads the Gay Games as re-inscribing heteronormativity. Luke perceives the event as asserting that gay men are differently abled, and unable to compete with heterosexual men. His resistance is spawned by this contention.

David, a first-year university arts student, resisted the games because he had a very different view on the politics of sexuality:

> It's interesting, part of me doesn't understand why the whole need for it, like gay people, yeah. Sure, like why we have our own special games often eludes me, at the same time it looks like fun, like. I wouldn't be opposed to it, like, it's just weird … Like I knew once upon a time they had it, like you know, because it's a challenge to homophobia, but like I just don't think it does the same thing anymore, like, I just don't think that's the way to challenge homophobia anymore, yeah sure it's fun.

Several 20-year-old participants shared David's view. Apparently, for many younger respondents while the multiple performances of the event were regarded as giving rise to temporary pleasure zones, the political message of the Gay Games was passé. These respondents clearly neither identified with the history of the US gay-rights movement nor spoke of sports as an avenue to alleviate feelings of alienation and oppression within society. Instead, the games became a source of anxiety and were described as uncanny (Gelder and Jacobs 1998). The games as 'the uncanny' suggests that they were simultaneously understood in positive and negative terms. The apprehension created by the games is an outcome of understanding the event at once as pleasurable and yet a performance of hegemonic masculinity.

Older respondents who also had difficulty reconciling a gay community centred upon sport reiterated their uncanny nature. Zack, a

self-employed graphic designer, also used the term 'weird' to describe the games. Zack's resistance to participating was based on his experience of a competitive environment within organized gay and lesbian sports in Sydney:

> I find it a bit weird. I used to swim with Wet Ones, who were the gay group, but believe it or not they are so competitive, and they're so unsociable, because, underwater you don't have to say much. I always found them very cliquey. I swam for two/three years with them. I was there for the swimming and they would go off and be terribly competitive at these races. I'm not competitive, so I can't see I'm going to splash around in the water so I probably wouldn't be involved with the swimming even if there were vacancies.

In Zack's experience the creation of 'community' through sport is exclusionary because the needs and desires of all club members cannot be met. Apparently, in swimming, his anxiety to participate in the games is derived from fears that his best bodily performances would be devalued in a swimspace where he believes trained, competitive 'swoosh' movements are valued over social 'splashes'. In addition, the sport environment did not encourage the creation of supportive social interactions.

Understanding the games as a competitive sports space also brought a whole range of expectations about the physical characteristics of participants' bodies. Respondents expected that male bodies participating in this sports spectacle would be both aesthetically and sexually appealing. The spectacularized, athleticized male has always been an integral part of gay eroticism, circulated within sports photography, films and magazines (Waugh 1996). However, the ideal of the perfect material body form has changed (Dutton 1995). At present, among many gays, the body considered sexually (and socially) desirable is the young, hairless, swim-toned body with prominent pectorals, washboard abdominal, bulging biceps and 'V torsos' (Figure 2). Both popular and gay culture has played a key role in contributing to this process of eliding athletic bodies with health, exercise and sexual attractiveness (Miller 2001: 47; Pronger 1990: 125). Since the 1980s, outward performances of homosexuality have therefore undergone radical changes with the demise of the 'mincing pansy', the 'limp-wristed falsetto' or 'screaming queen' to the super-masculine image of the 'gym-queen' (McDowell 1992: 16). Respondents who thought their body shapes, sizes or fitness levels did not conform to these iconic ideals in an event understood as a spectacle of competitive sports, were reluctant to participate.

Several respondents spoke with feelings of anxiety about displaying their bodies in public. They felt that they would be regarded as too flabby or unfit or not sufficiently toned, athletic or muscular. Garry, a civil servant in his twenties, describes his reason for not participating:

> Umh, I am really unfit at the moment. That's basically why. I have got the feeling that is about having a good time and it doesn't matter how athletic you are, still … fitness and body tone, definitely.

Feeling 'out of shape', respondents felt they would be 'out of place' participating in the event. Body shape operated as a mechanism of exclusion, particularly when respondents positioned the sports spaces of the event as a site of sexually attractive bodies.

Nevertheless, the fetished, athletic, male subject as a potential object of male desire underscored why many respondents were looking forward to being a spectator at the games. The body as an object of desire was one theme that emerged particularly when 'unfit' respondents explained their interest in attending as specta-

Figure 2 'The Look' (courtesy of *DNA* magazine, November 2002)—the male physique as an object of erotic contemplation developed for the gay male viewer. According to a gay magazine, *Campaign*, 'the Look … is now definitely athletic and not overgrown muscle: tight abdomens and buns [and] V-shaped torsos … While the traditional bodybuilding was preoccupied with bulk (and more muscles the merrier) the new "body sculpting" concentrates on tightness and symmetry of form' (Callaghan, 1992: 40). The popular image of male desirability is of a trim muscular, athleticism: a youthful, lithe body and 'pretty' rather than 'rugged' facial features.

tors. Martin, in his late thirties, explained his interest

> as an opportunity to share experiences of group spectatorship … yep, … some gay male friends that

want to see some sexy swimmers, doing whatever they do and so that's probably what I will do, and I think that will be really good fun.

Rudy articulated a similar interest:

It's always nice to see the guys out there in their 'Speedos'.

The Gay Games is therefore a site of homosexual desire.

However, the athletic body as a site of desire itself became the subject of concern for another second group of respondents who based their resistance to participating in the games fuelled by an apprehension that the games only helped sustained social compliance and 'gym-queen' stereotypes. Alex, a 22-year-old third-year student, expressed his angst arising from the games reinforcing heterosexual conceptions of masculine identity:

if you look at the propaganda the Gay Games has produced, there's hardly any sort of challenging of the stereotypical well-built male body. And I think that impacts quite heavily on conceptions of masculinity ... [the games] is challenging them [conceptions of masculinity] on their terms, in a way, because their saying we're effeminate, so we say, no, we're masculine, but that leaves a whole bunch of us to still take on the role of victim. We're still effeminate. And for me that's a huge issue, being Filipino-Australian, where Asian men are perceived as being more feminine, and that occurs with the gay community.

For Alex, the aesthetic sports bodies of the games presented a less threatening image of gay masculinity to society. However, this excludes gays who are effeminate, the pansy, the poofter, and as Alex terms it, the 'rice-queen'.

Gay bodies in sports remain contentious. Reverence and adoption of 'pumped' masculinity in sports arguably positions such gay bodies within the system of patriarchy. In this reading, the athletic body colludes with mechanisms of oppression and domination. The athleticized, hypermasculine male body denotes social compliance, in contrast to, say, flaunting the feminine, and represents a potential political neutralization of progressive meanings of an identity without essence that is integral to the queer imaginary of self.

Registration was inhibited among respondents who understood sports bodies primarily as an object of desire for two very different reasons. Feelings of anxiety were expressed by one group about how, under the surveillance of other sexual bodies, their own bodies were not sufficiently toned or muscled and hence were out of place on the sports field. These respondents expressed the opinion that they belonged in the crowd, where they could enjoy the spectacle provided by swimmers, wrestlers and body-builders. A second group totally rejected the ideal that a sports-based community event could liberate gay men in a heteropatriarchical society. Instead they regarded gay sports bodies as an attempt to reclaim masculinity defined within a patriarchal system. In this scenario the performativity of bodies read by current conventions as effeminate were out of shape, and again out of place on the sports field.

Conclusion

In the context of Sydney's Gay Games I have argued that culture matters in examining how the performativity of bodies is constrained, how community is created through particular performances, and how places and bodies are connected by willingness to participate in the event. Since 1982, the Gay Games has been hosted every four years in a city that is imagined as, and has material facilities of, a world gay capital. Sydney, like preceding host cities,

provided a meeting place in which GLBTI sexualities could challenge stereotypes about hegemonic masculinity that oppress gay male bodies in sports spaces. In the context of willingness to register to participate in the sixth games amongst Sydney's gay men, I have demonstrated how the connectedness between place, community and body matters. Those respondents who registered for the games understood their participation as a performativity of belonging to an international GLBTI citizenry. Furthermore, they read participating bodies as sites of community resistance, producing queer spaces, that may help to destabilize unarticulated norms by trespassing on territory that is taken for granted as commonly asexual and whose participants are assumed to be heterosexual. Munt (1995: 124) termed this, the 'politics of *dis*location'. The deconstructive spatial tactics of the Gay Games are one of many various ways in which the heterosexing of public space has been resisted (Bell, Binnie, Cream and Valentine 1994). To paraphrase Davis (1995: 287), Gay Pride marches, parades and public protests have brought the recognition that heterosexism is a spatially constituted discourse that can be interrupted and undermined. In Australia, where national pride and heroes are informed by heterosexist myths of sports, the games could have a particular transgressive power through media exposure by generating an explicitly sexual and readable public event that may upset the balance of common sense for much of the straight population.

Yet, the very creation of a sports community constrained enthusiasm to register. For those respondents unfamiliar with the history of the Gay Games a barrier to enter arose from difficulty reconciling sport with sexual politics. For others, the materiality of their own bodies operated to prevent respondents from participating through processes of shaming that are mobilized in this case by expectations about spectators' surveillant gaze in Olympic sports venues. Unfit, overweight or flabby bodies were regarded as unwelcome or culturally undesirable in these stadiums because they would be perceived to be both uncompetitive and sexually unattractive. Greatest resistance, however, was expressed by those who understood the event as reinforcing other gay stereotypes, particularly that of clean-cut, gym-sculpted muscular physiques of the 'gym-queen'. In this way, the material realities of respondents' bodies and how they imagined themselves as spatial mattered in how they positioned themselves outside the social space of the games.

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Note

1 Stadium Australia, built at Homebush for the Sydney 2000 Olympics some 35 km from Oxford Street and the central business district was not a venue of the Gay Games VI. Only some of the smaller Olympic sports facilities at Homebush were utilized including the Sydney Athletic, Sydney Aquatic, Tennis and Sydney Indoor Sports Centres. Instead, the opening ceremony was held in Aussie Stadium, Moore Park, which is located in close proximity to the visible gay spaces within Darlinghurst, Paddington and Surry Hills. The location for the corroboree–closing ceremony was in a much smaller venue adjacent to Aussie Stadium in Fox Studios, called The Show Ring. Sports activities were distributed throughout locations in Sydney including Canterbury (ice hockey), Centennial Park (touch rugby), Five Docks (badminton), Lidcombe (wrestling), North Ryde (ice skating), Paddington (aerobics) and Penrith (triathlon).

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Abstract translations

Jeux Gais: actualiser la 'communauté' du placard au vestiaire

Cet article explore les liens entre les questions de communauté, performativité, corps, espace, attachement, oppression et résistance dans le contexte des Jeux Gais de 2002 à Sydney. Je débute cet article en examinant comment le sens et la pratique quotidiens des sports contribuent à produire des espaces qui sont oppressifs envers les hommes gais. Je présente ensuite les Jeux Gais en tant que site de résistance gaie, lesbienne, bisexuelle, transsexuelle et inter-

sexuelle établie afin de briser les stéréotypes d'hétéronormativité dans les sports. M'inspirant de ma propre recherche sur les Jeux Gais de Sydney, j'explore ensuite comment la volonté de prendre part à ces jeux parmi des hommes affichant ouvertement leur identité gaie dépend de la façon dont ils perçoivent leur performance dans le contexte de l'événement. Je conclus en soutenant que la participation aux Jeux Gais de Sydney illustre des points importants à propos des liens entre le corps et l'espace par le biais du corps discursif en tant qu'espace et du corps matériel dans l'espace.

Mots-clefs: sports, performance, communauté, corps, gai, Jeux Gais, Sydney.

Los Juegos Gay: comunidad interpretativa fuera del armario del vestuario

En este papel se explora los temas de comunidad, representación, cuerpos, espacio, pertenencia, opresión, resistencia y su relación con la cultura en el contexto de los Juegos Gay de Sydney en el año 2000. Empiezo por considerar como el significado y la práctica cotidianos del deporte producen espacios que resultan opresivos para muchos hombres homosexuales. Luego presento los Gay Games como un sitio de resistencia para los homosexuales, las lesbianas, los bisexuales, transexuales y 'intersex'; juegos introducidos con el fin de romper estereotipos de heteronormatividad en el deporte. Haciendo uso de mi propia investigación de los Gay Games de Sydney exploro como la disposición a participar de los hombres que se consideran homosexual dependía de cómo interpretaban su participación dentro del contexto de los juegos. Concluyo por sugerir que la disposición a participar en los Gay Games de Sydney ilustra temas fundamentales acerca de la conectividad de cuerpos y espacios a través del cuerpo discursivo como espacio y el cuerpo material en espacio.

Palabras claves: deportes, representación, comunidad, cuerpos, gay, Gay Games, Sydney.