

BODY AS PERFORMED IDENTITY:
MALE ATHLETES AND THE VERNACULAR ENVIRONMENTS OF SPORT

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by

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Abstract

My thesis explored the ways in which physical bodies are used to perform identity and how athletic environments are designed to allow specific interactions. I was interested in the ways male athletes navigate masculinity through an autoethnography of my own performance and utilized humanities-oriented research to explore the vernacular environments of sport. I explored the following questions: How can my physical body be used to communicate self-identity and how are these identities performed? How do male athletes engage masculinity in the context of sport and how might athletic identities intercept the hegemonic masculine culture of institutionalized athletics? How does a space or environment allow for identities/bodies to interact and how does it serve as the setting in which I perform identity?

My research took place in three different environments: a competitive swimming pool (18 years), a corporate-run gym (8 years), and Muscle Beach, a public beach in Venice, California (5 days). I served as the main subject for my research as well as men that also occupied those spaces. Each of these spaces had different levels of accessibility as well as what identities they were designed for. Within each space that I participated in, by exercising and interacting, I recorded details that describe the layout and design as well as how these spaces function and enable/disable different types of behaviors. My data included journaling, blogging, photos, and video documentation that explored the significance of how the space is engaged. Through my own reflection and analysis I generated significance of how we engage spaces and our own bodies.

In the three athletic environments that I studied I found similarities in the spatial designs and types of interactions they attracted. I unexpectedly discovered how the power

dynamic between audience and viewer shifted as well as how athletes use aggression to engage and perform masculine identity through the body. In conducting this research I remained observant and aware of my own identity and body in these spaces and gained a better understanding of the relationship I have with my body. Limited to my personal perspective I found that the ways athletes express self-identity through the body changed and performed differently depending on the environment. Connecting athletic and arts educational discourses, I gained a better understanding of how a space functions to influence behaviors/interactions as well as the relationships between how bodies perform identity.

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Introduction

The grand spectacle surrounding the modern Olympics is deeply rooted in its origin in Ancient Greece and permeates various facets of contemporary culture today. This event attracts a massive international spectacle of the world's most valued and prized athletes performing in one location for the enjoyment of an incredibly large audience on such a grand and elite stage. The relationships between the athletes and the viewers is one that permeates at multiple levels of sport as well as influencing common cultures outside of the athletic realm. In many ways sport influences cultural identities and is something that is not atypical in the history of athletics. The influence of athletics has in fact existed in this dynamic from the very beginning of organized sport. As I begin to examine the dynamics and culture of various contemporary spaces of athletic training I found it necessary to consider the long line of history associated with this now institutionalized practice. By looking to the histories of athletic training I began to understand how current systems of bodily identities within the contemporary hegemonically masculinized culture of sport have been conditioned to navigate and communicate in the ways that they do.

Much of the language of athletics also exists in the art world, however American society places these two spaces as polarizing and distinguishes them through what is considered refined/pretentious or barbaric/courageous. What is interesting is that these two cultures despite having had such a paralleled upbringing have grown apart, although athletics and art education both address common spatial relationships as well as create dialogue and discourse on human interaction in very similar ways. Although there has been a slight increase of interest between these two seemingly separate worlds it is interesting to consider that these two originally developed hand in hand. In fact Hawhee (2002) discussed in depth

the ways in which the Greek athletics and rhetoric formed pedagogies together as they were part of a common cultural space. For the sake of this research project I would like to make the connection between Greek rhetoric as a valued academic subject and contemporary art education. Although Hawhee does not specifically address art educational pedagogies I found it appropriate to discuss her work in a way that engages academic discussion

Because the role of the gymnasia was quite valued within the Greek culture and the nude athletic male body exemplified their concept of *arête*, or idealized beauty, it became a center for various forms of cultural and intellectual exchange. Hawhee begins examining the sophists role in Ancient Greek culture as sort of teachers or people of cultural exchange through the use of philosophies. Hawhee engaged observations by Susan Jarratt and described “the sophists were the Athenian version of ‘public intellectuals’, so it makes sense that they would visit the public gymnasia, since the sites were already an integral part of the daily practice of most free Athenian men” (p. 144). Since the gymnasia had already taken on such a strong role for a community space amongst males and the idealized athletic males it was quickly expanded to become a much more holistic cultural experience.

Hawhee (2002) then made connections within the Greek gymnasia by describing that: from this spatial intermingling of practices there emerged a curious syncretism between athletics and rhetoric, a particular crossover in pedagogical practices and learning styles, a crossover that contributed to the development of rhetoric as a *bodily art*: an art learned, practices, and performed by and with the body as well as the mind. (p. 144)

She made these connections through discussing the similar pedagogical methods that continue to permeate academic and athletic education today. She labels these descriptions as “rhythm, repetition, and response” (p. 145). Rhythm provides the tempo and a pattern of movements much like music. Repetition is the rehearsal process of practicing. It comes with pains, pleasures, and detailed focus. Response speaking to the habitual engagement in the process over an extended period of time yielding improved desired outcomes. Hawhee commented that this understanding “brings to light the mimetic and repetitive aspects of training, aspects that emphasize education as a bodily practice” (p. 147). Within this statement I emphasize the need to understand this bodily practice as being imperative to understanding arts education. Bodily practice is often an aspect that is forgotten in contemporary pedagogical models of art education.

In conjunction with Debra Hawhee’s (2002) discussion of the ways in which the Greek athletics and rhetoric formed pedagogies together in a shared common cultural space, Erick Alvarez (2008) helped to historicize athletic and gym cultures and the idealization of the athletic male body. Examining these histories help to contextualize contemporary visual culture in which the world of sport exists.

Alvarez described that this development of sophist discussion of the relationship between athletic excellence and academic development is, “because of their belief that a healthy, strong body was linked to a healthy mind, the gymnasium, very much like today, played a crucial role in the upbringing and socialization of males” (2008, p. 26). Greek gymnasia and rhetoric developed hand in hand as “...the mind and body were intertwined for the ancient Greeks, the nudity was then connected to a vision of wholeness or in the Greek

concept of *arête*” (p. 29). This fascination with the athletic male form is interesting because much of their ideals are still something that are prevalent in understanding contemporary values of masculinity and the glorification of male athletes. There is also something to be said, in which I will discuss further in this text, about the viewing and performative experience of athletes and spectators. Alvarez continued:

while it is true that the Greeks’ body ideal was based on the noble aspects of *arête*, education and sports were largely linked to their religion. We also know that they considered the male body to be an object of beauty and desire, and one can safely speculate that they objectify as much, or more than we do. (p. 29-30)

With the rise of the athletic male body as an ideal, eventually Christianity became a powerful institution, suppressing much of the nudity and exposure of the male body. This later would be revived in the Renaissance through works like Michelangelo’s *David*. This revival would be even furthered in the rise of the interest in the spectacle with performances like the strongman acts that exploited the strong male body. Although this was not initially idealized in the same way it did give rise to many of the ideals of bodybuilding and contemporary fitness.

This thesis aimed to align these two once again in order to discuss how athletic bodies are used to communicate athletic identities. It is the nature of sports to be part of visual culture, which makes it possible to consider these ideas in similar ways in which art education, which is so deeply rooted in the visual, aims to engage identity expression as well as explore the interactions we experience. I was interested in exploring how the physical

body is used as an expression of identity and the vernacular environments in which these identities perform and interact within a space.

Art, rhetoric, and sports have similar pedagogies so I used my own athletic body, and thusly athletic identity, in order to talk about larger contexts of identity and the ways in which bodies communicate within a space. Due to the humanities-oriented research and autoethnographic nature of this project the process was quite reflective and vulnerable as I considered the ways in which my body was being used to communicate my own identity and how that dynamic changed depending on my environment. I looked at the ways in which my body navigated the spaces of the corporate gym, the competitive and training aspects of the swimming pool, as well as my trip to Muscle Beach. I offer up my body as a way to better understand how spaces both enable and disable types of behavior from both myself as well as others participating.

Personal Investment in Topic

I have been an athlete all my life and come from a very athletic family. I consider myself an elite level athlete, having All-American honors. At this point I am considered a professional, which has become very much part of my identity. My experiences as a collegiate athlete as well as navigating my own sexuality have made me interested in the ways the culture of sports passes silence and suppression of certain identities and behaviors off as acceptance. I am currently training for Olympic Trials in 2016 and am also a full-time coach. Sports, specifically swimming, are still a large part of my identity.

I would consider the realm of sport to be a sort of subculture in that it is a group of people that function in a distinct set of behavioral expectations that are often drastic

understandings of the way the rest of society operates or form a separate dynamic in which individuals perform. However, this subculture remains very much in the public eye and often informs the way expectations for things like masculinity trickle down into the mainstream society. Within this subculture we see a sub-subculture of non-straight athletes although this remains much less visible. There is a suppression of identity expression and the complexities of the way identities perform in a shared space.

Through the use of research as well as my own observational fieldwork I engaged the ways in which the physical body is used to communicate self-identity. This includes the ways in which these identities are performed and interact as well as how the body responds to and is impacted by the surrounding environments. I explored questions I have surrounding how a space is activated by the interactions between communicating bodies and objects. How these interactions within a vernacular environment are being performed as well as how a space or environment can facilitate or disable the communication or interaction of identities. How do these vernacular environments serve as a setting in which these bodies perform? Finally I began to understand the masculinized institution of sport and the ways in which certain identities are encouraged, formed, or suppressed as well as ways in which certain identities may intercept the ideals perpetuated by institutionalized athletics.

Artist Statement

As an artist and storyteller I am interested in discussion topics of identity and how those identities are constructed and communicated in relation to the environment. Through my own experiences I have the performance that occurs when identities are presented in direct response to the space and environment they currently occupy. The ways these

identities are communicated seem to adjust depending on context and relative to what they are experiencing.

I think it best to first consider my own relevance to these topics and placement in this conversation. I am a young, white, able-bodied male. I am an artist, an athlete, and an educator. I participate in a society that is established on a series of temporary interactions. I consider myself having a non-straight identity. I use this term to describe my sexual identity because I personally feel like my sexuality is an ever-fluid aspect of who I am instead of something rigid. I feel as though the term “non-straight” allows me to navigate my sexuality much more freely. I come from a supportive family and have always been active and competitive. The embrace of competition is something that has bled from athletics into almost every realm of my consciousness. I am an athlete, an educator, and more specifically a swimmer. In this regard I feel as though I can also attach the label of “performer” to my identity.

As I spent the majority of my undergraduate degree either studying the mechanics and dynamics of the human body or testing these same abilities on my own body, I developed an acute awareness of the physicality of my body. I learned not only the composition of my anatomy but how my body responds to an environment, especially those that encompass some sort of stress or impact. Whether jumping through the air, pulling through the water, or standing in a crowded gym I understood my environment and the impact I have on it. I feel as though the physical body is used to communicate one’s sense of self and identity. There is a vulnerability and an honesty that goes into displaying who you are through your physical self. I think this is important to consider, especially when we

begin to question how these physical identities operate in a space that calls for comparison and how these identities interact.

As an athlete for most of my life, I have questions about how my identity interacts within the realm of sport because of the expansive history of being a cultural institution that is notorious for perpetuating and enforcing hegemonic masculinity. I am curious how we might engage the potential for a nuanced understanding of masculine identities. I am also interested in critically examining the vernacular environments in which sport exists while being mindful of our placement in a space and how we as performers and participants add to the conversation. This interaction becomes a sort of performance where we are participating as both actor and audience. These interactions are temporary but it is in these moments where I find something artful worth considering.

I use my art practice as a means of self-reflection on my observations, experiences, and participation in the world around me. My art comes from a personal place that positions my identity into a larger conversation. Through autoethnography and humanities-oriented research methods I was able to reflect on my own experiences and interpret many of the ways in which I choose to articulate aspects of my identity within a given space. I used my athletic identity as an entry point into the vernacular environments of sport in order to better understand how these spaces serve as a stage for masculine identities to perform. I offer up my perspective as a way to make the abstract into something tangible. I believe there is something artful in all facets of life. It is through art processes that we begin to understand.

Literature Review

Physical Body Communicating Identity

With a topic so deeply rooted in identity I find it important to consider the ways in which identities are performed, expressed, and communicated. In many ways, humans communicate through clothing, language, and even social behaviors aspects of personal identity. When considering athletic identities specifically it makes sense that if an identity can exist from such a bodily practice such as sport surely the body itself becomes part of identity expression since sport itself exists so heavily in/on visual culture.

In beginning this investigation, I began looking at the similarities between athletes and artists' processes in creating their work. I introduce many similarities in the language that is used for both. The clearest entry point into these considerations I look at the ways athletes use their own body as their work itself but also as a tool in order to perform their practice (sport). It is important to first begin to understand the relationship an athlete has with the body in order to further examine any associations with identity.

Relating to the body. John Bale (1996) was useful in understanding the subjects of this research project by analyzing the work of Yi-Fu Tuan, which pays great attention to the distinction of play (as arbitrary) and sport (as immensely considered and intentional). Bale does this by describing that "...the athlete's goal is 'as precisely defined as in factory work...'" (p. 164). Not only is there body development that is being worked on but also a highly functional and intentional skill development. Without this precise and focused ability the athletic artist is unable to successfully perform their work.

Tuan (1993) continued that much like artists, athletes "...have to be highly conscious of the power and limits of their own bodies. The body is the athlete's instrument of success. It has to be nurtured and trained, mentally as well as physically...In sport, success may be

all-important, but means to it have their own beauty and justification” (p. 288). We see this very same significance in many artists that are under the belief that the art is in the process and the end result is a mere receipt of the prior commitment and work. Although often only the end result of final performance is publicly seen, art exists in the repeated preparation. This relationship an athlete has with the body as an instrument of strategic intention proves interesting and significant as we consider ways to bridge the gap to begin looking at athletic performances as an artistic practice. Language used to discuss athletic and artistic performances will provide an interesting conversation in the way I look at each of these identities.

Now that we have an understanding of how the athletic body is developed as an intentional tool we can look at what sorts of performances are actually occurring. I have found that that the athlete is performing the desired organized outcome of sport, however aspects of their personal identity become attached to this identifying title of “athlete”.

Socialization of body. Anna Zajicek (2001) discussed why the physical body and its sociology are important in understanding embodiment, or internalizing an identity and then performing it outwardly. She suggests, “our physical bodies cannot simply be separated from the process of identity formation and our negotiations of social position. Rather, the body is intimately connected to the understandings that we formulate about ourselves and our surroundings” (p. 237). Although she is speaking specifically to sexual identities, and I will later touch on this as something to consider, I feel as if these ideas are crucial to understanding athletic identities or even personal identity as a whole.

Zajicek examined post-structuralism, essentialist, and constructionist lenses in which to understand sexual bodies and sexual identities. She proposed that these "...approaches can be seen as reductionist: they limit our understanding of sexuality by eliminating from theoretical discourse the role actors' experience of their physical bodies play in sexual identity" (p. 240). It is clear that there is a need to include the experience of the physical body in discussions of identity, sexual or otherwise. This seems like something that must be considered especially in the context of sexual identities since the way we experience sexuality is by bodily pleasure. I would argue that the experience of an athletic identity is just as closely tied to such a bodily practice.

Within Reid Gilbert's (1994) discussion of identity as a performed experience there is an excerpt from Judith Butler (1990) that explained how identity (in this case gender) is "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 33). Although referring specifically to gender, Butler's definition of gender identity can also be related to identity as a whole, and provides useful in talking about athletic identity and the relation it has to the body.

Butler (1993) discussed her theory of performativity, which refers to the fact that gender (and identity) is not something that one is, but rather something that someone does. It is the constant reiteration that individuals participate to articulate identity. For the purpose of this project I will remain consistent with Butler's definition by using "performativity" as a theory of subject formation as opposed to "performance" as a voluntary participation or emulation. I will later discuss my participation in performing during my fieldwork as a

means to participate in the culture. When I refer to performative I am discussing a reiteration of something that has more permanence. The body can both perform and be performative.

The visual body. Gilbert (1994) also introduced ideas in which popular media portrays the male athletic body as an object of power. The ways that male athletes are exploited in advertisements and any sort of representation typically creates an exchange with the viewer as the athlete typically will match the viewer's gaze in which case the spectator becomes secondary. The gaze or the return of the gaze is deemed the vehicle of power and control. Although I will discuss this later, this exchange of viewing in the realm of sports culture also exists between athletes in a much more submissive way through averted eyes. This sort of thing typically occurs in places like gyms between athletes. There is a watching and an interaction that occurs within spaces between bodies and thusly identities and a power dynamic that is exchanged through the gaze of the performer and viewer. I discuss these interactions further as I analyze observations from my fieldwork.

Engaging Spaces

With an understanding in the ways in which bodies perform identities I was curious to examine the environments in which these performances happen and how they allow for a means for identities to communicate and interact. I was curious how a space is activated by interactions between bodies or bodies and objects.

Nathaniel Stern (2011) provided four strategies to consider when experiencing work especially if it has interactive aspects. In my research I have expanded the purpose of these strategies to consider each when experiencing any type of performance within a space. In my research I looked at athletic environments and will discuss these strategies later in this paper.

The first strategy is “artistic inquiry and process”, which speaks to the artist’s relationship to the work during the creating process, installing process, or even while it is being shared with an audience. When making the comparison of artist and athlete I discuss how this inquiry occurs during the preparation of the individual’s work, whether that be the body, performance, or artwork. The second strategy is “artwork description” which is a detailed description of appearance, sounds, feelings, and “how it responds to use in the gallery or performance space”. This is prevalent in press releases of shows of recalling vivid memories of sporting events that are often recounted in sensory detail.

The third strategy that Stern provided was “inter-activity” or how the movement of the audience of spectators occurs. This is not just speaking to how the object itself moves, but how the body responds to the work and how the work impacts bodily movement. The fourth strategy is “relationality” or how we relate to these types of interactions. Stern argued that “the implicit body in interactive art...enables viewer-participants, not just performance artists, to enact and explore such corporeal-connections of relations” (p. 234). This is important to understanding how not only the intended participants perform within a space but how the viewer or spectator is participating as an engaged audience. This role is something I considered when examining how I engage how a physical space enables and disables the movement of bodies as well as influences the ways in which these bodies interact. I used these understandings to assess how bodies establish and articulate identity in a way that is adapted to their context.

Observation/Looking. Bernadette Sweeney (2002) discussed the authenticity of the body in context of performance and the difference between how a rehearsed performance

may or may not indicate some sort of truth. There is also an attention to bodily participation of performance and how this understanding of how the audience, actors, or otherwise engage action to create a performance. There is also a consideration of site-specific performance (that is, an emulation that is voluntary) considers audience participation and how that is achieved or if it even matters.

Although this text is primarily looking at theatre performances I feel as though this is still useful to understanding what makes up a performance. Sweeney describes that "...a performance space accommodates the performers and the spectators or audience members in a particular configuration that reflects the nature of the performance itself, and the nature of the relationship between them" (p. 30). I find that this is a very important definition to talk about what can be considered performance space. If this definition holds true, as I feel it does, then this title of performance space exists in spaces of athletic exchange even if the performance is not as intentional. The roles of performer, audience, and otherwise are present. The ways in which the space provides for these roles is interesting.

Sweeney continued that:

one significant aspect of outdoor and indeed indoor, performance in a public open space in that all passers-by are audience members, however fleetingly and unwittingly; and issues of public order are relevant in a way that they are not in a contained, designated performance space. Also, any performance in a public space is just that- a performance. (p. 30-31)

This will become very important in discussing public spaces that are athletic environments. I will also flesh out how these spaces are defined by their level of public

access through how they control what sorts of participants enter the space. This also validates my expanded understanding of any space being able to be defined as performance or interactive space.

There is also something to be said about how the viewer, or any participant, engages not only the performing bodies but also the space or environment in which they are interacting. Sweeney suggested:

we experience, observe, and perform the body as both subject and object...as the body is both subject and object, we relate to our surroundings through our material presence but can visualize our bodies moving through those surroundings, thus objectifying ourselves. (p. 33)

It is in this sort of voyeuristic action that viewers are able to participate in the performance and be impacted by the environment.

Relating space and behavior. Examining how a vernacular environment influences types of behavior between bodies is crucial to understanding how spaces are designed. I use the term ‘vernacular environments’ due to the specific language that tends to be attached to certain types of spaces. Although there is often great variance depending on the environment I will gravitate towards using a more universal terminology that describes all types of performance, identities, and roles of spectator/audience and performer (athlete/artist).

Nathaniel Stern described an interactive installation by David Rokeby (*Very Nervous System*) and the bodily performances by stating “their activity complexly layers space, line and color to create evocative and painterly compositions. A ‘continual flow of unique and fleeting moments,’ infolding and unfolding, sensual and contemplative, it is akin to the

‘experience of embodied existence itself’ (p. 233). The work of David Rokeby involved a computer viewing human gestures in a room and translates the bodily movement into sounds in real time. This is an interesting example of a work that is interactive and performative but also is interesting to consider the relationship between the performer and the environment as well as the viewer if they are to be present within the space.

Speaking directly about environments within the context of athletics, fitness, and sports I find it necessary to understand specifically how these types of spaces are designed in order to serve the purpose that they are intended for. Although I will describe these spaces in great detail later the spaces I will be engaging are highly functional spaces with intentional design. John Bale discussed these spaces by providing that “the natural world is difficult to understand; the world of sport is the world made simple without aesthetic distractions” (1996). I do not subscribe to these thoughts entirely. While the world of sport, at least in the realm of competition spaces, are highly monitored to have controlled variables and have a set standard composition to have consistent environments I do not feel as though aesthetic distractions do not come into the conversation. The presence of an audience or notions of some sort of spectacle are ever present in influencing athletic spaces. Jessica Dawson (2008) discussed in a press release of the group exhibition “Hard Targets: Masculinity and Sport” that the various works “...remind us why so many smart people love sports. It’s about unraveling intention, analyzing moves and soaking up images. You know, like art”. As I will later discuss the world of sport is ever in the public eye as a highly exploited culture in its portrayal in obsessive media formats. This definition also omits the certain grandness or familiarity of spaces and the relationships athletes develop within a given environment.

Also, as I will later discuss, there is the ever-present aesthetic nature of athletic bodies (or aesthetics). For now, I will only begin to discuss the interacting of bodies within a performative space.

Bodies within environment. Stern further described how interactive art spaces allow for participation and what constitutes the artistic elements of performance.

Stern stated that:

the contemporary artist-researchers who creates what is called interactive art are concerned with how interactivity itself ‘matters’, a relatively new concept in artistic creativity. Here, physical action literally and figuratively becomes the ‘work’ that is the ‘work of art.’ Artwork and audience, action and perception, body and world, are each and always already implicated across others. (p. 233)

Here Stern emphasized that this is always occurring within the experience of art or art making since there is the intention of viewer interaction and participation. Something to keep in mind while experiencing artwork but also to be aware of our own presence within performing even in a non-obvious art setting.

Stern also discussed how our experiences with objects are perceived but relations are performed. Since the way we experience art objects is a bodily practice whether visually or otherwise we are in constant relation to them, or even in relation to one another as we share an experience. Bodies are thusly performed. This is interestingly contrasted by Sweeney as she discussed “the placement of body on stage or in the performance space relative to other ‘objects’, both animate and inanimate, emphasizes the body as object” (p. 33). I would further push that since the body is used as subject, like when actors take on characters their

identity still exists however they perform something else. The body in this sense acts as subject in how we choose to express or communicate. This can be a suppression of identity or true identity. The object of the body remains the same relative to other objects in the environment, what is communicated comes out of subject.

Challenging Hypermasculine Discourse

Defining masculinity. In order to discuss how masculinity enters into the conversation of why certain types of behaviors and interactions occur within the vernacular environments of sport it is important to first gain a sense of how I will be defining masculinity and how masculine roles are established. The culture of sport relies heavily on the formation of masculine identities and is often serves as the basis in which the rest of society forms their ideals of masculinity (or even that masculine identities are a considered idealistic).

Eric Anderson (2005) helped to sort out a few definitions in order better navigate the conversation of how masculinity operates and influences the culture of sports or even society as a whole. Anderson referred to a text by Robert Brannon (1976) in which Anderson is inspired to form his definitions. Brannon's rules, or tenets of masculinity are "(1) no sissy stuff; (2) be a big wheel; (3) be a sturdy oak; (4) give 'em hell" (p. 22). (1) refers to the rejection of femininity; (2) indicates that it is inherent for the man to lead other men; (3) refers to the stoic nature in which a man should not show weakness; and (4) signifies a colloquial phrase used in a sort of arousing motivational speech. Anderson expands on these rules by focusing on that masculinity is defined by a rejection of anything feminine. For the sake of Anderson's definitions, he included that any sort of homosexual behaviors are

considered effeminate. Anderson furthered these ideas by suggesting that contemporary culture calls for a reexamination in how we define hegemonic masculinity. This is important as many gender theorists typically look at how gender associations help maintain regimented definitions. Anderson argued that masculine sexualities are often overlooked in these discussions.

Anderson distinguished the top tier of masculinity and terms this ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Anderson stated that hegemonic masculinity “...describes men who have not only achieved all of [Brannon’s] tenets, but who also possess the ascribed variables of the dominant form of masculinity, in whichever or context it exists” (p. 24). In the context of sport this would include athletic achievement and any sort of dominating success. Fulfillment of the tenets are not enough to be considered hegemonic; most of these traits are out of the individual’s agency including traits that are valued through the power within the culture (potentially race, gender, ability, etc.).

In Anderson’s work he used the ‘orthodox masculinity’ as defining “a way to describe someone who fits all of Brannon’s aforementioned tenets, but who does not necessarily maintain the ascribed traits to be considered hegemonically masculine (including being gay).” (p. 24). This means that if an individual *behaves* according to Brannon’s tenets he is considered orthodoxly masculine. If this individual *behaves* under these tenets and also possesses the dominant traits of the society (for America this is white, athletic, straight...) than he is hegemonically masculine.

In order to better understand the interworking of sport as a highly masculinized culture Anderson introduced the term *masculine capital*. He suggested that

...if a male acts in accord with the five tenets mentioned above, he can be described as attempting to raise his *masculine capital*. If he raises his masculine capital enough, he is said to be acting in accord with *orthodox masculinity*; and if he happens to be white, good-looking, and so on, then we might say he represents *hegemonic masculinity*. It is important to understand these differences because they involve the intersectionality of race and other ascribed variables. (p.24-25)

It becomes important to be able to differentiate these terms in understanding how behaviors and identities change the way we talk about masculinity in this sort of hierarchal scale.

Masculinity operates on a system of guidelines within the institution of sport. I use the term institution here because I feel as though athletic culture also operates on a system of highly regulated rules that are greatly influenced by masculine ideals.

It is interesting to then to consider how this system of masculine capital functions. Anderson suggested, “surprisingly, boys at the top of the masculine hierarchy are actually provided more leeway to transgress the rigid gender boundaries, because few other boys would be willing to challenge their sexuality for fear of social or physical reprisal” (p. 26). If athletes are at the top of the masculine tier it seems as though behavior that would otherwise be harassed for being in accordance with homosexuality becomes acceptable because there is no position more powerful to condemn him. This is perhaps where we get this illusion of homoeroticism as this fantastical thing that is somehow socially acceptable within the same social group that aggressively (and paradoxically) asserts its power over similar behaviors.

The only role that may have power over a male of high masculine capital is in fact his peer. Michael Kimmel (1994) offered, “masculinity must be proved, and no sooner than it is

again questioned and must be proven again-constant, relentless, unachievable, and ultimately the quest for proof becomes so meaningless than it takes on the characteristics...of sport” (p. 122). This indicates that a sort of policing or internal monitoring of the masculinity within sport occurs. I discuss this further in hopes of exploring the types of behaviors and interactions occur within the spaces of sport and between athletic masculine identities.

Policing masculinity. Anderson discussed hegemonic masculinity in terms of the masculine sexualities and the maintenance of being considered hegemonic. He continued that “hegemonic masculinity not only requires that a male maintain 100 percent heterosexual desires and behaviors, but that he must continually prove that he is heterosexual” (p. 22). Within this culture this means that the hegemonically masculine must assert dominance over inferior groups, such as non-male genders or non-straight men. This means that there is a sort of policing that occurs within the culture to assert one’s own masculine dominance at the expense of another person, often this is observed through behaviors that indicate the internalized homophobia within the culture of sport.

This internalized (or suppressed) culture of homophobia is so strong that “...many (ostensibly heterosexual) athletes maintain that the hypermasculinity exhibited in sports nullifies the possibility of gays even existing in their space...” (p.13). Anderson continued that “men are, therefore, ever vigilant in maintaining individual masculinity through near-total homosocial patrolling, as they are under the constant scrutiny of other men” (p.25). This emphasizes the importance for policing these sorts of social rules, and may potentially indicate some sort of competition of identity. By lessening someone else’s masculinity an individual can assert his own dominance.

These aspects of masculinity are policed through usually stigmatizing other males by questioning aspects of their masculinity or jokingly poking fun at things that go against orthodox masculinity in order to assert themselves at the expense of another man. This is interesting because Anderson continued, “homosexual *acts* in American culture, whether active or passive, have been uniquely, and publicly, equated with a homosexual *identity*, despite the fact that self-identified heterosexual men frequently engaged in same-sex behavior while publicly and privately maintaining the identity of heterosexuality” (p.22). Within this hypermasculinized culture it is interesting to understand how these sorts of interactions may change the nature of sport. With more and more athletes, both professional and amateur, identifying as non-straight and an increasingly tolerant American society there is potential to intercept the cyclical nature of homophobia in sport and the power it has over defining masculinity.

Queering masculinity. In order to begin the discussion of how these non-straight identities may have the potential to influence the grip sport has on serving as the model of producing/policing the masculine ideal Anderson referred to Brian Pronger (1990) who “...maintains that coming out in sport is to acknowledge an identity that challenges the nature of heterosexual masculinity and therefore challenges the masculinizing institution of sport as a whole” (p, 43). This is an area of tension since athletes are given a tremendous amount of masculine capital yet when a man self-identifies with something other than the heterodominant culture in which he exists. Anderson (2002) suggested,

thus, gay male athletes, who are seen as a paradox because they comply with the gendered script of being a man through the physicality involved in sports but violate

another masculine script through the existence of same-sex desires, may threaten sport as a prime site of hegemonic masculinity and masculine privilege. (p.861)

By having this self-identity be known, willingly or unwillingly, this begins to make variance within the masculine culture visible, and perhaps even acceptable.

Anderson referenced Griffin (1998) in saying, "...if gay male athletes, who are stigmatized as being feminine, can be as strong and competitive as heterosexual male athletes, they may threaten the perceived distinctions between gay men and straight men and thus the perceived differences between men and women as a whole" (p. 861). Although I think this statement does carry some weight to it in that the role of non-straight male athletes may begin to question how sport, and thusly society, defines masculinity (or masculine capital for that matter), I feel as though this is equating characteristics of gay men to characteristics of women. I do think that there is some merit in that this may open up a much larger discussion on a broader scale, however I feel apprehensive in subscribing to the idea that the perception of women within the context of sport depends on the visibility of gay athletic men.

Even with a growing progressive society the culture of sport is changing at a very slow rate. Far fewer male athletes identify as non-straight in the context of sport than society's statistics. Although it is possible that non-straight males are deterred from entering the culture of sport I do not believe that this accounts for this discrepancy in visibility. Most professional athletes that do eventually publicly identify as something other than straight do so after they end their athletic careers. Anderson (2002) discussed, "...gay athletes often view their silencing as acceptable and fall into a negotiated, segmented identity that

contributes to their own culture of silence” (p. 870). In this research process I discussed the ways in which I navigated my own identity within the vernacular environments of sport in which I find myself changing the ways in which I perform my identity.

Jane Ward (2015) discussed a bit of tension that exists for non-straight male athletes. There is the complexity of homosexual acts that occur within sport that do not compromise an individual’s heterosexuality because given the context and the nature of this hypermasculinized culture (as well as others such as the military, fraternities, or even prison) these acts are often not seen as sexual. She suggested that “though homosexual contact is a feature of straight men’s private lives and friendships, it also takes ritualized forms in the institutional environments in which straight men come into contact with one another’s bodies” (p. 16). I think that while these sorts of behaviors are interesting in and perhaps relevant to discussion of the culture of sport this is not the main focus of what I aim to do in this thesis project. I think the homosexual contact/behaviors that occur within a masculine culture between heterosexual men is interesting but for the purpose of this paper I would like to distinguish these behaviors as non-sexual. Ward has helped to alleviate much of the apprehension I had about dealing with a topic that greatly involves sexuality and then discussing how bodies articulate identities. Too often in sport is the athletic body sexualized and it is not my intention to perpetuate that objectification.

Project Description

Methodology

I investigated the relationship the environments I chose have with being designed specifically for the identities that occupy them through humanities-oriented research. The

American Educational Research Association (2009) refers to humanities-oriented research in education as the, "...use of interpretive methods, broadly constructed, which investigate the history, meanings, beliefs, values, and discourse that human beings employ in the production of social life" (p. 482). For my study I used this research method in order to interpret the social dynamics of athletics as well as explore the nuances of how they influence society and engage masculine identities. I considered the ways in which the vernacular spaces of sport enable/disable different types of behaviors and are designed to allow for athletic identities to interact. In my story section I analyzed each space, giving detailed descriptions, and further processed the functionality of each space. Understanding the spaces and environments is important to further comprehend how the identities that perform within them operate and engage the complex relationships of masculine identities.

I also used my own identity as an athlete to conduct an autoethnographic study exploring the ways in which male athletes use physical body to perform identity and how these identities navigate masculinity. I analyzed the significance of my experiences during my fieldwork in the discussion section where I describe my personal relationship with communicating identity through my own body as well as how my observed identities engage masculinity at each site I performed in. Being an athlete for the past 18 years has given me access to these spaces and has allowed me to understand the complex dynamics that occur between athletic identities.

I recorded my observations through a combination of journaling, blogging, photography, and video blogs that document my time at each space as well as my own experiences training as an elite athlete. These documents record observations from my time

training, coaching, and may even recall past experiences from my time as a student-athlete. I found it important and relevant for this project to also have a digital presence because I wanted to have a space where I could document my work as well as remain transparent in my discovery process.¹ I think this also allows for an added layer of accessibility to the work and makes sense to be rooted in a digital space since the use of social media has a strong prevalence in fitness culture. An online space allows individuals to show an edited version of their reality and can control how we want to be seen. There are elements of showing off or flaunting ones own appearance to attract attention through likes, retweets, and followers. In addition to multimedia documentation of my fieldwork I also produced artwork that reflects my findings and experiences through this research process.

Parameters/Limits

For the purpose of my research study I explored the dynamics and interactions of male athletes in the realm of sport. Although I have a grasp of how my sexuality engages the topics I discuss it is difficult to generate data that is specific to the intersection of sexuality. There is much to say about how female athletes add to this conversation as well as non-straight female identities, however for the purpose of this study I would like to isolate the group I have identified. I was also limited by own white identity and a considerable amount of privilege and masculine capital that has allowed my identity access to some of the spaces I studied.

I feel as though I do enter this subject with my own biases and preconceived ideas of masculinized cultures especially in the context of institutionalized athletics due to my long-

¹ Please feel free to visit www.josephahladik.com for research process documentation.

standing athletic identity. Most of my research is being driven by my own experiences as a student-athlete and my time training/working out in each space so much of the knowledge I generated cannot easily speak to all experiences of men that engage masculinity, identity, and spaces. For this study I was limited to only the sport of swimming so I feel that I have a limited ability to expand the theories I have learned to the entirety of institutionalized athletics, although a further analysis and studies can be conducted.

Story

Within this section I discuss and contextualize the time I spent during my fieldwork by analyzing the space and functionality of three different athletic environments that I observed and performed in. I will begin defining each space through close analysis of specific details of its design and layout. The spaces I chose for my research are operate on a sort of spectrum in terms of what types of activities occur in each as well as the accessibility of private/public space. I am also considering the differences of recreational vs. high functional and specific spaces to better examine the behaviors they allow or disable. Understanding what types of limitations each space has in accessibility will provide a clearer exploration of what types of identities are interacting within the space, which will be explored and developed in the discussion section through my autoethnographic research. These limitations in accessibility are often intentional to create a space exclusively for certain identities. Specifically, I find that each of these spaces attract specific types of identities to them; I investigated how the spaces are designed to allow for these types of identities to perform. In many ways environments are created to facilitate the performance of masculine identities but may also shape the formation of athletic identities for specific sports.

In assessing each environment I will also pay close attention to the functionality of a space. I am looking at how the design of an environment both enables and disables different types of behaviors and in essence controls the types of performances that occur. I discuss specifically how elements of the spaces are being used as well as how the environments serve as performative or interactive spaces.

Space 1: Swimming

Defining the space. Within this space I will be discussing the performance aspect (competition) as well as the rehearsal (training) spaces of my swimming and the different behaviors that exist within each of these. In this instance I use the word ‘competition’ to discuss the direct contest between two athletes and less to do with the innate competition that goes on between masculine identities to assert ones dominance. The pool spaces in which I train and compete are highly regulated and precisely measured due to the fact that there are specifications that need to reflect a sort of standard that allows all competitions to occur under the fewest variables as possible. That is to say that one pool will not give an advantage over another pool, however certain variables, (such as indoor/outdoor, lighting, starting blocks with better traction...) do still occur.

The design serves specific purposes and stimulates specific and precise behaviors and actions of those that interact within this space. Its design is meticulously considered, which is interesting as I consider this space to be the most privatized and also the most focused space. I find it important and necessary to include these specifications because I consider this environment to be a highly functional space.

These standards include that the pool length be 25 yards, 25 meters, or 50 meters depending on the meet and each pool needs to be length certified by a licensed surveyor or engineer. According to the USA Swimming standards each lane is a minimum of 2.5 meters (8ft 21 inches) wide although some Local Swimming Committees (LSCs) require a minimum of a 7 feet width. Walls must be at right angles, and there must be markers on the bottom of the pool that are a minimum of 10 inches wide of dark or contrasting color that run down the middle of each lane. There are end wall markers in the shape of a T on the bottom that indicate the approaching wall. There is also a cross on the wall that extends at least 3 feet 4 inches (1 meter) below the surface of the water. There are also restrictions on water temperature that allows it to be between 78 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit during competition. There are also regulations on air temperature and humidity. Each pool has anywhere from 6-20 lanes. Starting blocks are installed behind each lane and have their own set of restrictions.

Backstroke flags cross over the width of the pool 5 meters away from the end of the lane that help indicate swimmers on their backs that the wall is approaching. The smell of humid chlorine permeates the air and seeps into your hair, skin, and clothing like a chemical haze that follows you long after you leave. You hear the sounds of the filtration system running water, splashing, people talking or cheering, coughing, heavy breathing, whistles, electronic beeps from the starter, pounding of feet on the walls during turns, and hums of lighting.

In order to access the environments of competitive swimming each team typically has standards in which an individual can enter. In addition to the monetary costs of joining private clubs, most of athletes start at young ages of needing to know how to swim and

evolve as the individual progresses and is able to participate in more advanced training groups. I describe this space as the most private space, as there is limited accessibility. In terms of performative and competitive space there is an added level of privatized space. I use the terms “performative” and “competitive” in terms of athletic performance and competition as well as bodies/identities competing for masculine capital and the direct competition of sports. Many meets require a set of performance standards where an athlete needs to go a certain time in order to attend and compete. This process limits some meets to be extremely elite access. Many of the behavioral and interactive dynamics of these spaces are very similar although the more elite you get the more evidence of masculine identities and muscle flexing can be observed

Space functionality. Although a highly individualized sport, training within swimming is highly team oriented. Lanes are typically filled with anywhere from 3-7 athletes that leave 5-10 seconds apart on sets. The black line on the bottom of the pool allows swimmers to share the confined space of the lane by splitting the lane into two sides. Common culture of training requires swimmers to always stay on the right side and is referred to as “circle swimming”. The flags that are placed at 5 meters are meant for swimmers swimming on their backs. Swimmers typically have a stroke count where they can turn over and perform a fast turn without having to ever look at the wall. The “T”s on the bottom of the pool serve the same purpose of indicating the approaching wall. Individuals are able to rely on the measurements of the pool in order to perform each race (and training session) so precise that they can literally do it with their eyes closed, which is also an indication of how much rehearsal time goes into each performance. Repetition is

something that permeates all aspects of swimming training. The behavior of circle swimming and the measurements of the backstroke flags both maximize the space available and prevent any sort of collision of bodies. As I will discuss in the next section collisions and moments of impact are often associated with masculine acts. Preventing aggressive contact within the sport of swimming may also come from controlling and limiting the hypermasculine behaviors that are often apparent in other sports. The specifications of swimming environments control how swimmers interact with each other and also the space itself.

The ways swimmers interact with this organization of space also enables interactions with bodies that perform so close together. Since there is so much time and energy put forth to become more efficient bodies, as well as the constant passing by one another, there is a sort of familiarity and recognition that happens whilst training. Once you swim with people for a while you can catch a glimpse of a calf or shoulder or even just the wake of water as you swim past someone going the other way. You can identify whose leg, arm, or wave it belongs to. I will discuss this recognition and comfort with other bodies in the following section, as these interactions are important in how swimmer bodies engage masculinity. This familiarity is interesting when examining the relationship between bodies and the environment in which they exist.

In studying how the body is both impacted by and impacts the vernacular environment in which it is situated, the interaction and performance of a swimmer and the pool is one of the premier examples that I have experienced. The very function and skill of a swimmer is measured by how they move in a way that changes the environment they are in. By entering the hand in the water into a high elbow catch position and pulling back towards

the hip while keeping the hand and forearm nearly vertical the swimmer is pushing water backwards and propelling them forward. The movement of a swimmer forward as well as a strong propulsive kick creates a wake of water that pulls water forward as well. While racing this creates a draft that other swimmers can use to facilitate pulling themselves along if they position their bodies in the correct spot. Competition pools use lane lines to divide lanes as well as to attempt to reduce this sort advantage although this drafting still exists and if used correctly can be a smart racing tactic. In my roles as training athlete as well as educating coach I have spent years studying and understanding how swimmers control their movements in the water to best maximize efficiency and power. In order to improve and progress as a swimmer it is essential to understand the relationship of body and environment through body awareness, water tension, pressure, currents, and many other special qualities.

There are also elements that surround the spaces of competition that create a sort of grand spectacle of athletic performances. In most competition settings as well as in training, although there are far fewer viewers, bleachers to accommodate spectators surround the competition pool. In this sense the pool and deck area become the stage in which the stadium seating surrounds. Not only does this anticipate a large audience but it also accounts for controlling the way sound is carried within the space as spectators cheer and chant.

The architectural decision to place the audience in stands or bleachers is interesting in the way that it creates a stage out of the field/pool/arena, however the stage sits at the lowest point. The audience must look down upon the athletes. The relationship of the spectator and the performer is one that plays with a sort of power dynamic. The athletic performer is physically powerful and a powerful masculine identity, but the way they are observed

indicates a submission to the gaze of a mass crowd. The audience has power in numbers, as the performer is unable to match the gaze of his onlookers. In the professional sports setting the spectator is paying to observe this source of entertainment and thusly enabling these athletes to perform for a living. In this sense the power very much resides in the spectator, however the athlete is still valued for his masculine identity. Many cannot achieve this identity but any association a spectator has with athletics (even just viewing or purchasing merchandise) reflects the valuing of masculinity for their own identity.

In my experience competing at elite levels the energy on deck is affected by the volume and excitement of the audience. The grandness and enthusiasm of onlookers, as well as the exploitation of my body, has made me aware of the spectacle of my performances in competition and I have realized that the best swimmers in the world are the ones that thrive on this sort of attention. There is something powerful about being able to stand up on the starting blocks before my race, in my own lane, bow down to take my mark and for a brief moment silencing the crowd in anticipation. When I hear that buzzer and I am freed to race I am immediately flooded with the sounds of the crowd and my preparation takes over my body. I allow the energy of my environment and muscle memory to perform what I have trained my body to do.

There is this really interesting exchanging of power that goes on with athletes allowing people to look down on them and submit to not matching such a powerful gaze. There is also something to be said about being aware of onlookers that magnify the awareness an athlete has as people are visually exploring their bodies and watching them perform.

Space 2: Corporate Gyms

Defining the space. In contrast to the highly regulated and minimized variables that exist within the spaces of competitive swimming, gyms tend to have some variance in the layout and overall composition of the space. Depending on the gym size, space, and resources a gym has, the equipment is usually arranged in sections differentiating from free weights, body weight, strength machines, and cardiovascular machines. If the gym has the ability to have a variety of these types of resources the gym typically arranges any sort of machines (which typically have a very specific and exclusive movement that it allows for) arranged in rows or around the perimeter of the gym space. These also may be organized in which section of the body or muscle group the gym-goer wishes to target. It is also common for gyms to have special interest rooms, such as yoga, spin classes, a pool, or open gyms, adjacent to the main lifting areas. Many of the machines will also provide instructions and information regards to proper technique for the one or two movements that they were built.

The free weights areas typically have multiple benches or racks where people can squat, bench press, or do any number of things. This area also typically has shelves of dumbbells and kettlebells of varying weights where people can select their weight and perform whatever movement or exercise or they want. These areas are typically equipped with rubberized floors.

The body weight areas are typically covered in wooden or laminate floors and are equipped with yoga mats, boards or physio-balls for balance exercises, or a variety of elastic bands and adjustable straps. Cardio machines, often treadmills, elliptical, bikes, or stair

machines, are typically positioned in their own section with televisions mounted on the walls or directly on the machine.

Although many people choose to wear their own headphones popular music typically fills the air of the gym as well as the clanging, pounding, and grunting as people perform their various exercises. Mirrors also line the walls of the gym.

In terms of accessibility to most gyms I define this space as somewhere in the middle of the field in terms of public and private space. The gym largely remains still somewhat privatized since typically gyms require some sort of membership or agreement, which may not be accessible to everyone whether it is due to geographic location or financial obligation, although usually anyone can apply or find a gym that they are able to make sense for their situation and intentions. Many private gyms tend to be expensive and have a variety of requirements or restrictions including hours of operation or mandatory contract periods whereas public gyms, like community recreation centers, may only require you to live within a certain radius. For the purpose of my research I am exploring private gyms that I have attended. These gyms typically are large and have a variety of resources for its members. With these restrictions many gyms also have much versatility depending on the gym space. This is important to market towards an audience of varying experience with fitness.

I am also defining this space as being somewhat of a mix between recreational and focused athletic environment as it has such versatility in function and a broad range of demographic in terms of skill level and fitness experience/motive. There are athletes that attend these gyms to train for specific sports, people that attend simply for a fitness lifestyle,

those that have goals of desired body images, and some that are there for socializing (amongst many other motives for going to a gym).

Space functionality. In analysis of how the space functions to enable and disable different type of behavior and allows for specific interactions between bodies I am first drawn to some of the multifunctional components of how this space is designed. Since there is a social component to this space and spectrum of people that attend, there are definitely a variety of masculine identities that participate in exercise and interact in very peculiar ways. The corporate gyms that I attend very much still emulate the Greek concept of *arête* in that there are programs designed for all ages, skill levels, and even provide classes, restaurants, salons, and more; in this way the gym creates a culture and community of a fitness lifestyle and social exchange. It is interesting in mapping out this space through my research that different types of people and identities tend to gravitate towards different sections of the gym. Within each section there also seems to have different levels of masculine capital attached to them. In this way there seems to be a sort of segregation of identities within the sections of the gym. Typically, the heavy lifts are done in the free-weight sections and attract the most masculine identities, as opposed to the cardio sections which are located on the other side of the gym. The lifting area also has the most potential for injury if lifts are done improperly so it is possible that the risk component, as well as the aggressive behaviors, has something to do with the connection of attracting high levels of masculine identities, which I will discuss further in the next section. The special interest rooms are even further removed from the design. The spectrum of masculinity is visible in the layout of the different sections.

The mirrors that line the perimeter of the gym also serve as a multifunctional component. The intention of the mirrors is to expand the visual space and make the gym seem larger as well as allow people to watch themselves perform exercises to make sure their bodies are moving in the desired ways. This is useful to make sure technique is solid to prevent injury but also has a bit of a vanity component. Mirrors serve as a way to see how others perceive you so they may also be used as a tool to self-reflect body image and if their body adequately reflects their identity.

In addition to this personal assessment the mirrors also functioned to enable different types of visual engagement. Some used the mirrors to take pictures of themselves to document their activities or body shape. In addition to the gaze being exchanged within the self the mirrors functioned in a way that allowed visual engagement of the surroundings. The mirrors enabled an individual to observe others as they performed without being obvious or direct. It is true that many attend gyms for the purpose of being viewed and the mirrors are a way to show off and allow for your body to be seen. Although the gaze is seldom met, there is power in allowing spectators to watch as you perform the capabilities and skills of your body.

This sort of thing may not be a conscious decision for most people at the gym but is something that I have been aware of. It is possible that my identity as an athlete allows me to embrace being watched and gravitates towards performing my body for others. There is a sort of satisfaction for me to be seen working out since I have pride in the way I have disciplined my body.

Space 3: Muscle Beach

Defining the space. For the third space I was fortunate enough to receive the Roads Scholarship for Research and Travel, awarded through the *Better Homes & Gardens* Art History class at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, which allowed me to travel to Los Angeles where I visited a handful of artist environments and vernacular spaces, including Muscle Beach. I set off to gain a better understanding how this space was designed in order to create an environment in which bodies perform and the ways in which viewers participate and interact with other bodies as well as with the objects and the environments themselves.

During my experience researching this space I journaled, blogged, and documented extensively, analyzing and detailing all types of sensory stimuli that I experienced.² With this understanding and awareness of how my body was behaving within a space my trip proved to be an interesting self-reflective experience and one that was intense in comparison to the spaces I had already explored. My time at Muscle Beach proved to exemplify the core concepts of my project (including the ways body is used to perform identity, the ability for a space to enable/disable different types of behavior, and the ways in which male athletes engage masculinity) I had been researching and seemed to show these concepts and theories at a heightened level. Muscle Beach has an interesting history often being credited as the birthplace of modern body building and has become a social space for athletes to engage in performances as well as watching others as they show off their bodies.³

Muscle Beach is now located on the Venice boardwalk in Los Angeles amongst other tourist shops, pop up stands, and street performers. After breeching the entryway to the

² These blogs and images have been made public and can be found at www.josephahladik.com.

³ For more history about this space feel free to check out www.musclebeach.net.

boardwalk with “VENICE” being strung across the street I was instantly greeted by the crowded grounds of Muscle Beach. Amongst gift shops and a “Muscle Beach Museum” the actual outdoor gym area stood amongst the sea of bodies. There were large vibrant orange signs and bright blue chain link fencing that enclosed the weights area. My approach to visiting this site was to first observe and then, if I could get myself to do it, participate in this sort of performance. The gym area was much smaller than I expected, housing various machines, some free weights, and some open rubber floor space; nothing that stood out as exceptional from what I had seen at the gyms I have previously attended and had written about. The machines were also clearly used and weathered, which is likely a combination of the constant abuse they endured and the fact that this gym was exposed to the elements outdoors. Along with the gym being smaller than I expected there were also not very many people using the equipment. For whatever reason I pictured such a famous location being packed but there were only a handful of people that exercised independently of one another. Despite the physical size of the gym itself I do not want to downplay the grandness in which the location was presented. The signs were huge, the concrete façade was huge, and the crowd was huge.

Before I settled on where or if I would be participating I continued to observe and map out the grounds. I moved from the glamorous gym crowd and came across a series of five bleachers that were angled towards a center point of a raised platform. A large archway stood atop the highest tier and appeared to be a giant barbell made of tan-grey concrete. This was a much more quiet space. A few people sat and watched the gym from a distance and

had casual conversations with people. There were a few signs up the bleachers advertising the founder of Muscle Beach and its historic significance.

Behind the bleachers was a large area of sand with gymnastics equipment where others were working out. The best way I can describe this area is that it looked much like an adult playground and seemed to operate in a very similar way. I saw people interacting with each other as they worked out and people seemed to be here with friends. Unlike the gym where everyone stayed within themselves or engaged the crowd this space seemed to be much more playful and open. People worked out with people they may or may not have known and walked around much more freely. People challenged each other to different exercises or acrobatics on the equipment. This was a social space and one where the performances of individuals seemed natural and organic.

I also would like to further understand how accessibility comes into the conversation before I consider some of the performances and interactions that I observed. In terms of accessibility is concerned I felt as though there were a few different things going on that accounted for the types of people that interacted within this space. I found this space to be the most public of the places that I observed as it is open to anyone that would like to enter the space. I am also defining this space as also being the most recreational of spaces as the performances and behaviors that I will discuss have the most variety in terms of play and focused activity.

Space functionality. What is interesting to me is how much the design of Muscle Beach allows for specific and intentional types of interaction between the masculine identities that perform within the space. Although this space is highly public there may still

be some sort of social barriers that allow for certain identities to gravitate towards different parts of this location. The people that occupied the lifting area, those that served as spectators, and different people that interacted in the sandy gymnastics area all behaved differently but culminated into the overall spectacle that I observed at Muscle Beach.

As I have discussed the enclosed area of the weightlifting area is the premiere setting in which you enter the Venice Boardwalk. The vibrant orange and blue signage and fencing draws your attention as it is placed with the pastel ocean backdrop. The blue fencing of the space also serves as a barrier for onlookers to distinctly separate the crowded audience from the few men performing in their environment. The machines within the space are organized in a way that allows for ample visibility as well as functional space for the bodies to navigate amongst each other without abrupt interruption. What is also interesting is how these bodies seemed to glisten in the Los Angeles sun in a way that could not possibly be from perspiration, but rather a predetermined strategy of some type of oil so that the light hit each muscle perfectly, casting bounding shadows across their hardened bodies.

Within the intermediate space where the empty energy of past pageantry took place I found time to reflect and observe from the tops of the five angled bleachers. I asked my friend after I recorded and reflected into my notebook and he told me about how this was the stage they used for bodybuilding competitions. From what I was told apparently they do a series of photo shoots at the gym and then parade out from under the massive arch as people sit in bleachers and the surrounding area to observe, take pictures, and cheer. It sounded like some sort of beauty pageant of extremely built and sculpted athletic bodies. The archway served as a frame for the gym for people to watch. Although in my observation this section

of the grounds was the emptiest I could easily imagine and feel the ways this space functioned. Each bleacher pointed at the concrete archway, which was formed by a giant barbell atop pillars on a raised stage. I felt the grandness and power of how bodies pass through and are greeted by cheers and camera flashes of approval.

The sandbox of gymnastics equipment functioned as a sort of playground for athletic and masculine identities. The interactions within this space were much more playful and social. Although there was not fencing or any sort of physical barriers there appeared to be a set of social barriers that discouraged individuals that did not have enough masculine capital or the ability to perform atop the raised sandy stage. There also was a lot more free space between equipment, which almost broke up the space into sections, each with their own apparatus. Surrounding the sand were benches and grassy knolls where people sat after walking the boardwalk or on their way to the beach. Many people observed in a much more casual and informal way while some took advantage of the performers by being a non-discreet audience participant.

Discussion

In this section I analyzed my autoethnographic documentation of performing (both exercise and my own embodied identity) in the spaces I studied in my fieldwork as well as continued to process, analyze, and engage masculinity within the environments in order to develop the discussion and relationship between each space. I discussed the commonalities that I observed and generate significance behind my fieldwork experience. I found that in each space individuals and myself were very consistent in the ways in which identity

engaged the relationship to physical bodies, how bodies interact in a shared space, and the ways in which masculine capital is earned.

Concerning Masculinity

Each of the three spaces that I studied operated similarly in how individuals engage with and express masculinity. Typically in sports, masculine capital is gained through aggression and bodily impact outwardly through physical contact with other bodies. These three spaces operate differently in that they do not engage in physically aggressive acts with other bodies; instead masculinity is presented through non-physical, interpersonal engagements and personal expression with the body. In each lens the individual, instead of physically contact with others, disciplines his body through self-inflicted aggressive acts. His body then shows evidence of masculine behaviors. It is important then to make the connection between masculine identities and the physical self because the body is evidence of performed masculinity through self-inflicted aggression.

Given that sport is understood in various ways, I wanted to explore and better understand the ways in which swimming, corporate gyms, and Muscle Beach engage masculinity. On first glimpse, it may seem that swimming is publicly deemed lesser on the masculinity scale than other sports. This may be due to the individuality of competing and it is a no-impact sport, which resonates a non-aggressive sport. Aggression, contact, and any form of the acts associated with combat speak to the masculine ideals that sport looks to. Since combative behaviors are often directly part of earning high masculine capital, boys need to be ruthless and go into battle. It is very different in the swimming context as many of

the specifications of the designed space prevent these types of collisions and interactions, however aggressive behaviors still exist.

In my research the spaces that I chose for this project showed that a very similar dynamic is present. Within the spaces I explored the masculine identities that are formed and performed do not have to do with physically contacting other bodies, but rather individuals performing aggressive act upon themselves. The physically disciplined and built body is then the evidence of these repeated acts of aggression and express masculine identities. In this section I discuss both the interpersonal engagement and the personal expression of embodied masculine identities as well as develop a language that helps to discuss a nuanced understanding of masculinity.

Interpersonal engagement. In terms of the interpersonal engagement with masculinity, I am referring to the idea of the spectacle and outward performance of the body to communicate identity and how the relationship between the self and the audience engage the gaze and observation. I discuss these observations based on my own experiences performing in each of the spaces during my fieldwork.

In the context of my swimming I found that within the relationship between spectator and performer there seems to be power in accepting an unmatched gaze and refusing to show evidence of participation in viewing. Discourse on the gaze typically puts the power in the viewer however in the dynamics of competitive swimming I find the power to be placed in the performer in submitting to the viewer's eye. The flexing and showing off of bodies that occurs on the pool deck is a way of flaunting a masculine identity. Whether it is to psych out competition or merely to attract the gaze from others it still evokes a sort of asserting

masculinity and dominance by the presence of a disciplined body and the desire to be seen. This is facilitated through the competitive aspect of swimming in which viewers spectate a race by looking down upon the athletes. As discussed earlier there is an inherent acceptance of the inability to match the gaze of the entire audience, and the presence of viewers can be thrilling for the performer.

Within the free-weight section of the corporate gym I visited I observed a very similar exchange between the performer and viewer. The exercises performed in this section were the most powerful and aggressive in nature and also had the most amount of risk associated. Men strutted back and forth as if they were eyeing down a competitor before performing their exercise. Upon completing the routine, the individual would let the weight crash down on the rack or rubber floor to indicate they exhausted the strength or even surpassed their ability. There was a showmanship to this section in the way individuals performed with little actual interaction between people verbally with the exception of asking if someone is done with that piece of equipment or if they required a spotter. Even this exchange seemed to be rooted in a sort of power dynamic of implying that someone required help or requesting that another step aside so he could use that machine.

I also considered why so many men grunted and yelled at the gym as they lifted. This is something that I have always felt strangely about. I found that the actual benefit of making noise is fairly minimal but is done to attract some sort of attention and also make it known that there is an aggressive, and thusly masculine, performance occurring.

The people that occupied the weight-lifting space of Muscle Beach also maintained this sort of blatant orthodox masculinity in the way they performed within the space. The

men were clearly muscle bound and in their prime. A few had perhaps been using this gym ever since it started back in Santa Monica. There were also only men. For those that were clearly in their prime and fitting in with the bodybuilding legacy of Muscle Beach the gym acted as a sort of stage. Many people would gather outside the fence with strollers or cameras and stop their walk down the boardwalk to watch. There a crowd formed, as the athletes would perform their exercise routines. After a set of whatever exercises the audience would even applaud and cheer for the men in approval. Occasionally a guy would be about to perform a perceptually difficult round of an exercise and would even walk around and work the crowd before attempting his lift. Others would put in their headphones and not acknowledge the crowd but would occasionally glance over to see who was watching. Some men even walked up to the gates to take pictures with their audience of onlookers. This observation was drastically different from what I had seen at the other gyms that I studied. These identities actually engaged the audience and acknowledged the role of the viewer that elevated the performance and created a grand spectacle surrounding them. There was a willingness and embracement of the exploitation of their muscled bodies by exposing themselves to the crowd that asserted their identity as something that was admired. Whether through curiosity, admiration, or lust the spectators eagerly watched and waited for the men to execute different exercises

Within this enclosed space is perhaps the most blatant examples of everything I had been reading about in terms of the spectacle and display that is performed masculine identities. These men, many of whom have spent years sculpting the appearance of a strongly built body, chose to come to this space not only because they have easy access but

because of the spectacle and exploitation of their bodies to a public audience. The onlookers that surrounded the perimeter of the blue fence were primarily composed of women, although not exclusively. Many people stopped to observe and take photographs as they walked along the crowded boardwalk.

Analyzing this sense of spectacle and watching these men interact with the crowd is interesting and complex. The men serve the roles as performers and have a sort of power to the way they perform masculinity for an audience. Again there is a submission to the gaze that happens and heightens the control the performer has on the overall exchange. Even simply performing in a context that has such a rich history in the formation of masculine ideals that permeate all of athletics and athletic bodies that influence visual culture, the performers at muscle beach are directly associated with high masculine capital. This is the culture that forms how the rest of society perceives and defines orthodox masculinity.

Personal expression. As I discuss the personal expression of a masculine identity I am specifically analyzing how the body is being displayed and serves as evidence of a masculine identity due to the implication of past, self-inflicted behaviors. In this sense the individual has agency in how they articulate masculinity through the formation and relationship with the physical body.

In the world of swimming the aggression associated with masculinity is not expressed at the expense of another athlete, but rather the masculine swimmer is aggressive in training and willingly inflicts the damage to his own body. Training is something that is greatly valued because it is recognizing the beating of ones body into improving. The philosophy of many programs that I have trained under is to beat you down, let the body build back up and

then tear it down again. Training becomes a constant push and pull of tension but is the reason that swimmers have a very strong relationship with their body. I considered this type of masculinity to be *specialized masculinity*, which speaks to the rigid set of ideals and processes that are specific to this group in how they gain masculine capital and position their masculine identities. The body is not only the vehicle in which a swimmer is able to perform, but also evidence of the repeated aggression they have subjected themselves to in training. There is a sense of pride in ones body and a sense of accomplishment.

I have observed a very similar thing occurring within the context of corporate gyms. I found that many men use the mirrors as a way to view their own bodies in the process of exercising. Many men lifted up their shirt to count how many abs were visible, or even candidly took pictures of their reflection. The act of viewing oneself through the mirror and the obsessive nature of taking images that may or may not be for a public audience is a means to document the progress of their own body. Some do this by weighing themselves or taking measurements that they include in their documentation workouts to track progression and the aggressive acts onto the self. Within this space I observed the most variance in terms of performed masculinity as well as valuing of bodies. Corporate gyms served as the environment in which *conventional masculinity* was observed. I use this term to describe the masculine ideals that are seen in everyday life. While gyms contained a more diverse population than I saw in other environments, this space seemed to mimic a potpourri of how individuals maintained masculine capital and presented bodies. I observed some of these aspects through the ways individuals dressed themselves in a somewhat public space to either

reveal or conceal different aspects of their bodies, although this lends itself to the awareness of how they are perceived of others.

A very similar dynamic occurred within the gymnastics/acrobatic section of Muscle Beach. The sandy area attracted mostly playful performances with individuals, including myself, choosing to workout shirtless as a means to show off the body itself as being disciplined. This aspect of the space had less to do with the performance of exercise since this is a casual and recreational social space, and more to do with the embracement of ones own body in a public space. This is in contrast to the *grotesque masculinity* that I found within the weightlifting sections of Muscle Beach. I use this term to refer to the extremeness of the bodybuilding culture that exists in this space. The set of ideals here are often to push past, either naturally or otherwise, common conceptions of the human body. This form of masculinity relies heavily on aesthetics that are often shocking and severe, which creates a sort of spectacle out of the outlandish body.

My Body In Space

Relating to my body/identity. Out of all of the spaces I have studied the world of competitive swimming is where I have had the most experiences navigating bodies and identities. I have been a competitive swimmer for the past 18 years so many of my early identity formations were made either swimming, on deck, or in locker rooms. My long-term investment in the sport has contributed to my athletic identity although the space alone has not created it. Swimming has taught me how to engage masculinity within the context of a sport that relies on masculine capital being earned through aggression and disciplining of ones own body. Although I do not believe that the space creates the identity swimming did

allow me to understand how my identity engages a space, and others, through interacting and viewing of bodies.

It was interesting for me to think about my own comfort within this environment because I am seemingly quite vulnerable in that my body is the most exposed. In analysis of why this comfort existed I found that my athletic identity is constructed very much through my successes as an elite athlete and my work ethic. Both of those things are valuable and desirable in competitive swimming and are attributed to valuing of masculinity. Aspects of competing permeate all of masculinity discourse however I would like to focus on how the perception of hard work comes into the conversation. Someone that is willing to consistently work hard is someone that consistently disciplines themselves and performs aggressive acts to their own body. As previously discussed, in the context of a non-impact athletic culture masculinity is evidenced through the disciplined and worked body.

Although swimming required me to wear only a suit, goggles, and a cap my body is constantly being displayed in the rawest form. While this is seemingly vulnerable I have found a comfort in this because of the consequences of exposing my body has on my identity. In this context these consequences of how I am viewed work in my favor and communicate my masculine identity.

In analyzing my own reasoning for performing within context of a gym I found it helpful to first consider how and why I use gyms. Typically the bulk of my training exists in highly privatized spaces with people that have similar goals and identities as my own but occasionally I seek additional training and attend the gym that I belong to. My intention of this space is typically different than most of the people there because as a specialized athlete

my workouts are specific and focused. That is not to say that my intentions are any more valuable or valid than anyone else using the space, but I recognize that my athletic identity is different than many of the other people at the gym.

In observing my relationship with my body in this space I felt very different than in the context of swimming. In swimming I understood the sets of the ideals: triangular torso, successful, functionally fit, big feet, muscled back...etc. Since this space is much more diverse I had a difficult time understanding how my identity was being perceived through my body. Sometimes I felt at risk of inadequacy because the idealized masculine body looks very different here. I struggled to maintain the esteemed masculine capital that I have in swimming, and I felt as though I had to continually earn it back through the performance of exercising and proving strength. I noticed that I also considered what types of clothing I wore to show off parts of my body since this is what I had grown accustomed to in swimming.

I found myself checking my own reflection in the mirror to not only make sure I had proper exercise technique but also found myself more aware of how my body looked. I focused on what muscles were firing and how they were catching the light. The mirrors of the gym also allowed me to observe others and watch how I was being viewed, something that I could not check in a pool.

At Muscle Beach I felt a very similar thing happened. I feel that I have an understanding of how my masculinity and athletic identity fits within the context of swimming because my physical body is a reflection of my past aggressions and is functionally built to allow me to perform my skill. I found that Muscle Beach, primarily the

lifting area, idealized the aesthetically strong. The ideals in this space were very much about having the appearance of a bodybuilder and visual strength. This space was intended for the viewing of extreme bodies, which I will get into, and less to do with performing incredible feats of strength.

I definitely felt inadequate in the lifting area, so much so that I did not feel as if I had access to this space. What I realized is that functionally I was plenty strong enough to perform amongst the other men however this space did not value the functionally fit, it made spectacle of the aesthetic bodybuilder type body, something that I did not have. It was discouraging to perform in front of the audience when I was not necessarily idealized in the same way and felt that I did not have the same levels of masculinity as the other men working out.

I did, however, feel comfortable working out in the sandy gymnastics playground area. I was able to take my shirt off once again and expose my disciplined and worked body, something that felt more natural for me. In this space I felt comfortable not only because I could be shirtless, but also because the gymnastics equipment in this space called for the movement of bodies. In order to interact with the space you had to move, lift, and pull your body in various ways, which required strength. I felt as though this space was very similar to swimming with how my identity is expressed through the relationship with my body. It was not enough to be visually strong, my body had to prove functionally strong.

Viewing and interacting. Communicating identities in a physical sense lends itself to the viewing and comparing of other athletic bodies that allows for understanding how my body is positioned within a space and how it engages others. Similarly, involvement in

swimming trains individuals to develop an astute awareness of how the body is positioned and moves in the water. A community and culture begins to form of athletes with similar skill sets and a shared sacrifice. Bodies are constantly openly discussed and compared. This comfort and camaraderie that comes from sports has enabled almost a sense of pride in my body and an ability to openly talk about bodies and appearance. My athletic identity allows my body to be viewed as the vehicle in which I perform my skill. Swimmers establish a sense of physical ideals that value a lean and muscular body that is powerful. Because of the specific demands swimming has on the body there are even several proportional advantages that are desired, such as large feet, flexible joints, and a triangular torso that is disproportionately longer than the lower body. Although these are very visual descriptions they are valued because of their functional advantages for swimming fast.

These sorts of things have become badges of honor in identifying a swimmer in a crowd. As discussed in the previous section my athletic body has been an indicator of the aggression and discipline I have experienced in order to train my body to be as functional and efficient as possible. My body is the way I am able to communicate a masculine and strong identity and is constantly in direct comparison of others. I feel as though how my body is perceived visually directly reflects how I have built my body for a specific skill however the amount of masculine capital my body indicates changes depending on the context. The way I choose to show off parts of my body or the way I carry myself in exposed situations is a way for me to communicate my athletic identity as having trained my body to be the best that it can be as a swimmer and in certain situations establish my masculinity. I am interested in how the displaying of bodies allows the performer to have a sort of power over the viewer by

asserting dominant masculinity through how he displays his body.

One of the most prominent memories that stood out to me exemplifying the types of behaviors that occur at elite competitions was in my senior year of undergrad before the NCAA Division I Championships. NCAA DI Championships are the most competitive and elite short course yards meet in the world, featuring the country's (and world's) top athletes. It is so competitive that typically the NCAA only invites anywhere from 20-30 athletes in each event, limiting access to the space. My senior year I had the honor of receiving an invitation to this competition on several relays for my university. This meet is exclusively male athletes (women have a separate meet) and for many of us this was our first time competing at this level. Prior to traveling our coaching staff called a meeting to discuss with us what to expect while we were there. We went through everything from itinerary, to confidence-inducing speeches, and there was one tip that stood out to me as peculiar. Our head coach had given us the advice that traditionally at this meet there are a lot of interactions that go on between the male athletes more so than any other meet.

We were told that in the days leading up to the start of the meet as we practiced on-site amongst our competition that there would be a lot of muscle flexing happening on deck and we were advised not to participate in order to prevent muscle fatigue and wasting energy. This tip seemed very strange and unnecessary, as at this point we had all been at major competitions throughout our careers.

What astounded me was that once we arrived and were preparing to warm-up I instantly observed precisely what they had suggested. On deck I was amongst so many of the world's most elite athletes who have trained and disciplined their bodies their entire lives

for this performance. So many ripped and muscled bodies were everywhere. It seemed like every movement an athlete made he was expecting someone to be taking an editorial photograph of him. Each movement appeared calculated with moments of pausing in a contorted flexed pose and each searching for how many people were watching. Guys sprinted, flexed, and strutted in order to show off and peacock their trained and powerful bodies in a way to intimidate and evoke top tier masculine identities. Although I am not certain if the intention of my coach was to attempt to reduce our gazing at other bodies or if he did only want us to prevent muscular fatigue it is interesting that his message was for us to be the ones being looked at instead of the spectator. I have also been instructed to never look into the crowd or at other competitors behind the blocks.

When I exercised in a corporate gym I was first surprised with how much was going on that was not exercise. Many people took phone calls, texted, took mirror selfies, and all sorts of social engagements that distracted from what I initially perceived to be the sole purpose of exercise. I realized that for many people there is a social aspect to the gym that is very much reminiscent of the original formation of gymnasia as places for cultural and communal exchange.

I found that there was diversity in the ways in which people dressed and presented themselves through their appearance. With my new understanding of the social aspect of this space I understood how people choose to either expose or conceal different parts of their bodies and also performed exercises that expressed different reasons they have for being there, whether that be attempting a difficult lift to express power or masculine identity or wearing high heels while on the treadmill to establish femininity. Although this project does

not delve into apparel I do find it worth mentioning that I found it necessary to wear clothes that revealed my identity as an athlete. I feel as though I found it important to not only allow my body to communicate my athletic identity but also that my body has been built for a specific purpose rather than limiting it to aesthetics.

In terms of how my body performed and interacted within this shared and diverse space I did notice that in many ways I stood out in the crowded gym. I became aware of how and when people were watching me exercise fairly easily although my athletic identity had already primed me to anticipate this type of gaze. The use of mirrors facilitated this exchange and I found that almost everyone would watch each other. This is interesting as it indicates the viewing of bodies and trying to figure out where ones own identity fits within the diverse context of the gym.

As discussed previously during my trip to Muscle Beach I primarily worked out within the sandy gymnastics area. There were ropes to climb, gymnastics rings, parallel bars, and a few beams that were scattered around the sandy space. I started climbing everything in sight, doing handstands on the rings and bars, and things that I did not even know I could do. As I was upside down on the rings I noticed that a few people had come over and were blatantly taking photos of me and would wait for me to go again once I lost my balance. I personally did not mind this attention as I am comfortable with my body but I found it a bit strange at how out in the open it was. It was a conflicting feeling because I was entirely okay with others observing my body showing off my functional strength but this blatant documentation of a stranger created a moment where I understood that although I may have physical power in this situation I was willingly submitting to the gaze of this photographer.

There is this confidence in my body and performance where I was embracing this interaction. This sort of thing permeates almost all athletic environments and is something that goes without discussion.

In moments of feeling inadequate or if ones body does not fit the masculine ideals of the context, masculinity is often policed in very similar ways through the shaming of bodies or poking fun at another's expense. This even happens at the expense of female athletes because no matter how much masculine capital they maintain they are already lower because of their gender.

On the other hand those that do not have a positive relationship with their bodies, or even in moments of feeling inadequate an individual may lose a sense of a powerful masculine identity. These identities are very much interacting with each other however in my time training I have witnessed several individuals that develop a distorted body image of themselves which greatly impacts how their masculinity is perceived. I continually subject myself to the gaze of other bodies and feel confidence, occasionally insecure and inadequate, and powerful in being able to showcase hard work and training. Bodies that fit within the ideals and have achieved higher levels of masculine identities assert that dominance through direct competition or socially poking fun at others' expense.

Art-Making

The topics that I engaged in my artwork have to do with very similar topics of my personal identity and how I am sharing and presenting it through a physical object or space. In the process of creating my most recent work I used casting and mold making techniques to capture my physical body in this unique moment in time. I also used natural and often flesh

materials, such as hog gut or rawhide, to discuss elements of sacrifice as well as the tension that occurred when working and overworking a material and disciplining it until it works the way I intended it to, very much like being an athlete. Similar to this thesis process there were a few surprises along the way and just like the body, materials have limitations. These materials also tend to have a life of their own as they respond to the environments around them; many natural materials, including flesh products, change depending on humidity, temperature, and even lighting.

My art-making practice is driven much like the specialized athlete in that it is heavily process oriented and is physically labor intensive. By offering up my exploration of masculine identities through the use of artwork I feel as though I am able to educate bodies in a much more physical and organic way by allowing viewers to develop their own relations and understandings. The installation of my sculptural works create a space in which I challenge the viewer to question their own participation and visceral experience relating to the works as well as each other.

Conclusion

The process of undergoing this project allowed me to learn about the relationship I have with my own body and how I articulate my athletic and masculine identities in the spaces I perform and how this adapts depending on the context. I found that I have gained a better understanding of how my participation within a space navigates the roles of performer and viewer. The power dynamic between performer and audience is exchanged through the willingness to submit to the gaze and places the power in the performer. I was surprised to find that I actually felt the most comfortable performing in the context of swimming, the

space in which my body was physically the most exposed, because I understood the ideals and values of the culture. After experiencing feeling of inadequacy in other spaces that were less familiar to me I realized that exposure does not necessarily equate to vulnerability; exposure can be powerful.

In the spaces I observed I found that masculinity is often evidenced by the aspiration of having a physically idealized body that indicates past self-inflicted aggression. After processing theory of the dynamics of the hegemonically masculinized culture of sport I am curious to further my research to study sports that engage in physically aggressive contact and impact of bodies as well as engage what it means for bodies to touch. To expand this research I would like to consider a larger group of athletes of various cultures of impact and also consider how gender and sexuality enter the conversation. I found that it was difficult to engage sexuality or gender without first gaining a better understanding of the culture I studied.

There are parts of me that felt strange about doing this project because it was so much about the self. I often questioned whether or not I was actually making new knowledge or if I was just posting shirtless selfies. At the end of this whole project I am at peace with how I am presenting this work. I think there are undertones of the fitness world that are a tad bit narcissistic with feeling the need to assert the self and a constant consideration of appearance. This whole project is not based on a shallowness of the visual, but the depth at which the visual and physical offers. I am glad I felt this ambivalence at times during this project because it really made me consider the significance of my work. In anything that we do we insert parts of ourselves and prioritize what we feel is valuable and necessary.

In my role as educator, in either athletic or artistic context, I feel as though I have taken away much knowledge of how I facilitate complex discussion of identities. The findings of this project have allowed me to not only gain a better understanding of masculine identities in the realm of sport, but have also given me the framework to discuss and challenge conceptions of identities in any given context. Similar to how masculinity is performed differently depending on the environment I am confident in adapting and molding these findings to better understand how identities engage both each other and spaces. This project has given me the language to discuss topics of identity and bodies that can I can facilitate in my educational practice.

My recommendations for future studies are to further explore the similarities in athletic and art educational pedagogies. It would be helpful to look at organizations that emphasize arts education as a bodily practice and overlap athletic performance and fitness. It is also relevant and important to further explore how sexual and gender identity engages these spaces and engages masculinity as well as spaces that are private, such as locker rooms. In order to further develop this research I acknowledge that there is a need to both recognize and push past male and white privileges that have made conversations challenging. Part of this involves acknowledging that I may not have access to certain cultural spaces and involves understanding perspectives and reflections of others.

The findings of this thesis proves useful to not only better understanding the nuances of masculine identities within the context of sport but also in understanding how bodies and identities relate to one another and within a space. This understanding of the dynamic of interacting bodies and viewing is relevant to the field of arts educational pedagogies and can

be implemented to better understand how we experience art environments. These theories allow us to expand our understanding of the relationship to our own bodies as well as how we navigate a shared space.

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