



ALL THE RIGHT LABELS

GAY MALE ATHLETES AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF CLOTHING

ABSTRACT This qualitative study investigated the relationship between body image and clothing, as expressed by 16 elite level gay male athletes from the United States, Canada, and Australia. The athletes suggested that within gay social settings, clothes serve as a means to gauge other men's personalities and relative wealth, and as a means to display one's body. Clothes were viewed as being a functional accessory to assist sporting performance, regardless of the appearance of that attire. However, within aesthetic sports, the function of clothing may be to look good, so as to earn high marks from judges. Finally, the athletes suggested that cultural expectations of masculinity may negate the need for stylish clothing, and that masculinity often requires men to wear muted clothing styles. These findings indicate that clothing should be considered as a factor that influences body image, and that not all sub-groups of gay men may consider clothing or body image in an identical manner. Future implications for body image and sexualities research are discussed.

KEYWORDS BODY IMAGE, CLOTHING, GAY MEN, ATHLETES, MASCULINITY

Do clothes really make the man? What about the gay man? Or the gay athlete? Stemming from questions such as these, this qualitative study examines the perceptions toward clothing among elite level gay male athletes from the United States, Australia, and Canada. In particular, we focus upon the relation between clothing, body image, and these men's social identities as gay, male, and athletic.

BODY IMAGE AND THE HEGEMONIC AESTHETIC

Body image is conceptualised as one's internal representation of one's own body and a person's *perception* of his or her physique (Grogan, 2007). A person may be contented with his or her body image, a state known as "body image satisfaction." Likewise, one can be unhappy with one's body image, which is clinically termed "body image dissatisfaction" (Grogan). Body image dissatis-

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faction has been linked with a host of medical, psychological, and social negatives, including eating disorders (Gordon, 2000), low self esteem (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999), and even suicidal ideation (Brausch & Muehlenkamp, 2007).

Although one may be happy or unhappy with one's total physique, a person's body image can also be considered by separate body domains. For example, a man may be satisfied with his body image as regards his level of abdominal definition, but unhappy with his level of body hair. Numerous studies have been conducted regarding body image of individual body parts or domains, including studies of penis size (Filiault & Drummond, 2007), women's breast size (Koff & Benavage, 1998), and men's body hair (Boroughs, Cafri, & Thompson, 2005). Thus, consideration of individual body domains is well established in the psychological literature as a method of examining body image.

Social norms and archetypes often contribute to people's sense of body image satisfaction or dissatisfaction. That is to say that people may compare themselves to a body that is socially deemed "ideal" for a person of that gender, age, nationality, and ethnicity. Within contemporary Western culture, men are typically expected to be toned and muscular (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000; Thompson & Cafri, 2007). Filiault and Drummond (2007) have coined this toned, muscular ideal as being the "hegemonic aesthetic" within contemporary culture. This extension of Gramsci's (1993) hegemony theory and Connell's (2005) notion of hegemonic masculinity suggests that within any historical moment, a particular body type is accorded hegemonic power and dominance. Consistent with hegemony theory, Filiault and Drummond argue that the hegemonic dominance afforded to the toned, muscular male has been facilitated by references to nature. That is, a muscular, toned male body is viewed culturally as being "naturally" superior to all other physiques, and is therefore placed in a position of prestige and dominance. Body image dissatisfaction, then, occurs when an individual is unable to approximate the hegemonic aesthetic, and this failure causes individual distress and anxiety. Gay men may be especially prone to body image problems. Achievement of the idealised body may be especially important for acceptance within the gay social world (Bergling, 2007; Drummond, 2005a; Signorile, 1997), and gay men who fail to achieve that ideal may face ostracism or social exclusion (Atkins, 1997). It is therefore not surprising that many gay men express body image dissatisfaction, often moreso than their straight counterparts (e.g., Connor, Johnson, & Grogan, 2004; Martins, Tiggemann, & Kirkbride, 2007; Yelland & Tiggemann, 2003).

Although there is a growing literature about gay men's body image, this canon has been faulted for its simplicity in its analysis of Western gay male culture. In particular, it has been noted that much of the literature considers gay men to be a homogenous social group and fails to take into account other social identities gay men may have beyond being gay, and the impact of those identities upon body image (Filiault & Drummond 2008, 2009). As noted by Rudd (1996), gay "culture" may actually be a conglomeration of many distinct "subcultures," though the cultural aspects of White, urban, upper-class gay men may have a strong influence upon the other gay sub-cultural groups.

Despite this overall flaw of the gay male body image literature, some studies have begun to consider body image among sub-groups of gay men. For example, Drummond (2005b) has investigated body image among young Asian gay men living in Australia, and Halkitis (2001; Halkitis, Green, & Wilton, 2004) has interviewed gay men with HIV. Of relevance to the present study, Filiault and Drummond (2008) interviewed openly gay Australian tennis players with regard to body image perceptions. Those men placed value on what was termed the "natural body," which was said to be a body that has not been consciously altered for appearance purposes. This natural body was contrasted with the gay body, which the athletes felt was often modified so as to be more attractive. The gay body was thus deemed unnatural, and therefore undesirable, to these gay athletes. Interviews with Canadian runners (Bridel & Rail, 2007) demonstrated similar attitudes and themes. Findings such as those demonstrated the need for future research on gay men's body image to consider sub-populations of gay men, so as to better understand nuances in body image perceptions within that broad population. However, Filiault and Drummond's (2008) findings were based on a small sample from one Australian city; likewise, Bridel and Rail's (2007) sample was limited to one Canadian metropolis and one sport. These limitations suggest the need for future research about gay athletes to consider the opinions of a larger, more diverse group of men.

CLOTHING AND BODY IMAGE

Although individual body domains, such as muscularity, may contribute to a person's body image, non-physical features of a person may also contribute to their body image and their ability to achieve the hegemonic aesthetic. One such non-physical feature is clothing. Clothing provides individuals with a chance to modify their appearance so as to appear in accord with social archetypes of the ideal body. Clothes can be used to cover up undesirable features while serving to accentuate features that are in line with the hegemonic aesthetic. To those ends, clothing is a means by which individuals can access status and dominance (Rudd, 1996), such as that which is accorded to the hegemonic aesthetic.

Beyond the ability of clothes to alter the appearance of the body, clothes could be a separate area of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, based upon one's sense of clothing style, and one's ability to approximate socially idealised fashion trends and modes of dress. An individual could thus be body image dissatisfied with their clothing if he or she had a poor sense of style or failed to dress in a socially desirable manner. For example, Drummond noted that often the men he interviewed "reflected on the clothes [they wear] as a part of [their] body identity" (2005a, p. 284).

Despite the ability of clothes to influence body image, and display or hide one's body, little research has been done linking clothing, body image, and men. Of the available literature, it appears as though clothing is important to young gay men's sense of body image, as it provides the ability to alter appearance in the manner described above (Drummond, 2005a). However, in the sense that clothing alters appearance, it was deemed part of an unnatural/gay

body by the gay tennis players interviewed by Filiault and Drummond (2008). These findings are limited, and suggest the need for further *body-image oriented* research on gay men and clothing that is mindful of the observations regarding homogeneity in gay male body image research (Filiault & Drummond, 2009).

CLOTHING AND GAY IDENTITY

Although literature considering clothing and body image among gay men is limited, there is a large body of work which analyses the manner in which clothing can facilitate identity expression. Clothing is a non-verbal means by which a person can communicate “who” they are (Freitas et al., 1997; Kates, 2000). It is also a way individuals can hide their identities, by dressing dis-concordantly with their own identity. To that end, clothes are a means of “passing” (Butler, 1990) as another identity (Holliday, 2001). Historically, clothing may have been especially important to advertising a gay identity (Cole, 2000).

Because of the ability of clothes to advertise identity, gay men may choose different clothing styles based upon their setting. Drummond (2005a) suggests gay men may have three sets of clothing: clothes for home, clothes for the straight/mainstream world, and clothes for the gay world. These findings are corroborated by other research that demonstrates gay men may dress differently at work so as to fit in with what is perceived to be a straight, heteronormative atmosphere (Skidmore, 1999). The ability of clothing to demarcate gay and straight identities may be diminished in recent years, due to the emergence of the “metrosexual” look (Clarke & Turner, 2007) and the growing congruence between what would be gay and straight hegemonic aesthetics (Filiault & Drummond, 2007).

CLOTHING AND SPORT

Although the body is often considered the limiting factor in sporting success (Connell, 1991), clothing, as “attached” to the body, may also serve to help or hinder sporting performance. The qualitative study of openly gay tennis players suggested a functional view toward sporting apparel, by which clothes were considered to be meaningful only in that they did not hinder performance. Style and colour were unimportant compared to functionality (Filiault & Drummond, 2008).

While it may appear that clothes are just another piece of sports equipment, other studies of clothing and athletes nuance those findings. For example, an interview with a male competitive snowboarder revealed a dislike of pink snowboarding equipment, as pink would be inconsistent with a masculinity identity (Anderson, 2001). Additionally, female in-line skaters may consider fashion and feminine appearance when purchasing clothes for their sport (Dickson & Pollack, 2000). Thus, even within competitive sport, doing well may be important, but athletes want to look good in the process, and communicate an acceptable identity.

Given the ability of clothes to alter body image, alter identity, and alter sporting appearance, gay male athletes' perception of clothing is of interest. As gay men, clothes may, indeed, "maketh the man" (Drummond, 2005a) for this group of athletes. However, as previous research (Filiault & Drummond, 2008) has demonstrated, gay athletes may not regard body image in a manner consistent with the previous research on gay body image. Additionally, as athletes, gay male athletes may view clothing as being utilitarian in nature, rather than as an aesthetic device. But, as demonstrated by Anderson (2001) and Dickson and Pollack (2000), even within sport, looks may matter. Hence, it can be asked how a larger, more diverse group of gay male athletes thinks about clothes and the body.

Research of this theme may serve to enhance the scope of the body image research field by investigating the perceptions of an under-researched appearance domain. This knowledge may be useful in extending appearance related research and clinical work beyond the context of the physical body, to body adornment. Additionally, this research serves to further specify the literature about gay men's bodies by investigating a sub-group of gay men (i.e. gay athletes). Such a line of enquiry not only provides greater depth of knowledge about gay men's body image, but also serves to highlight the need for greater awareness of intra-group diversity within the psychological and health sciences literatures about both sexuality and body image.

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

According to Filiault and Drummond (2009), qualitative research on gay men's body image must make explicit its methodological underpinnings. The present qualitative study is informed by phenomenology. In general, phenomenology tries to understand the manner in which people make sense of their lives and of the world (Patton, 2002). Of particular importance to phenomenology is the notion of perception. What is essential in phenomenology is not objective reality, but the way in which an individual perceives his or her own world and life, since "individuals choose reality by assigning meaning to the objective world" (Muhhall, 1994, p. 6.) This emphasis on individual perceptions makes phenomenology a powerful tool in qualitative research about body image. Given that body image is concerned with an individual's perception of his or her appearance (Grogan, 2007), within qualitative research, phenomenology is ideally suited to query a person as to his or her perceptions regarding the body. It is because of this link between body image and phenomenology that the methodology has been used in various previous studies of gay men's body image (Drummond 2005a,b, 2006; Drummond & Filiault 2007; Filiault & Drummond 2008, in press).

The variant of phenomenology used in this research was "queer phenomenology" (Ahmed, 2006, 2007). Queer phenomenologists consider important an individual's orientations within a particular socio-historical moment, and the manner in which those orientations come to shape the person's perceptions of the world. A person's orientations refer to how an individual is positioned relative to other individuals and institutions. It could be thought of as a per-

son's identity, and the manner in which identities come to influence perceptions. Thus, for this study, the participants' orientations were being gay, male, and athletic within contemporary Western culture.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 16 elite level, White male athletes who are openly gay and whose first language is English. Ages ranged from 18 to 52 years. In total, 15 sports were represented.

The individual participants are described in table 1. For more detail consult Filiault and Drummond (in press).

RECRUITMENT

Participants were from seven major cities; three from Australia, two from the United States, and two from Canada. The participants from these targeted cities were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling. Initial e-mail contacts were made with gay sporting groups in the targeted locations, and members of those groups were encouraged to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. Finally, a news article regarding the study was included on www.outsports.com, which is a website targeted to gay athletes.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Code name	Sports	Highest Accomplishment	Interview Location
Alex	Gymnastics	Olympic medalist	Australia 1
Bryan	Figure skating	National champion	Australia 1
Corey	Snowboarding	World Cup Top 25	USA 1
Damien	Flag football	National champion	USA 1
Eddy	Hockey	No championships to date	USA 1
Fred	Ultra distance biking	Tournament winner	USA 1
Geoff	Telemark Skiing	Tournament winner	USA 1
Hank	Volleyball	National champion	USA 2
Ian	Soccer	State finalist	USA 2
Jake	Golf	State runner-up	USA 2
Kyle	Rugby	World champion	Australia 2
Luke	Rugby	World champion	Australia 2
Mike	Rugby	World champion	Australia 2
Nathan	Surf lifesaving	Tournament winner	Australia 1
Oliver	Water polo	Gay Games champion	Australia 3
Pete	Ballroom dancing	National performances	Canada 1
Quintin	Swimming	State finalist	Canada 2

Individuals interested in participating were sent an information sheet describing the study. Those willing to participate were contacted via e-mail or an instant messaging (“IM”) system to ask initial screening questions, including a brief sporting history, racial identification, sexual orientation, and persons to whom the participant is “out.”

PROCEDURES AND ANALYSIS

This study utilized both individual phenomenological interviews and online questionnaires. The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the first author’s home institution.

INTERVIEWS. After giving informed consent, each participant engaged in an individual, semi-structured interview with the first author. The interviews lasted 50 to 90 minutes, and covered topics related to body image, sports, homosexuality, and masculinity. The interview schedule was shaped based upon the authors’ expert knowledge of these issues, as well as the salient themes as developed in the pilot study (Filiault & Drummond, 2008). Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the first author.

QUESTIONNAIRES. Following the interview, participants were given a debriefing form, and a page listing a pseudonym (to ensure confidentiality) with a URL for an online questionnaire. Participants were instructed to complete the questionnaire two weeks after the interviews, and label their questionnaire with the pseudonym. The online component included a range of questions considering topics similar to those raised in the interview.

ANALYSIS. The interviews and questionnaires were analysed inductively, using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For more detail regarding methods of analysis, please refer to Filiault and Drummond (in press).

THEMES

The athletes suggested that clothing can serve multiple purposes based on the setting. Clothes can help the men look good, perform well, or assert a masculine identity. Each of those themes, and several associated sub-themes, are elucidated below.

LOOKING GOOD

One function of clothing is to assist individuals in appearing more attractive. This ability of clothing is facilitated in one of two ways: either by wearing stylish (often expensive) clothes, or by showing off the body beneath.

LABELLING THE MAN. According to the athletes, the types of clothes a man wears serve an important purpose in shaping the degree to which others per-

ceive him as being attractive. For example, in describing his apparel for a date, Alex said:

If I'm going out to dinner or something, I'm fairly particular about what I'm wearing, or what looks good, or what feels good, or what is in at the moment, all those sorts of things. ... I'm certainly not going to turn up in daggy shoes, daggy pants, ripped pants or anything like that.

Corey concurred with that assessment in stating:

You wouldn't walk into a five star restaurant that was black tie in shorts and a t-shirt.

For these men, the clothes a man wears are of importance. In general, they voice an expectation that, in social situations, (gay) men should attempt to look their best by wearing clothes that look good and imply a certain element of status. T-shirts and ripped pants are not viewed in the same light as a black tie. Although that observation may seem obvious, the semiotics that underpin this statement are indicative that that clothes act as a proxy, by which the viewer may perceive personality and other attributes of the wearer. Alex suggests that:

If you care about yourself, and what you think about yourself, you're going to project that in any way possible. Even the way you walk, the way you sit, the way you talk, the way you dress yourself, you know, those sorts of things, definitely, I believe, is a projection on your self worthiness.

Viewpoints such as that suggest, through clothing, the viewer perceives an image of self-esteem in the wearer. Whether or not that assessment is accurate is irrelevant; the illusion of self-esteem is what is important. A man with self-esteem is thought to want to project that state by any means possible. Clothing is one such means.

Beyond personality, clothing can allude to demographics, particularly socio-economic status. According to the participants, the better a man dresses, the higher his perceived actual capital, which, in turn, raises his social capital in many gay social circles. Thus, clothing is a means by which a gay man can gain status and prestige in the gay world by suggesting his degree of wealth within the broader world. Kyle explains this relationship when he describes clothes as capable of projecting:

An image of cleanliness, affluence. There of lot of it on the scene, particularly among certain groups, you know. They value celebrity, wealth, all that sort of stuff, status. I'm not so much like that.

Certain clothes do a better job of denoting wealth and desirability than do others. Sometimes, a shirt is not just a shirt. The label matters. For instance, Quintin says his preferred clothing brands are:

Guess, H&M, a bit of Abercrombie. I have some stuff from Club Monaco. So, like, brands are a big thing for me. ... I think it has largely been influenced by society, and what is accepted as kind of cool, or attractive. So, I think that plays into a lot of decisions about my clothing.

Social perception of clothing is therefore important in shaping clothing decisions. Some brands fit into a social archetype of being “cool or attractive,” and therefore denote desirability. Individuals possessing those attributes are therefore, in turn, believed to be, themselves, cool or attractive. Hence, achieving a certain look, by wearing the right brands, is important in creating an image of desirability. Clothes provide a means by which a gay man can distinguish himself from the crowd.

Moreover, the designer of an article of clothing serves as a means to stratify gay men based on the perception of wealth associated with the designer. Geoff illustrates the phenomenon by saying: “I think it has something to do with social status. It is like ‘Oh, you can afford Gucci versus Target.’”

Therefore, while clothes themselves have labels, the purpose of clothes is to label the wearer. Based on a gay man’s sense of style, the viewer is thought to be able to discern such personality traits as “self worthiness” and “cleanliness.” Moreover, clothes stratify men, not only into being “cool” and “attractive,” but also into groups of affluence based on the brands they are able to afford. The clothes a gay man wears can therefore provide power or prestige, or serve as the basis for marginalisation. However, it is not just the clothes themselves that are of importance. The interviews suggest that the body over which the clothes are worn is of importance, and the job of clothing is to highlight that body.

SMALL AND SMALLER. While one purpose of clothing is to allude to certain traits which in themselves are not immediately obvious visually (i.e., self esteem, wealth), another purpose of clothes is to highlight what is visually obvious (that is, the body). Clothes should make the wearer appear “sexy.” This attribute of clothing is described by Mike:

R: What would you decide to wear if you were going to a gay club?

MIKE: I would probably wear, um ... I’ve got a pair of, like, black faded jeans, and just a kind of, like, singlet top.

R: Pair of jeans, singlet top.

MIKE: Yeah.

R: And what are the reasons for deciding to wear those things instead of others?

MIKE: Because it makes me feel sexy.

R: What is it about them that makes you feel sexy?

MIKE: Because it makes me kind of—I know that kind of outfit makes me look good, so I feel confident, and I feel sexy in it. ... I’m pretty confident, full stop, but that kind of outfit really makes me go POW!

Clothing, then, can not only give the perception of personality characteristics, but can also change our personalities and projection of ourselves. One manner by which this change is facilitated is that clothing can make the wearer both feel and appear sexy. Clothes, therefore, can facilitate a person’s ability to navigate the hegemonic aesthetic, and the confidence, power, and prestige associated with the aesthetic.

According to most of the men, the best way to show off the body, and appear “sexy,” is to wear tight clothing. Geoff says he likes to wear clothes that are:

GEOFF: Tight around the ass, yet still have the cargo kind of laid back look as well. And tight t-shirts, of course.

R: Do you think tight clothing is kind of big?

GEOFF: I think it is pretty big now.

R: And why do you think that might be?

GEOFF: To show off the body.

Tight clothing is essential to showing off the body, and to looking good in gay settings. Kyle agrees with that assessment when he says he wears clothing that is:

KYLE: As tight as I could go without looking ridiculous.

R: Why tight?

KYLE: I don’t know. I think because it shows confidence, and, I feel, that the audience appreciates somebody who wears tight clothes.

The above interview segment touches upon three important points. Beyond re-emphasising the importance of tight clothing, it also supports Mike’s earlier assessment that clothes build confidence. Moreover, Kyle’s use of the word “audience” is telling. Clothes are not just for the wearer; rather, clothes are equally used to draw attention to the wearer. Kyle knows that clothes are monitored and used as a means of judging the qualities of the wearer: clothes, in any setting, are worn before an “audience.” Those spectators are ready to jeer or cheer the clothing selections of the wearer, based on the quality of those clothes and the body those clothes are revealing.

Finally, Kyle suggests that while tightness is important to looking good, there is a threshold at which clothes may become so tight as to become “ridiculous.” Therefore, the gay man should not rush to the shop to buy the extra-small shirt. The men suggest that individual discretion should be used so as to wear clothes that reveal the body without coming un-flattering. Fred elaborates on that point when he describes his concept of “age-appropriate dress.” He says that, for him, at 38 years old, age appropriate dress is:

FRED: Something that’s ... not too tight.

R: So, really, tight clothes are for the younger guys?

FRED: I think really tight clothes don’t look good on really anybody.

But, the younger guys can be excused. You have to be incredibly fit if you’re gonna wear really tight clothes; or, really, you probably should just wear something that’s not really tight.

R: Right.

FRED: And, it’s like, if you’re 38 years old, I’m not saying you have to wear a potato sack. ... I’m in good shape, so I can wear tight t-shirts if I want to. So I’m like ‘what’s too tight?’ ... If I wear something too tight there’s a few things that are going to happen. A: There’s always going to be someone at the bar who is bigger or more muscular than

me, so all I'm really showing off is that I'm, like, skinny. B: I'm not sure why that's a way to differentiate myself, because everybody's dressed like that.

While tightness is important, the men believe it is equally important not to become too tight, and to accept body changes that come with age. The participants say that while clothing is a means by which to judge the man, clothing interacts with other attributes in making that assessment. Therefore, the fashion trends described are not overarching dictates, but, rather, the stylistic archetypes applied to *younger* gay men. This emphasis on young gay men within dominant gay culture is, however, to be expected, given the dominance of youth within the gay scene more generally (e.g., Drummond, 2006a; Jones & Pugh, 2005).

Beyond the discussion of age, Fred reiterates the point that clothing is a means by which gay men are judged and become stratified, by comparing himself to the hypothetical muscle man. Clothes are a manner by which gay men may receive their relative worth on the social ladder. Yet, there is a certain irony to this stratification. Clothing is the means by which gay men are supposed to differentiate themselves and garner attention from an imagined "audience." Yet, as Fred says, "everybody's dressed the same." It is, paradoxically, an individuality achieved through homogeneity.

PLAYING WELL

In addition to describing the clothes worn in social situations, the athletes also described what they often wear in certain sporting situations. The underlying logic of sport clothing was that it could facilitate sporting success. However, in certain sporting situations, the logic behind achieving may be altered. The sub-themes below describe two different thought processes behind sport clothing.

"I WEAR WHAT'S CLEAN." It appears as though a great deal of thought must go into deciding one's outfit for social situations—what personality characteristics clothing portrays, wearing the right brands, choosing tightness relative to age. The decision making process behind what to wear to sport thus stands in stark contrast to the above logic. This simplicity is summarised by Kyle in describing how he picks out what to wear to rugby practice.

Whatever's clean. I certainly don't think "oh, I look fat in this." I never think that. I generally wear the same thing, which is a pair of shorts and a t-shirt.

Thus, in some sporting situations, the level of thought devoted to clothing choice is limited, and may be reduced to what is appropriate to the sport. This is not to say that all clothing decisions in sport are without thought. However, the factors in making that decision are notably different than those factors that are considered in social settings. On the night before a long cycling race, Fred describes the clothes he will wear:

It's really about the function. ... For instance, I would ideally race tomorrow in a slightly baggier jersey. ... But, I know I'm going to be racing without a camel back, which means racing with waterbottles tomorrow, which means I've got one in the cage and one of them is gonna have to be in my pockets in my jersey. When you're mountain biking, the only way for that to work is if you've got a really tight jersey because it compresses the bottle against your back. So, when you go over stuff, otherwise the bottle will come off and slam into your back. It doesn't look good, but I don't care, because that's what's required to win.

Doing well is the primary factor in decision making about sport clothing, according to the athletes. That said, some sports clothing may share elements with "sexy" clothes. For example, cycling jerseys may be tight; however, Fred's choice of a tight shirt is not based on a desire to show off his body, but to keep his water bottle handy. If the same could be achieved with a "slightly baggier jersey," presumably, he would opt to do so. Quintin expresses a similar attitude when he says he likes his swimsuits:

A bit tighter, smaller, size for when I was, like, competing ... but it wasn't really a sexual thing ... [swimsuits] don't make a big difference, but I think they can make a slight difference in your time. ... It's always like, you want, you want to do as much as you can do to, you know, swim as fast as you can.

Again, the purpose of the tight swimsuit is not to appear sexy, but to give Quintin a "slight" edge. It seems that appearing "sexual" is an afterthought to optimal performance. Thus, while clothes between sport and gay social events may seem similar—tight and revealing—the thought processes and functional intentions are different. Within the gay scene, tight clothes are used to differentiate one's self from the crowd and please the "audience." Within some sports, tight clothes are used to win.

FUNCTIONAL AESTHETICS. Although athletes may wear sexy looking clothes not out of a desire to look sexy, but to win, sometimes those two goals may overlap. That is, in some sports, doing well means looking good. This applies to aesthetic sports, such as gymnastics, where athletes are rated subjectively. Alex explains this trend:

ALEX: Everything needs to be sort of tight. ... My coach needs to be able to see my body, my body form, and I also need freedom of movement. So, that comes into play. ... There's nothing worse than jumping in a pair of board shorts, or a t-shirt. I can't stand jumping in a t-shirt, so I do probably tend to dress a bit more styling, or figure-hugging, or conforming, but I do that purely for my coach's benefit. R: You're not necessarily trying to show off?

ALEX: I don't do it for that reason. ... I do worry about what's going on when I'm performing, or what I look like when I'm performing. You need to look strong, you need to look clean, you need to look good, rather than frumpy or heavy. Also matching. I'm not going to

wear colours that don't match, I'm not going to wear colours that don't help my performance get better scores.

Gymnasts are not alone in experiencing this notion of aesthetics as functional within sport. Geoff describes the phenomenon within telemark skiing:

You want to be seen. You're on a palate of snow, with rocks, and you have judges at the bottom. So, those judges need to be able to see. If you wear something that's, you know, bright and nice and styling, that's always a factor at the bottom, that you want to look good. So, you know, I usually have a nice coat, my coat's red right now. ... They're looking through binoculars, and they have to be able to see you, for sure. So the brighter the outfit is good. ... Current designers in the ski industry are definitely designing clothes that are funky and unique and can be seen.

Alex wears form fitting, stylish, colour coordinated leotards. This effort to look good is not an end in itself, but a means to "get better scores." Similarly, Geoff wears a bright red, stylish coat, so judges can see his skiing. Aesthetics, in this case, become functional, since to look good is to do well and draw the attention from judges. If, in the case of the gay club, good clothes and good designers help the gay man earn the label of "desirable," in sport, good clothes can help the gay man earn the label of "champion."

PUMPED UP FASHION. In addition to describing their social clothes and sporting clothes, the athletes described what they usually wear to the gym or health club. Some of the responses varied little from the simple attitude toward clothes revealed earlier by Kyle. For example, Geoff said his gym attire consists of: "Athletic shorts and muscle shirts." Likewise, Mike wears: "What I got on [cotton shorts and a t-shirt]. Old shit. I can't stand it when you see people at the gym that are dressed up."

Thus, for some gay athletes, the gym is just another sporting venue, and the purpose of gym clothes is simply not to get in the way; it is a very functional attitude toward clothing. Accordingly, little thought is put into what to wear at the gym, and little value placed on gym attire. Gym clothes are "shit."

Other participants disagreed with the above sentiments. These men presented a more nuanced view toward gym clothing, balanced function with aesthetics. For example, Hank says: "At the gym I try not to wear my nice clothes, just cuz it's sweaty. But, I don't wear, like, my really nasty clothes. Like, I definitely think about people seeing me." Thus, Hank's gym apparel choices are partially dictated by function—to be sweat in—but also by a consciousness of being seen. As one's performance in the gym is (usually) not the basis of competition and not judged, those who are viewing gym apparel are closer, conceptually, to being Kyle's gay club "audience" than Geoff's skiing judges. For some gay men, the gym is a venue to look good so as to impress and garner esteem from other gay men.

Indeed, elements from the gay club are brought into the gym. For example, there is a certain element of brand consciousness. Kyle elaborates upon brands at the gym when he says he wears:

A pair of Billabong shorts is what I'll usually wear, and just any old t-shirt that looks like—You don't have to look like you're wearing a flash new label t-shirt, sometimes you feel even sexier when you're wearing something that's, you know, old and tattered.

While Kyle expresses that he doesn't feel the need to wear a designer t-shirt, his denial of labels at the gym is made ironic by his explicit mentioning of Billabong (a moderately expensive Australian surf brand) shorts. Perhaps this ironic avowal/disavowal of brands is emblematic of the overall role of clothes at the gym for some gay men. That is, one needs to take care to look good while, at the same time, trying to seem as though one is not actually trying to look good. This mixture can be achieved, for example, by wearing a tattered top with brand label shorts, as in the case of Kyle. Still, even in this mixture, there is an element of forethought and planning mindful of an "audience" that is in stark contrast to Mike's attitude toward his gym clothes.

The gym is a site of irony. While for some gay men it is a venue where it is acceptable to wear "shit," for others it is a site to look good and "show off your body." However, one must be careful as to not be deliberately attempting to show off one's body. For the gay man attempting to look good at the gym, he must balance function with aesthetics so as to please the "audience." Or, as Luke said of his gym clothes: "I would pick what would look good on me but be practical, too."

Somehow, the two must coincide, without looking like there was much forethought. For these men, the irony of the gym is trying to appear attractive while also appearing as though one did not put effort into being attractive. In different venues, different labels are applied to the gay athletes. In the club and at the gym, he must be labelled as good looking, while on the field he must be labelled as well performing. Yet, beyond the labels of "attractive" and "champion," there is one other label of concern to gay male athletes: that of "masculine."

WEARING THE MAN

As described above, the gay male athletes in this study suggested that clothes can facilitate success in the gay club and in some sporting venues. Those attitudes toward clothing oppose the manner in which the men described the relationship between clothing and masculinity. Quite simply, masculine men should be concerned neither about their appearance nor their clothing. Hank's description of this relationship is emblematic of this attitude:

R: How should a masculine guy dress?

HANK: Well, not good. Not—I can say how not to dress. I don't know, like, how to dress.

R: How should he not dress, in that case?

HANK: I don't know, like tight shirts or mid-drift shirts or tight jeans, faded jeans. I don't know, those kind of, like, stylish clothes, I guess. I don't know.

Kyle concurs with the above assessment in saying:

Masculinity is just acting like a man, not a man who is running around worrying about his hair or worrying too much about what he's wearing or anything like that.

Statements such as those give the impression that masculinity is achieved by not doing certain things. In this case, the participants suggest that masculine men should not worry about their clothes, and certainly should not wear "tight," "stylish" clothes.

According to Mike, part of the reason why masculine men should not wear stylish clothing is that such clothes draw attention away from the man, and on to the clothes. He says masculine men wear:

Just usually understated stuff. The way he wears those clothes, he wears the clothes, the clothes don't wear him. ... We've got a word, a phrase in our circle of friends: 'That's eating itself', meaning the clothes are so, you know, in your face, and the hair's so coiffed that sort of stuff that's drawing attention away from the person. So, I just like it when the guy can wear something, and the clothes just hang on him. And, it's usually just something which is very understated.

Based on that viewpoint, masculine men are defined by who they are as people, not by the clothes they are wearing. Clothing, therefore, is not a tool of impression management for masculine men, but, rather, just a covering that hangs off the man. Superficially, this impression of clothing stands in opposition to the purpose of clothing in gay and some sporting settings. In those places, clothes were used to get attention, and to create a positive impression of the wearer. However, that use of clothing may not be masculine, according to the men interviewed for this study. Rather, a masculine man does not require clothes to assert his personality; presumably, he is able to do so himself without the assistance of apparel. Flashy clothing may therefore be an unnecessary addition to the wardrobe for the masculine man.

There is however an inverse, but still important, relationship between clothing choice and the assertion of masculinity. A masculine man *must still wear the right clothes*, lest he be perceived as un-masculine. Just as the gay man must wear "tight" clothing to give the impression of "sexy" in the gay club, and some athletes need to wear attractive or functional clothing to facilitate performance, men must select muted clothing to assert masculinity. Clothing choice still matters, even if the logic behind that clothing choice is to mute the visual impact of one's attire.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

To the gay male athletes interviewed for this study, clothes have meaning. For these gay men, the attire one wears can modify the manner in which a body appears performances. As such, clothes can be used as a means by which to portray certain personal characteristics, highlight the body, or facilitate sporting performance. In each case, though, clothing is a vehicle by which a gay man

can try to create a positive impression of himself, and garner prestige and respect from the "audience" that is viewing the apparel.

Clothes, then, are a means by which a person can earn power and prestige in various settings. Wearing the right types of clothes in the gay club makes one appear attractive and desirable, and access the stature associated with aesthetic appeal in gay social settings (e.g., Atkins, 1998; Bergling, 2007; Signorile, 1997). Wearing the proper attire in sport can help an athlete win, which is, presumably, the highest level of prestige accorded to an athlete. Finally, clothes can help men appear masculine, and access the power related to masculinity in contemporary Western society.

There are, therefore, hegemonic aesthetics related to clothing, based upon the setting, be it gay, sporting, or mainstream. That is to say that there is a socially expected archetype of clothing appearance in those settings. One's ability to dress in accord with those archetypes either provides an opportunity to gain status, or an occasion to be marginalised.

These attitudes suggest that clothes are intended to create a positive impression upon the "audience." This function of clothes is similar to the attitudes expressed by gay men with regards to other parts of the body. For example, the importance of "six pack abs" to gay men is that they are used to impress other gay men in an attempt to attract sexual partners (Bergling, 2007; Signorile, 1997). On their own, the visual qualities of abdominals have little meaning to the individual. Meaning is only gained when there is an audience present to view and judge those abdominals. Just as body aesthetics have an important place in gaining stature in gay social settings, clothing does as well. Therefore, conceptually, clothes can impact a person's body image, since failure to display the right style will lead to social denigration, which can, in turn, impact individual esteem and like of the self. Individual attitudes toward one's self are at the core of body image research. We suggest that future analyses of body image should not only take into account immediately somatic attributes like musculature and thinness, but also clothing. A muscular body may be desirable, but loses status if it is dressed in the "wrong" clothing. Future studies should consider that interrelationship.

The finding of this study nuance previous research findings about gay men, body image, and clothes. With regard to identities and clothes, past research on gay men and clothing has found that particular forms of attire were used to assert one's identity, particularly one's gay identity (Holliday, 2001; Kates, 2000). This notion of identity assertion was notably absent in the present study. While the athletes did suggest there was a desirable mode of dress in gay settings (tight, designer clothes), they did not say that this style of clothing was used to advertise a gay identity. Instead, the participants said these clothes made them look "sexy" or showed off their bodies. Likewise, discussions of passing were absent in the present study. Other research demonstrated some gay men may try to appear "straight" so as to avoid homophobia within mainstream settings (e.g., Skidmore, 1999). While the gay male athletes in this study did mention that clothing can be indicative of masculinity, they did not say that they felt the need to dress in a masculine fashion when they were outside of gay venues. This trend may be indicative of what Anderson (2005)

termed “masculine capital.” That is, this group of highly successful athletes may be perceived as extremely masculine due to their outstanding success in sport. Therefore, they do not always feel the need to use clothes to assert their masculinity, since their sporting success secures their masculinity identity. These conclusions, however, are tentative, and future research may find it fruitful to investigate gay male athletes, clothing, and masculinity using a theoretical lens of masculine capital. In any case, the manner in which these gay male athletes view clothing is notably different than suggested for previous samples of gay men. This finding emphasises the importance of considering sub-groups of gay men when doing body image research, as not all sub-populations of gay men may view the body similarly. Body image research that homogenises gay men into one broad social group loses this depth and complexity of understanding.

Finally, these findings place into greater context Filiault and Drummond’s (2008) study on gay tennis players, which served as the pilot for this study. The gay tennis players placed emphasis on what was termed the natural, unaltered body. With regard to clothing, the gay male athletes in the present study never mentioned nor suggested “nature,” nor any cognate concept. Thus, while “nature” may be important to some gay athletes, or may be of importance to discussions of certain aspects of body image, it may not be of importance to all gay athletes, or to all areas of body image. This finding is indicative of the need for future research to be conducted on body image in gay male athletes so as to develop a more robust theoretical basis by which researchers and clinicians can come to understand this phenomenon.

The findings and conclusions presented above need to be qualified. Qualitative research makes no claim to generalisability (Patton, 2002); therefore, these findings may not be applicable to other gay male athletes. However, given the diversity of athletes represented, including a wide range of ages, a diversity of sports, and three nationalities, we believe the attitudes expressed in this study may be representative of those held by many gay male athletes. Additionally, only White men were interviewed. Future research is needed regarding body image in non-White men, as we have previously argued (Filiault & Drummond, 2009). Finally, these results only reflect the attitudes and experiences of openly gay men. Closeted gay men, bisexual men, and heterosexually-identified men-who-have-sex-with-men may have different attitudes toward their bodies.

In spite of those limitations, the present study represents one of the first multi-national, phenomenological investigations of body image in gay men, and of gay male athletes. It is hoped that these findings not only generate future research on sub-populations of gay men, but serve to generate future research about clothing that is mindful of body image as a psychological construct.

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