

Constructing Inclusive Masculinities

By

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### Abstract

In an effort to counter orthodox masculinity, my work uses ornamentation and the insertion of my own queer body into a hyper masculine context, which will expand existing notions of masculinity, into more inclusive ones. I will discuss issues of acceptance and visibility that affect queer athletes and the greater implications. My thesis exhibition will be completed in two parts: a live performance art piece and a gallery exhibition of sculpture and photography. The artwork has an autobiographical point of departure informed by my own family's personal mythology surrounding our Scandinavian heritage, while also reflecting on my identity, as a queer, lower class person with a rural Saskatchewan upbringing. I use artwork as a tool to create discussion and dialogue, which forwards my own agenda of creating more inclusive versions of masculinity. This is significant when looking at the social atmosphere facing queers in North America.

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Dedicated to Leslie Magnussen

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The exhibition *Go Hard or Go Home* and this thesis paper are the accumulation of two years of study in the Interdisciplinary Master's in Art Media and Design at OCAD University. My motivation for entering the program was to develop my artistic practice while learning academic language and theory that will act as a framework for my artistic career. I have always been a prolific maker, seeing art as a tool for self-expression and imagination. I view my practice as a self-reflexive journal that helps me better understand my own life and how art can be a tool of transformation by creating discussion and reflection. I entered the MFA Program with a painting, drawing and performance art practice, reflecting my undergraduate education at Concordia University and the Malmo Art Academy in Sweden.

Through the IAMD program at OCADU I experienced many shifts in my artistic practice, which led me to produce this current body of work for the exhibition *Go Hard or Go Home*. During my first year I adopted more of an interdisciplinary approach to drawing and performance, exploring a diverse range of mediums in my studio practice. The work I do in drawing is an important part of my masters and lays the foundation for later work, since drawing has an intimate connection to how I think through ideas. In the recent months leading to the exhibition the focus turned to wearable sculpture and its documentation with photography. I have maintained my performance art practice, which was initially the focus of this thesis, but is now shared with the creation of objects and their documentation.

There are two live performance pieces, which are major components of my thesis work, shown at the gallery exhibition through photographs and objects. The most recent performance *Viking Blood* that was held during the *35th Annual Rhubarb Festival* organized by *Buddies and Bad Times Theatre* on February 21st and 22nd.



The twenty-five minute interactive performance piece centered on a family myth that I have Viking blood that makes me stronger than other people. While a previous performance titled *We Are the Champions* was performed in June 2013 for Art Spin (a bicycle art tour in Toronto). This piece is a reinterpretation of the classic ballet *Swan Lake* where I have graphed my own experience and characters I have developed onto the familiar framework of the story. These performances have elements of the absurd and my own personal myth embedded in the costumes and actions, in order to queer concepts of strength and manliness which are reflected in my research goals of creating more inclusive versions of masculinity.

This thesis paper has been written to support my current practice and shed light on the new knowledge created through my autobiographical work. Therefore I have made the decision to use a familiar tone that is rooted in my own personality while also being critical and rigorous. I have taken this opportunity to not only inject theory into this paper, but also humour, personal stories, and questions I think about which inform my practice. This approach to writing is in line with past IAMD student Hazel Meyer whose thesis I have used as a reference for this statement. (Meyer, 2010)

I have organized this paper to begin with current research on Masculinities Studies following with my methodology section. This is where I will map out my methods for producing the work and how I think through the making process. In the body of the paper I will elaborate on my practice and the four facets that are vital to the thesis exhibition *Go Hard or Go Home*, which are masculinity, ornamentation, performativity, and personal myth.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Masculinity Studies**

Research in the field of Masculinity Studies has informed my current practice through the understanding of aggressive or restrictive forms of masculinity. This research has allowed me to make educated decisions in order to counter limiting forms of masculinity. I hope to open up and make porous the boundaries of masculinity through being disruptive of the fixed binaries that exist. Two theorists have supported this research: RW Connell and Eric Anderson. Connell is an Australian Sociologist whose theories from 1987 and 1995 have laid the groundwork for my understanding of hegemonic masculinity and Eric Anderson's recent writings have introduced me to the concept of orthodox masculinity and inclusive masculinity in regards to sport.

I will briefly define the terms discussed in this paper including hegemonic masculinity, orthodox masculinity, and inclusive masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is defined by Connell as, "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable" (Connell, 76). Since there are many ways to be a man or masculine there is a tendency for one form to be dominant and police other variations of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity can be best understood by looking at the political science term of hegemony, "a concept created by Antonio Gramsci, refers to a particular form of dominance in which a ruling class legitimates its position and secures the acceptance-if not outright support of the classes and archetypes below" (Anderson, 30).bHegemonic masculinity is a

position that is the most desirable and supported form of masculinity; it is supported by the classes and archetypes that it tries to oppress. An example of this is gay men who according to this theory are a subordinate form of masculinity wanting to be extremely masculine or “straight acting”. There is a hierarchy which not all gender representations and variations are considered equal, hegemonic masculinity is at the top of this hierarchy. However, the term is in flux as masculinity studies is a growing field creating some confusion since older research used hegemonic masculinity as both an archetype and a position of dominance. I will make the distinction that hegemonic masculinity is the name of the position that is the most accepted and celebrated form of being a man at the top of the hierarchy of masculinities, while orthodox masculinity is the archetype that currently occupies that position.

The distinction between hegemonic masculinity and orthodox masculinity is important at this stage in North America because major shifts in ideologies have emerged which have weakened orthodox masculinity and its hold on the hegemonic position, being the most celebrated form of masculinity. Anderson believes we are moving to a more inclusive version of masculinity, which might hold the hegemonic position in the future.

The inclusive forms of masculinity are defined as the forms that, “rejects the homophobia, sexism, stoicism and compulsory heterosexuality implicit in orthodox masculinities” (Anderson, 31). As time progresses men are embracing diversity in sexual orientation/gender and rejecting sexism, in turn moving away from orthodox masculinity. It is a difficult task to define the archetype of orthodox masculinity as Anderson has stated in his book *Inclusive Masculinities*. However he also states,

“there are central tenets that all scholars (of all epistemological orientations), use in their work to describe orthodox/hegemonic masculinities. Most highlight that the first rule is that of sexism. Here, the primary element toward being a man has been not to be, act, or behave in ways attributed to women” (Anderson, 34). According to the “Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory-46” there *are* nine facets that can be used to test a group’s level of orthodox masculinity. In the article *Moral Atmosphere and Masculine Norms in American College Football* written by Jesse Steinfeldt and Leslie A. Rutkowski, they use this inventory to test the participants on these nine facets:

- 1)Winning/Competition;
- (2)Emotion Control/Concealment;
- (3)Breadwinner/Primacy of Work;
- (4) Risk-taking/Adventure;
- (5)Violence;
- (6)Heterosexual Presentation/Homophobia;
- (7) Playboy Sexual Attitude;
- (8) Self- Reliance; and
- (9) Power over Women.

When you look at the individual facets it is clear that orthodox masculinity is linked with sexism, homophobia, and more traditional viewpoints of gender roles. Areas such as (2) Emotional Control/Concealment or (3) Breadwinner are classic stereotypes of how a man should act. Men should not cry or be emotive, while earning the income for the household. These nine facets are not necessarily all present in every case, however they highlight important aspects of orthodox

masculinity. The sixth facet representing heterosexual presentation and homophobia is the one I will go into at greater lengths since I believe this has contributed to major issues with acceptance and visibility of queers people and queer athletes. I believe countering it or reducing the high levels of these facets will improve relationships with queer athletes. Anderson explains “the primary element toward being a man has been not to be, act, or behave in ways attributed to women...the reason for this underlying discontent to femininity is because effeminacy among men is correlated with homosexuality” (Anderson, 34). Though there are varieties of forms and different levels of how masculinity or femininity might be expressed, the persistent presence of orthodox masculinity is a defining factor for what is accepted, valued, and taught. While other expressions of being male are said to be inferior and silenced.

### **Similar Art Practices**

There are a few artists whose practices I see reflected in my current work including Nick Cave and Matthew Barney. I view these two artists as models for producing exceptional work, which I have looked at for inspiration and in order to better understand the context surrounding the work I produce.

Nick Cave is an American artist who is most known for his *Sound Suits*, made out of a variety materials, from natural sticks and wood, to fabric and second hand trinkets. His work is a constant point of reference for me when discussing wearable sculpture. His recent collaboration with the *Alvin Ailey Dance Company* titled *HEARD NY* incorporated dance and costumes to transform the performers into a heard of horses. Nick Cave’s past history as a dancer has informed his work and

this is present in his photographs, where a dancer's movement is captured on film. Cave exhibits his *Sound Suits* in a multitude of forms including performance, photography, and the suits themselves as statuesque mannequins in gallery settings. His methods of displaying work in a variety of forms as well as collaborating with dancers are similar to my methods for producing and displaying my work. This similarity is evident in the performance with the ballet dancer Jimmy Danger for my *We Are the Champions* piece.

Matthew Barney's practice spans several mediums including film, drawing, and photography, which have resulted in a personal universe. His connection to being an athlete is present in several of his films and most notably his early *Drawing Restraint* series. Barney introduced sports training to his art practice inspired by the bodybuilding tactic of hypertrophy, which is "the exaggerated growth of muscles, often created by repetitive, stressful exercise" (Kertess, 64). Hypertrophy became a methodology for his drawing, this was accomplished by tying and adding layers of resistance such as ropes and pulleys to his arms and body in order to restrict movement while doing a performative drawing. His practice is very dynamic creating across several mediums that range from large-scale collaborative films to solitary drawings and photos. The photos he chooses to display from his films and performances have been said to, "slow down the narrative and crystalize certain aspects of the conflict" (Dervaux, 41). My photographs have the same purpose, allowing the frames to tell the story through freezing essential moments and displaying them like movie stills.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

My methods for producing performance-based artwork and studio-based artwork are slightly different though they share some crossover. This is because I construct initial plans and costumes in my studio that are then work-shopped in order to create a final performance. This methodology section will first expand upon the methods for producing the live performance work then I will map out my process in regards to studio work.

My research methodology is performative in nature where performance art becomes a lab for research and curiosity. Interaction, gift giving, and costuming are my methods for establishing a trust and relationship with my audience that will build the foundation for a genuine interaction. I am using performance as a vehicle to have interactions with strangers, which informs my practice. With live performance the end goal is to produce a transformation in both the viewer and myself. This is of course a very intangible and perhaps unachievable goal, however I have developed methods of producing a transformation, which I believe are effective. It is important to note that my relationship with my live audience is closed, since there is no built-in method of giving feedback or response after the performance. This is typical of performance art practices. However, I have developed the two performances that are part of my thesis through studio critique with my fellow IAMMD cohort as well with curators and volunteers that ran test performances. I have gathered feedback and frank criticism in regards to the performance in order to understand the experience of the live audience. I have used my instincts and trial and error to develop techniques that I find useful to create a transformation, while also borrowing tropes that are present in

sports based spectacle, which I am attempting to queer.

The three methods for creating a transformation during performances are gift giving, interaction, and costuming. This transformation/engagement should take the viewer out of their current headspace and into my temporary personal world. I hope that through my methods the end result would be that the audience begins to identify with myself, or members of my team. Much like how a sports fan identifies as a member of the team and sees their presence as affecting the outcome of the game, I hope the members of my audience see their contributions as pivotal to the event and similar to an avid sports fan behavior. "Biological research shows that men's testosterone levels actually increase when the team they root for wins, and it dips when they lose" (Anderson, 45). Since sports affects the human body in a fundamental way, does performance art elicits a testosterone connection as well. Though I view my methods of costuming, interaction, and gift giving as performance art techniques it is important to note that they all exist in the sports arena.

Costuming is an effective way to change the appearance of the audience and allows me to restrict or enhance a person's movement. I also use costuming to potentially conceal their identity; I believe this might give the person more freedom to behave in an unusual way. My performances are very interactive and I believe a person is more connected to a work if they are part of the adventure. This is one of the major reasons why a recorded documentation of a performance always seems to be lacking. I think it is important for a person to experience the work in a live setting, knowing that they could be called on to participate.

Gift giving in the form of small art objects is essential to my practice as it



means that a piece of the performance has been transported to another location. Hopefully it will be the person's home where it becomes a souvenir that reminds them of the experience. I also firmly believe that there needs to be a level of reciprocity. Since I am asking the audience to enter the work, I want to ensure that they are given a gift in exchange for trusting me. This approach allows me to better understand my audience and the role my methods of interaction play and in establishing a bond. Lewis Hyde explains it in his book *The Gift*, "It is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling bond between two people" (Hyde, 56). I seek to create temporary communities where gift giving is about building social bonds and is in contrast to commodity exchange or payment.

The method for producing non-performative work is based on a personal need to consistently make objects. I consider this act therapeutic. Through studio-based research, where trial and error is a major method, I experiment with new materials and processes. The majority of my time in studio is spent doing repetitive actions such as beading or gluing. I enjoy this repetitive nature as it allows me to see the transformation of accessible cheap materials into art. Working with a material over an extended period of time allows me to add several layers of detail, which is something I appreciate when looking at art myself. I consider myself a maximalist when it comes to the construction of the objects, often wanting to produce complicated viewing experiences.

I view my life experiences as data, which I use to construct objects and performances. They are the result of me thinking through the act of making. I believe

that as a society we compartmentalize how we act in different settings and social situations and for me there are three versions of myself: a private, a public, and a personal version. Art making is a window into my personal self, much like how a journal can be a tangible expression of personal thoughts and feelings. In order to clarify my methodology for my artistic production I have included a diagram figure 1. In the diagram my public self is represented by a glass prism and life is represented by the ray of white light. I am the autobiographical filter that transforms life experiences into four distinct art expressions, masculinity, ornamentation, performance, and personal myth, which are interconnected in my art practice. In my diagram personal self and private self are separate, reflecting that there are private experiences that are not part of my practice.

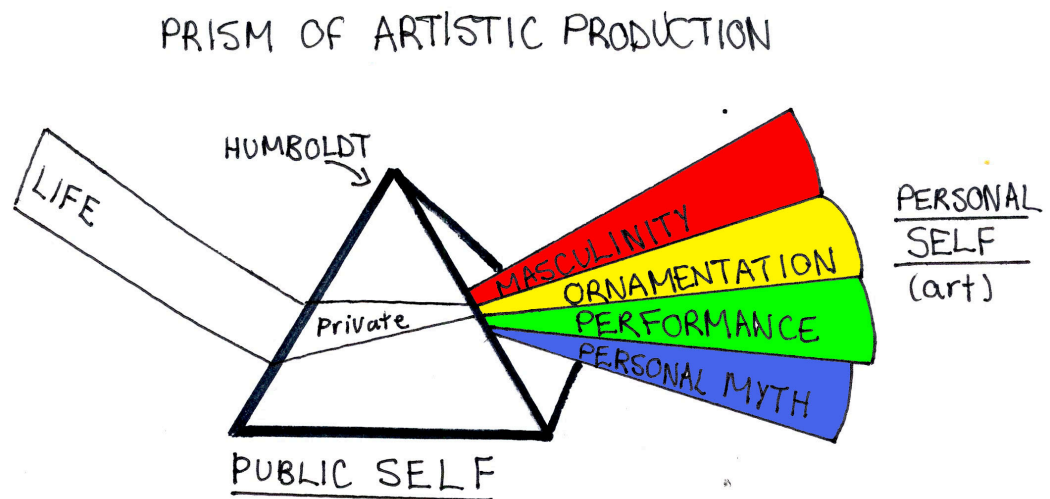


Figure 1. Prism of Artistic Production

The relationship I have to theory or academic knowledge is often difficult to negotiate within my practice, since I have always been satisfied with producing for the sake of producing. I now view theory as a support that is not often tangible in the making process but apparent after I have created the piece. This theory allows me to translate work that is often idiosyncratic and personal into something that other people can relate to and expand upon.

#### **Chapter 4: Intro - Facets of Current Practice**

There are four facets of my current practice that have been combined to create this body of work. These four facets can be summarized in four words, masculinity, ornamentation, performance, and myth. I will link these facets of the work, which have been layered, weaved and smashed together to form this thesis exhibition. My methodologies of producing work are to reflect on my own identity and explore these through artistic production. On a personal level I am interested in masculinity because I am a feminine queer man who experiences the pressure to be masculine. Whether from my family, society, or myself, I experience gender policing on many levels. I have focused on sport because I believe the sporting arena is an important masculine environment that is very performative in nature. I have personal experience with this, being a competitive track and field athlete in University. The ornamentation and bedazzling that I have done to football jackets is an attempt to queer masculine objects. However I believe that the referencing I have used to sport memorabilia is a form of ornamentation in itself that contributes to the performance of masculinity. Rupaul the famous drag queen, states that "You're born naked, and the

rest is drag” (1996), I agree with this statement seeing that a masculine sports jacket is also a way to ornament the body that is in itself a form of drag or performance. The four facets discussed are very present in the two performance pieces, which are major works produced for this thesis.

I have introduced several binaries that exist in my work including real and fake, feminine and masculine, poor and rich, rural and urban, and high and low art. Throughout my practice I have been working with different binaries and combining them to complicate these labels and to also reflect on my own identity and the grey zone that exists between the binaries. When an artwork contains, materials and symbols that represent the two opposite spectrums of a binary it comments on the grey area that exists in between. This is complex, messy and often overlooked because it is not easily definable. I see binaries existing in my life in multiple ways, and I have shifted from both extremes on the spectrum of many of the binaries mentioned earlier. One example is growing up in a rural environment to now living in the largest city in Canada. Having class mobility and the shifts that happen throughout the years with coming out, moving, education, and style, have complicated how I view myself and view the world. It can be said that binaries exist in my work, which can be attributed to my own exploration of memory of different versions of myself, which have existed at various points in time, rural with urban, glamour with banal, etc.

## **Part 1 - Constructing Inclusive Masculinity Through Art.**

An important objective of my thesis work is to resist ideas of hegemonic and orthodox masculinities. Through making embellished alterations on football jackets and helmets, which introduce a level of ornamentation not normally found in such a hyper masculine environment. This ornamentation presents the idea of personalization where individuals can differentiate themselves and be a diverse member of a team. I believe sport and performance art share a lot of common language. This opinion is also expressed by IAMD alumni Hazel Meyer, whose work often exists in the intersection of art and sport, she states, “athletic activity, sports, and exercise are able to engage the body, to create space through movement in a similar way to performance and immersive art practices” (Meyer, 8). The movement and presence of the body in states of strain and endurance are common to both sport and performance art. This can be seen in the work of Matthew Barney whose interdisciplinary practice takes influence from his time spent playing university football at Yale while establishing his art practice. Christopher Bedford, a curator who has written extensively about athletics and art, states that,

Barney’s work undermines the assumption that a hierarchical relationship exists between the visual conventions of video/performance art and those of popular film and television. Ultimately, Barney’s films reveal that the average sports fan’s investment in body-based imagery is remarkably similar to those images included in the emergent canon of performance art (797).

I agree with Bedford and see my practice as replicating Barney’s approach to performance fused with sport.

My interest in combining sport and performance art happened first through

creating a series of uniforms and helmet that later inspired a performance. I was drawn to altering uniforms and creating custom helmets since in sport, uniforms and iconography are tools to create a homogenous group. By personalizing them I want to resist this uniformity. The decision to focus on sports (and in particular football) is to comment on the relationships that have been built between aggressive team sports and orthodox masculinity. Anderson states, “a significant use of sport in recent times has been to reproduce hegemonic masculinity by turning young boys away from qualities associated with femininity or homosexuality and (attempting) to teach them how to be masculine, heterosexual men...in the process, sport has become a leading definer of masculinity in a mass culture that has lost male initiation rituals” (Anderson, 862). When producing the costume as well as the framework for my interactive performance pieces I wanted to infuse elements of femininity, co-operation, and queerness that I felt was excluded from the sports entertainment that is broadcasted. Though some of the characters and situations are humorous, my intentions are not to make fun of sports but instead offer up a sincere queering of it.

For the thesis exhibition *Go Hard or Go Home* I wanted to showcase a body of work that used the two performances as the core, which the sculptural and photo work would radiate off of. Since the performances were past events it posed an issue, how to best represent them and the objects and costumes which are their residue, while introducing work such as the photographs, which we inspired by the performances. For the window of the thesis exhibition I decided to display two bedazzled jackets on two mannequins that were facing each other with a rope in between them, hung from the ceiling. This rope referred back to the earlier *Viking*

*Blood* performance where I physically climbed a rope to attain a helmet. I viewed the two figures as portraits of my twin brother and me. Not only for the actual fact the mannequins are exact copies of each other, but also because the jackets worn were from the same sports team *The Minnesota Vikings* but in different colours. I viewed the different colours as the tradition of wearing slightly different uniforms when you played in your own city or in another city. I thought of the jackets as the “home” and “away” part of the same team but in very different spaces. They became portraits of my brother and me who, despite our similarities, are very different fundamentally. Him seeming to inherit my father’s aggression and brawn while my own family resemblance is questionable and only exists in my physical appearance. The position of the figures facing each other was intentional because I wanted the figures to not only mirror each other but exist in a space where their body language could exude a soon to come action or event. I constructed a facemask for each using a variety of materials that were influenced by the logo on the jacket. Materials such as wooden pieces from a back massager and braided hair were introduced because I wanted to form a connection between the jackets and the human body that was absent.



**Figure 2. *Yellow and White Jacket* By Humboldt Magnussen. Beads, wood, glue, paint on second hand jacket, 2013, variable dimensions**

The importance of sport with its potential to be broadcast into millions of homes, while being taught at school from an early age, has a massive influence on how we see gender. "Sport, by virtue of its essentially spectacular character,



concentrates the subject of masculinity in representation like almost no other image-based field” (Bedford, 13). The theatrical nature of the sport of football coupled with the hero worship of the top athletes in North America creates a culture where a team represents a city, its people, and becomes a stereotype for how men should behave. The level of spectacle in sport is something I was very aware of when creating the live performances. In an effort to mimic the spectacle in my performance work I attended a CFL game as research. This later inspired the use of smoke machines, group huddles, chest bumps and rhythmic clapping that was present in the two performances. The familiar rituals of a sporting event became very apparent when performing *Viking Blood* when an unplanned “wave” started in the audience, while the phrase “Let’s Go Vikings” was also chanted.



**Figure 3. Documentation from *Viking Blood* performance By Humboldt Magnussen. 25-minute duration, Toronto, 2014**

Playing or watching sports has a long history of being an activity where male bonding and the reinforcement of orthodox masculinity can take place. A 1983 photographic text piece by artist Barbra Kruger states, "you construct intricate rituals which allow you to touch the skin of other men". This speaks to the amount of effort and control that goes into a simple gesture of affection between men. Eve Kosofsky Sedwick defines these rituals of bonding as "homosocial" which is the, "expression of affection and desire within male- dominant social networks...[which] are accompanied more often than not by shared expressions of intense homophobia that are intended to legitimize otherwise transgressive expressions of affections" (Bedford, 15). A homosocial environment creates a space for people with shared interests and ideologies to bond, while rejecting people that fit outside the norms of their homosocial group. "Three of the shared meanings that are perpetuated via male homosociality are emotional detachment, competition, and the sexual objectification of women" (Bird, 130). Theorist Sharon Bird explains these shared meanings further by stating,

To express feelings is to reveal vulnerabilities and weaknesses; to withhold such expression is maintain control...Competition facilitates hierarchy in relationships, whereas cooperation suggests symmetry of relationships...The objectification of women provides a base on which male superiority is maintained (Bird, 122 123).

Homosociality is part of a larger hegemonic masculinity framework. It is important to note that not all aspects of this framework are intrinsic to the individual's identity or expressed outwardly. However, the social pressure to conform creates a space where the individual is more likely to be privately in disagreement, instead of outwardly vocal about aspects that are upsetting. This is likely a reason why the

queer community has made huge advancements in many aspects of life, while the existence and acceptance of “out” athletes lags behind other human rights accomplishments and greater nationwide acceptance and visibility.

Anderson explains this occurrence through the idea of “masculine capital”, “[Which] is achieved through athleticism, and because athleticism is thought to be incompatible with homosexuality, it follows that athletes cannot be homosexual... Put simply, the notion of a gay athlete is something of an oxymoron” (Anderson, 42). Star athletes are given some leniency when it comes to transgressing gender rules normally being policed, “It explains why team sports athletes can partake in amazingly homoerotic rituals and still maintain their publicly perceived heterosexual identities” (Anderson, 43). These homoerotic rituals can vary in intensity from less aggressive forms such as the common practice of butt slapping, to very embarrassing and perhaps traumatic forms such as hazing. Which is often done to new members of a team as an act of initiation. Famous soccer player David Beckham spoke of his early experience where he revealed, “he was forced to masturbate to a photo of an English soccer player while he was a 16-year-old in 1992” (Jim Buzinski). This was while his teammates watched. The hazing was meant to humiliate but it does not affect the perceived heterosexual identity of the people involved, including the spectators and the veterans who organize the hazing ritual.

There are many issues surrounding the treatment and visibility of queer athletes especially in regards to the very recent Winter Olympics in Russia. Controversy started with Russia’s new laws on “homosexual propaganda” and continued with arrests and harassment of the queer community in Russia. The

history of the revival of the Olympic Games in 1896 was fostered by Pierre de Coubertin of France. It is explained that Coubertin, “saw French men becoming soft” (Anderson, 29). He believed that, “sport promoted physical health, which was essential if nations were to win wars - a powerful argument in a France still smarting from disastrous defeat in the Franco-German war” (Hill, 6). The relationship between war and sports is well documented and the language surrounding sports heavily alludes to war. I make this connection very clear by selecting *The Minnesota Vikings* as a recurring image in my work. Vikings are known for their epic battle skills and violence. The violence and sacrifice that takes place both on and off the field, through physical contact as well as playing with an injury, is accepted at times in sport as it is inherently tied to war. During the Olympic Games there were seven “out” queer athletes participating out of the total 2,500 athletes. That is 0.27 percent of that population which does not reflect the estimated “20 percent of the population that is attracted to their own gender” (Eveleth). The Sochi Olympics and the discussion surrounding queer athletes and queer rights brought unprecedented attention to the issue. Though it is difficult to measure the positive or negative outcome I do believe that raising the profile and level of awareness resulted in support shown worldwide.

When considering the work I have produced for my thesis exhibition there is a level of tenderness and absurdity that is added to more physical and violent acts. This can be seen in my recent performance pieces where chest bumps were awkwardly performed and group huddles were centered on helping me overcome an obstacle. These actions are in contrast to the usual strategizing related to beating the opposing team. Similar to a regular sporting event there existed moments of tension,

which came from both planned and unplanned actions. This included climbing the rope that reached to the top of the ceiling as well as needing volunteers from the audience, which resulted in people volunteering either reluctantly or enthusiastically. Though I enjoy tense moments I am currently at a moment of reflection and questioning strategies to encourage interaction so everyone involved is enthusiastic.

My relationship with the audience is one where I strive to be respectful and act with reciprocity built into the performance. However when constructing my performances I assumed a lot about my audience and thought people would enjoy being part of the performance.



**Figure 4. Documentation from *Viking Blood* performance By Humboldt Magnussen. 25-minute duration, Toronto, 2014**

In retrospect though I built my performances on the idea of creating a temporary community similar to what I understood happened at a sporting event, I did not realize the difference and problems that also existed in the format I was

seeking to mimic. In the future I need to engage an audience that is fully aware of my performance art style and wanting to participate, while making space for the audience to have agency and influence.

During the final challenge I asked audience members to breathe into plastic bags that were collected and tied to form a protected shield around my body. These would be used to keep me safe in battle. This was an effort to involve the whole audience but also include the idea of community strength.



**Figure 5. Documentation from *Viking Blood* performance By Humboldt Magnussen. 25-minute duration, Toronto, 2014**

In reality breath does not make an appropriate suit of armour in war, but I was thinking about breath as representing life and wanting to show a physical manifestation of their support for me to complete my challenge. In the end I

succeeded by my own rules, and though I failed according to the Viking God who represented an orthodox form of masculinity, his acceptance was not necessary for me to identify myself as a strong Viking.

The helmets worn in both performances *Viking Blood* and *We Are The Champions* are the same. They were first constructed out of paper mache and painted green to represent the watermelon helmets worn by *The Roughriders* football fans in Saskatchewan and then bedazzled and painted gold for the colours of *The Minnesota Vikings*. I felt it was important to re-use the same helmets because the role of the people wearing the helmets stayed the same. These were members of my team who were there to help and support each other. The helmets not only fulfilled their role of costuming the participants but were also layered with meaning and aesthetic detail. When constructing the golden helmets I worked with strings of plastic beads as well as bought and made wooden beads. When gluing the beads I thought of them as geometric shapes working with the circle, square, and triangle which was repeated to create a pattern or, in the case of the circle, a ripple. I wanted the helmets to reference the logo of *The Minnesota Vikings*, which is why braids and horns became essential details in the works. Elements of glitter jingle bells, and balls of yarn were added to the surface. In my mind the helmets shifted from being props or costumes to art when the audience wore them.



**Figure 6. Safe N Warm Helmet By Humboldt Magnussen. Beads, woods, plastic, paint, synthetic hair on paper mache helmet, 2013, 16 x 20 x 8**



Wearing the outfits are essential. Not only because the act of wearing a helmet is part of its function but because the helmets would showcase their fragile nature and would need to be constantly repaired. The act of repairing the helmets with many new jewels and layers of thick spray-paint is what makes the helmet art. Not only because it is a relic of a performance but also because the performance caused a change in the object. The construction of a helmet that is in fact fragile points to a contradiction; though it is a helmet it cannot truly protect you. It is perhaps an absurd or poetic idea of shielding yourself with something breakable, however I believe the materiality of the helmets comments on the repair and upkeep that comes with performing masculinity.

The performance of hyper masculinity, which I consider a facade used in order to avoid being vulnerable, has been explored in both performance and photography. The photograph "Fixing Viking" shows me as a Viking in mid repair of my Viking helmet while white school glue drips on the floor. This photograph deals with an absurd idea of a modern day Viking trying to fix his helmet with glue, It highlights a disinterest in the performativity of masculinity through my facial expression. The first iteration of this piece consisted of the helmet laying broken on the floor with a bottle of glue being spilt next to it. Deciding to photograph myself during the action of repairing the helmet was important since I felt I wanted to introduce the movement of my body in the act of repairing that was missing from just the sculpture.



**Figure 7 Fixing Viking By Humboldt Magnussen. Inkjet Print, 2014, 20 x 16**

### **Part Two: Ornamentation, Value, and the Power of Dollarama**

To counter orthodox masculinity I have used materials often associated with the feminine or decorative in juxtaposition with objects from sport. Though sport is a major theme of my work I have deviated from using strictly sports memorabilia in my work by using natural materials as well. This is evident in the bedazzled log helmet which is displayed both as a sculpture and worn by myself in a photo. The log has been decorated with glass and plastic pearls affixed to a wire mesh. Creating this piece was meditative and therapeutic. The pearls represented femininity and the log represented masculinity. I was hoping to create a piece about gender, which was not

neutral, but an equal representation of the two gender roles smashed together. Although there is only a small scattering of real pearls used in this piece, the use of pearls is significant because of what they represent and how they are made.

The creation of a pearl is in response to the oyster trying to protect itself from something that is irritating it. This irritation can come from a small object in the wild, or the insertion of a piece of shell in cultured pearls. The instinctual reaction by the oyster is to cover the irritant by the same material of the shell, which in time creates a pearl. One can think of the production of pearls as method of healing for the oyster, that in turn creates something precious. This is perhaps how I most relate to this sculptural piece, as a method of healing that creates something precious. The natural instinct to protect the oyster's body is also present in the actual log, whose hollowness is also a natural instinct in response to a fungus that lived inside the bark. The tree had to grow around the fungus creating the hole, which I have embellished and turned into a helmet. Both materials were created as a result of some unwanted infliction and in turn formed evidence of a method of healing and recovery.

Through creating the piece I have contemplated my relationship with my grandma who passed away a few years ago who always wore a string of pearls. I have contemplated whether or not the string of pearls my grandma wore was a real pearl necklace or costume jewelry. This has lead me to question why certain things are valuable, while others are worthless and how unauthentic replicas of precious objects can deceive or fool people into believing they are priceless.



Figure 8. *Show Me the Waves Slaves of the Sea is their a Swirl and Oyster Pearl Inside of Me* By Humboldt Magnussen. Inkjet print, 2013, 28 x 40

The decision to construct the sculpture using mostly glass and plastic pearls was a practical choice, as I personally can't separate a good fake from the real authentic item. Growing up poor I am unable to understand why would anyone spend more money on a "real" item vs. its no name or knock off version? There are several reasons why people favour the authentic version of a product. These can be for the sense of quality in an object, to be the envy of your neighbors, or because it is the only option available. The creation of facsimiles blurs lines of socio economic status and superiority surrounding wealth. Since pearls, gold and other symbols of wealth are highly coveted, having a fake of that symbol can seem shameful to some people. However, using facsimiles can also create the desired object without spending large amounts of money that it would require to work with real gold or pearls.

I feel a responsibility to recycle and repurpose materials since the new material from the dollar store is often linked to unfairly paid factory labour. Buying products made in China or other countries, where labour standards and payment are not as high as first world countries, is a problematic side of dollar store merchandise. It is something I have difficulty avoiding because some of my materials, such as glass beads, are not being produced in Canada. I acknowledge that though I am speaking to the potential of dollar stores, there is a difficult reality for the people who make the products. Also the proliferation of cheap mass produced items have created a culture of excess, which creates a large amount of waste and pollution.

My use of ornamentation or what I refer to as bedazzling comes from a place where decoration can serve as a source of personalizing commercially produced objects. Dollar stores are know for their extensive assortment of objects and

materials offers the customer great value, often on “no name” versions of branded products. I purchase my materials from dollar stores as I feel they reflect the cultural climate I am currently living in. Dollar stores have been embraced by the people of my generation and socio economic status. The fake, reproduced, or knock off versions can compete and fool the passer by, which undermines the value of the “rare” object. The supply and demand of luxury goods are highly controlled to create the illusion of rarity. The economic value is maintained through monopolies of mining and production. One example of this would be De Beers whose diamond cartel controls “60 to 75% of the world's diamond trade” (Alex Santoso). De Beers “creates an artificial scarcity: they stockpile mined diamonds and sell them in small amounts” (Alex Santoso). I prefer to work from the abundance of dollar stores while I question what is the real difference the authentic and the glass/metal version since, “Diamonds are intrinsically worthless, except for the deep psychological need they fill” (Alex Santoso). De Beers chairman Nicky Oppenheimer explains that this psychological need has created a culture where the understanding of what is valuable is linked too closely to the cost associated. I believe this is a major issue in society where people are developing self worth based on what they own, while placing the importance of something such as art, or material goods based on the cost.

Similar to the pearl embellished log, I have created a small figure titled “Cry Baby” which is meant to rest on the gallery floor. This piece is also not in line with the sport-based work, but very much in the theme of masculinity and queerness. “Cry Baby Dolls” are the size of a small child, have the appearance of crying and are

placed sitting up against a wall. These dolls appeared in relative's houses, in the corner of the hairdressers I went to, and were sold at craft sales in the mall during my childhood.



**Figure 9 Cry Baby By Humboldt Magnussen. Porcelain doll, vent, jackets, sweat pants, socks, glass pearls, beads, wire mesh, marbles, string, porcelain hands, 2014, 24 x 20 x 20**

When I found an old porcelain doll at the Value Village I decided to make it into my own "Cry Baby Doll". When constructing the helmet that would be sewn into the hood of the jacket of the doll I began to contemplate the difference between masks and helmets. I decided that helmets not only hide the identity of the wearer but also protect the person from harm. This is the reason I make helmets instead of masks, as it is important that they have a dual function. I originally started constructing helmets to discuss being queer and closeted and turning the helmet into a symbol in my personal iconography. With this particular doll, the face was ornamented with pearls and beads to conceal the original porcelain doll, but also to protect the fragile material from breakage. I have started to view the doll as a self-portrait as a child, and this thinking has shifted how I decided to display the work. Instead of placing it against the wall I have put in the corner of the room on top of the warm air vent, which is where I would relax and warm up during Saskatchewan winters.

I will be giving out a limited number of gifts on the night of the opening and during my defense. I wanted to keep the theme of aggression and tenderness that comes across in some of my other work apparent in the gift. I have purchased oysters in tin containers that have been cultured with pearls and accompanying necklaces. In order to get the pearl and place it in the necklace you have to break open the oyster that is currently sitting in a preservative. I believe this gift is important because it unites several of the facets of my thesis, including gift giving, value and materiality. The act of breaking the oyster is in line with ideas of violence which is intrinsic to orthodox masculinity. Often getting/earning a thing of value or rarity is



paired with violence. The combination of an act of violence in order to receive something of value is very present in sport where in order to obtain a trophy or prize money the athlete has to not only defeat their opponent but in some cases physically hurt them. There is a tension that exists with this object, because though it is a real pearl the oyster is in fact dead and resting in alcohol, which prevents it from rotting. The flesh of the oyster is visceral in sight, touch and scent. I was personally drawn to the canned oyster because of a memory I had with purchasing a similar item at a discount store in Saskatchewan. In high school I bought the canned oyster with a friend as joke, but never wore it. At this point in my life I had an understanding that it was fine to shop at a discount store, as long people did not know you shopped there. In my experience being from a poor family there was always a level of performing and dressing as a higher class, and avoiding things that would point out your social and economic status.

### **Part 3 - Performance – We are the Champions and Viking Blood**

*We are the Champions* was an interactive performance piece in the summer of 2013, curated by IAMD alum Heather Nicol for the bicycle lead art tour in Toronto titled Art Spin. The performance was interactive with audience members becoming characters and dancers in the work as well as cheering during the performance. The work parodies masculine culture while acting as an autobiographic retelling of the story of *Swan Lake*. This performance spoke to my approach of using humour and poetics to subvert existing notions of masculinity. With the help of four planted participants, the performance went through a narrative arc with autobiographical and

personal twists. The traditional royal ball thrown for the birthday of the prince was replaced with a football game, played with a real watermelon as the substitute for a traditional football. Through combining sport and ballet I wanted to create a space where they could exist in tandem, and offer up both a queering of professional football but also *Swan Lake* which is also a heteronormative piece of art.



**Figure 10 Documentation from “*We are Champions*” performance By Humboldt Magnussen. 25-minute duration, Toronto, 2013**

The importance of using a watermelon as both helmet and football is a reference to *The Saskatchewan Roughriders* whose fans sometimes wear carved watermelons as helmets when they go to a game. The football team I created represented more traditional ideas of masculinity and therefore was aggressive while the swans were more delicate and fluid in their movements. This performance used the structure of both ballet and football and combined them to make a hybrid of the

two. Ballet and football are projected in popular culture as opposites being embraced by one of the two gender roles almost exclusively. Of course there are all female football teams and all male renditions of the ballet *Swan Lake*, but the stigma remains that boys do not dance and girls do not play football. The differences in football and ballet are based in the difference between sport competition and artistic expression. I used to see sport and art as opposites, but now I can see the intersections that exist and how present aesthetics and glamour are embedded into sport. When looking at football you can also see elements of choreography through carefully organized game plays or drills that create a flow of moment. Though the movement is not built to form a narrative, it does have a level of dynamism present in dance. The attention given to aesthetics can be seen through all levels of sport, from the flashy uniforms, which are designed to be seen over far distances, to the lighting, and music present. As well the trophies given exude a sense of royalty present in king's crowns and jewelry design.

The main difference is the rules of engagement present in sport and dance, which positions the audience differently. In sport, the audience is active while in ballet the audience is passive. Cheering allows the viewer to become an active member, since athletes respond to the crowd's enthusiasm and connect the audience to the player. The fans of the Roughriders often call themselves the "13<sup>th</sup> man" which highlight their involvement in the twelve-man game. With ballet cheering, movement, and clapping is considered distracting and reserved for when the dancers bow.

With my performance I positioned the audience as sport spectator through giving out flags, noise-makers, and horns to encourage cheering which was the only

soundtrack for the performance. The narrative of the performance follows a tragic love story and it was important to work with a ballet dancer that could help me translate my own coming of age love story to dance. The lighting of a smoke bomb at the end of the performance signaled to the participants that they needed to spin and fall to the ground. This triggered the ending of *We Are the Champions*. In *Swan Lake* the prince is fooled and cannot be with the Swan Princess so they both commit suicide. I felt the spinning and smoke bomb could signal death but possibly happiness. This ambiguous ending gave the audience a chance to interpret if for themselves.



**Figure 11 Documentation *We are the Champions* performance By Humboldt Magnussen. 25-minute duration, Toronto, 2013**

*Viking Blood* was performed at the Rhubarb Festival in February 2014. It was performed twice to a live audience of about 150 people each night. A script was

made and the challenges were created to represent three traits that every Viking should have: strength, good navigation, and community. The audience was given flags to cheer with, while on both nights twelve people would volunteer to put on a costume on me consisting of a helmet and jacket and assist me through the challenges. The performance was timed and began by a voice over "The Voice of The Viking God" that explained the performance. The first challenge was climbing a rope to the ceiling to collect a helmet. The second challenge was to test my skills of navigation by finding three fog horns that were given to different members of the audience before the performance started. I explained that by finding the foghorns I would receive a Vegvisir, which is commonly known as a Viking compass. This symbol is linked to magic and would help me find my way when lost. The final challenge was to construct armour with the help of the audience. This consisted of the audience members blowing into plastic bags and tying them to my body. This was very compelling for me as people were invested in seeing me succeed, so more audience members volunteered to tie bags when time was almost up during the second night's performance.

In the end, the performance was meant to fail which proved to be disappointing for the audience. However, it was important to be unsuccessful as the Viking God represented orthodox masculinity and I wanted to queer the idea of what it means to be a Viking. Though there might be the occasional chest bump and battle cry, most of the obstacles had an artistic flair where moments of mediation and ritual intersected with bravado. Through having the entire attendance assist me on my hero's journey I hoped to have established a sense of community while

questioning notions of strength and masculinity.

The performance piece was built off of the idea that the audience and the performer work as a team in order to accomplish the tasks and queer notions of masculinity. In retrospect the relationship that was built during the piece positioned me as a person in control and the audience as followers. Which is not the result I had intended. I wanted the piece to seem malleable and open to change, which it was in a limited capacity. Though it was not expressed clearly enough I viewed the audience as already confirmed Vikings. I did not want to be a hero and have the audience experience a level of hero transference through the piece, which was unfortunately perhaps the result. Though I was using a hero-story narrative plot I wanted to use the structure of the sports game in combination with the hero trope in order to create a group experience.

I have built situations and performances, which because they act as a catalyst for a social interaction with the public there are elements of relational aesthetics woven into the performances. This is a method of working that French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud wrote extensively about in his book *Relational Aesthetics*. According to Claire Bishop relational aesthetics, "is entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and audience. Moreover, this audience is envisaged as a community... relational art sets up situation in which viewers are not just addressed as a collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a community, however temporary or utopian this may be" (Bishop, 54). Relational aesthetics are present in my work as part of my interdisciplinary practice since in the two performances I did sought to create a temporary community and

hope that my work in performance will create new discussion and interaction.

#### **Part Four: Performative Mythology**

*Personal myths are defined as those cognitive structures that serve the functions of explaining, sacralizing, and guiding the individual in a manner analogous to the role played by cultural myths in a society. They give meaning to the past, define the present, and provide direction for the future. They operate, to a considerable degree, outside the individual's field of conscious awareness. Personal myths affect daily decisions by mediating perception, motivation, and behavior ( Feinsein, 199).*

Being a Viking or having Viking ancestors is one of my personal mythologies, which has at different points in my life given me a sense of strength and motivation. It is how I understand my identity as part of my family, my historical roots, and where that positions me as a Canadian with Scandinavian ancestry. I think of having Viking blood as a personal mythology, which has a small possibility of being true. The influence of this personal mythology and Vikings as role models of strength and loyalty is something I am aware affects how I handle myself. From a personal standpoint I have always felt very restless and had this feeling of being home sick even though I was actually "home" in Saskatchewan. This propelled me to explore my Viking roots and to travel to Norway to research the traditions and history of the Vikings. After my travels I realized I did not connect to this culture but still feel very close to this personal mythology of the Viking history and culture. The semi-accurate versions of Vikings in pop culture, characterized by the Thor movies and *The Minnesota Vikings* sports team, is commented on in my work. It is not literally being a Viking but the fictionalized version, which speaks to a modern masculinity and the watering down of culture/identity.

Using the branding of *The Minnesota Vikings* is important in this work as the spirit behind the symbol intersects with several of my interests including masculinity, sport, and personal mythology. *The Minnesota Vikings* adopted this moniker to speak to the strength and tenacity of their team while paying tribute to the Scandinavians that founded Minnesota. It is popular to name your sports team after a group of warriors (Knights, Warriors, Argonauts, Titans, Pirates, Gladiators), because it acts as a symbol that reflects the value of the overall team and its existence as a cohesive unit. The logo is a historically inaccurate picture of a Viking wearing a helmet with bullhorns. Although the helmet with bullhorns has come to symbolize the Vikings, it is important to note that they never wore bullhorns and this image of a Viking was created in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. By appropriating the merchandise of the Viking sports team I am trying to lay claim to something that has already been adopted and appropriated for the sports watching public. I believe personal mythology is a framing device. The early influence of Viking culture and its spirit has come to shape my understanding of self and continues to affect my identity and my work.



## **Conclusion**

Orthodox masculinity has limited and policed other more inclusive forms of masculinity, which in turn has produced a hostile environment for both queer men and queer athletes. I have created work in response to orthodox masculinity as a method to queer ideas of masculinity and resist the status quo. Through my interdisciplinary work I have approached this agenda in a variety of methods including performance, sculpture, and photography. The end goal is to inspire conversation that allows the gallery to be transformed into a discursive space and questions ideas surrounding gender roles and expectations. My work in performance is based in spectacle, while also wanting to create a community similar to what is experienced by dedicated fans of a sports team. The major difference is that I am attempting to parody elements of orthodox masculinity while also pursuing an inclusive and queer environment. I have discussed my methods of production, which have informed this body of work, including gift giving, costuming, and interaction. As further outlined in this paper the position of hegemonic masculinity is currently occupied by orthodox masculinity that dominates and suppresses other forms of masculinity. We are at a time when acceptance of queer individuals is increasing and gender roles are becoming less apparent. It is important that we move to a more inclusive form of masculinity both in sports and the general public. I have created artwork, which through ornamentation and craft and the insertion of my own body, will no doubt fuel a conversation, which will hopefully expand existing notions of masculinity.

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