

# COURT AND SPARKLE

## Kye Allums, Johnny Weir, and Raced Problems in Gender Authenticity

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In a 2012 interview that appeared in “The Jock Issue” of *Original Plumbing*, Kye Allums made a comment about his decision to take testosterone, one that suggests the limits of public discourse about the relation of bodies to gender, even among people who understand that individuals might not identify with the category initially assigned to them. Allums had received widespread public attention in 2010, right before his third season playing NCAA Division I basketball for George Washington University (GW), when he came out as transgender in a November 1 interview with *Outsports.com*, announcing that he planned to stay on the women’s team that he had come to GW with a scholarship to play for.<sup>1</sup> As a condition of staying on the team, Allums had to refrain from taking testosterone, which he began after deciding not to play as a senior. But as he told T. Cooper, the interviewer for the *Original Plumbing* piece, despite starting testosterone almost as soon as he could, he had some ambivalence about doing so:

I struggled for a while, like why am I going to take testosterone when I don’t feel that I need it to be what I already am? Pre-T, people were saying, “You aren’t a man,” and after I started it, people were like, “Oh, now you’re a guy.” But I was a man before. A man can have a high voice, big boobs. Trans people like us, we’re confirming the stereotypes by taking hormones. We feel we have to do this to be seen how we want.<sup>2</sup>

As Allums indicates, common understandings that trans people transition their bodies to match their gender identities, usually through hormones and surgery, work to cement the idea that authentic maleness or femaleness requires certain visible, audible, or otherwise knowable physical attributes and hormone

levels. Real women have breasts; real men do not. Such notions, Allums suggests, may also falsely isolate body modifications pursued in the context of transition: “It would take a very strong person to be able to say, ‘Fuck it’ [to those external expectations],” Allums continued. “I guess I could’ve done that, but I didn’t want to. I see other . . . men and like what they look like, and I want to look that way. I mean, skinny guys look at bigger guys and want to look like them so they work to look that way.” Both trans and nontrans people transform their bodies to suit gendered aspirations.

In this essay, I look at effects, ideas, and diversions in discourses around gender authenticity in gender-segregated sports by considering Allums’s coming out as trans next to another controversy about sufficient maleness in athletics that also made news in 2010, this one involving the internationally medaling champion figure skater Johnny Weir. I think of putting these case studies together as staging a bit of a queer sports-studies date (and queer-sports-studies date) between two people whose sports profiles suggest little reason to bring them together. Allums plays a team sport firmly ensconced in educational, recreational, and professional realms and dominated at the top by competition among men. Weir competes in an individual sport pursued largely outside educational and professional contexts and with a shaky status as sport, partly because of the perceived dominance of females and feminine-coded characteristics like artistry and dance. Even the athletes’ 2010 gender ordeals differ in significant ways, including that Allums’s has been framed largely as serious business and Weir’s as cruel humor. Weir, whose departures from masculine norms had long been part his public reputation, was competing for the United States in the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada, when two broadcasters joked that Weir needed a “gender test.” Presumably, the comment did not really reflect a question about Weir’s own gender assignment in life and sport but was a sideways slam about fagginess and effeminacy.

Yet as with many such unlikely meet-ups, connections emerge in the unfolding of their stories—You, too? Me, too!—that open up promising topics of shared import. Two especially interest me here: the vast reach into the athletic lives of athletes who are trans, gender-nonconforming, or both, of gender binarisms, stereotypes, and prejudices that ought to be easily dismissed without lengthy discussion; and the matters that hammering on such gender biases may obscure, efface, depend on, or accomplish. Of particular note in these cases are issues of race. Race makes virtually no explicit appearance in coverage of Allums or Weirs regarding their careers, lives, and genders, probably partly because their race is not noteworthy in their sports. Nothing is out of the ordinary about a black basketball player or a white figure skater of any gender. Yet race figures importantly,

I argue, in the operations of gender policing that affect Allums and Weir. My purpose is not to expose that race matters. I presume that race matters in everyone's life and that gender—normative, nonnormative, identity, attribution, expression—never happens apart from race. How race matters is a central topic here.

## **Kye Allums, or The Case of the Disappearing Scholarship**

### ***Straightforward on Defense***

In contrast to his comments in *Original Plumbing*, Allums's first public comments about being a transgender athlete suggest someone who, at least as filtered through interviewers and editorial processes, embraces some of the clean divisions he would later challenge. "Yes, I am a male on a females' team, and I want to be clear about that," Allums said in a press conference that appeared in a November 3 Associated Press (AP) video. "I am a transgender male, which means, like feeling-wise, like how I feel on the inside. I feel as if I should have been born male, with male parts. But . . . my biological sex is female, which makes me a transgender male." The description complemented the *Outsports* piece, which portrays Allums's coming out as clarity upon clarity. "It was a text message from his mother during his freshman year at George Washington that flipped the switch," relays the author, *Outsports.com* cofounder Cyd Zeigler: "They were in a fierce texting battle when his mother wrote, 'Who do you think you are, young lady?' The answer was suddenly crystal clear to him: He wasn't a young lady at all." Research then helped him overcome preconceptions ("[trans people are] not weird. It's all in your mindset and how you think"), while ongoing encounters with misrecognition offered visceral confirmation of his identity, underscored by cultural evidence: "'When people refer to me as 'girl' or 'she,' it doesn't sit well with me,' Allums tells Zeigler. 'That feeling you get when someone pisses you off, that feeling you get when your stomach gets hot and it aches, that's what it feels like. And that's how I know I'm not supposed to be a girl. If I was, I'd be walking around like everybody else, getting make-up and doing my nails.'"

I do not take that last statement to represent Allums's understanding about gender in general. As Potent Susurro writes, in reviewing Kortney Ryan Ziegler's 2008 film *Still Black: A Portrait of Black Transmen*, there is no necessary correlation between telling a relatively standard story and understanding it to be the whole story. While most of the six trans men profiled "tell the expected/required medical narrative of gender," she writes, those accounts, while not thereby being inauthentic, also belie more complicated understandings of gender and sexuality that the same people also convey.<sup>3</sup>

In Allums's case, this is undoubtedly true. Allums obviously knew females who did not get their nails done. In fact, they appear in the Outsports piece when Zeigler describes Allums finding among lesbians some people who dressed and acted like him, inducing him to think temporarily that he might be lesbian himself. Allums also knew men who did not conform to a simple, heteronormative stereotype. By Zeigler's account he was one of them. "In this basketball family," Zeigler writes, "Allums has become the eccentric big brother. He's the only player whose major, Interior Design, is artistic in nature." The image of Allums as the guy who brings taste to the group adds a bit of the queer-eye stereotype to the tough-guy protector circulating widely via a quote from Allums's official statement to the press—stamped as such by GW—that "my teammates have embraced me as the big brother of the team."<sup>4</sup> That narrative finds a place in Zeigler's piece, too. "When teammates get new boyfriends [only boyfriends?] they have to run them by Allums for approval. Having grown up taking care of his younger siblings, it's a role that comes naturally. 'If you mess with one of my teammates,'" Allums said, "you're going to have to deal with me'" (brackets mine).

### ***Clean Lines***

Female and feminine over here, male and masculine over there; knowable step-across in the middle; weirdness and confusion set aside: regardless of how fully those simplifications represented Allums's views of gender in 2010, clean lines served him at the time in several ways. First, they helped him gain permission to play basketball in a context where, as Allums learned very fast, the impact of simplistic links between gender and body parts—if you have breasts you are a woman, if you do not you are not—could extend far beyond the injuries or insecurities caused by private comments. In Outsports, Allums had announced plans to have chest surgery the summer before his senior season, and Zeigler related the confirmation of an NCAA spokesperson, Jennifer Royer, that Allums could keep his eligibility to play on the team as long as he did not take hormones. Some early stories repeated Allums's plan for surgery.<sup>5</sup> Yet by November 3, there was a noticeable shift in coverage, and by week's end a plan to defer surgery had not only virtually replaced Allums's original plan to have surgery but had also become a sign or condition of his right to play. GW's school paper, the *Hatchet*, states: "To maintain his eligibility as a student athlete on the women's basketball team, Allums . . . said he will hold off on any gender reassignment surgery or hormone therapy until April 2012, by which time he will have completed his eligibility as a student athlete."<sup>6</sup> An AP story by Joseph White, which ran on numerous websites including the LGBT Edge, the Huffington Post, and local news outlets, begins:

Kye Allums can't have the surgery, can't start taking testosterone — not as long as he wants to keep playing basketball for the George Washington women's basketball team. But he can change his name. He can ask people to stop calling him a woman. He can show off his mohawk, face a dozen cameras at the Smith Center after a practice and declare: "Yes, I am a male on a female team."<sup>7</sup>

What caused the switch-up in reporting? One likely source is an official statement issued on November 2 by Robert Chernak, senior vice provost and senior vice president for Student Academic and Support Services. Chernak states: "Kye has informed the university that he will not begin any medical or drug protocols while a student-athlete. The university consulted the NCAA regarding his competitive status. Kye will continue to be a member of the women's basketball team."<sup>8</sup> While the statement neither mentions surgery nor explains why Allums "informed the university" about plans to defer "medical or drug protocols," it is easy to imagine a series of shifts akin to a game of telephone whereby "medical" becomes "surgical" and a stated plan becomes a directive. The "medical" and "drug" protocols that Chernak names separately can be mapped neatly, if not quite logically, onto the duo "surgery and hormones" familiar to many as a common articulation of "medical transition." Meanwhile, Chernak's invocation of the NCAA invites the interpretation that deferring surgery conforms to NCAA requirements, although such a rule would make little sense. The NCAA would hardly ban athletes from competing as female who had cancer-linked mastectomies or even those who had breast reductions to counter the athletic disadvantages of large breasts. Unlike advantageous testosterone levels, which are suspect whether produced by the body or taken as supplement, conformity to aerodynamic ideals is generally considered simply genetic luck or smart intervention, not something to regulate.

Yet underexamined notions about gender criteria pervade sport, beginning with the principle on which policies and debates about the participation of transgender athletes most publicly rest: that sex segregation is the foundational criterion of fairness in competitive, and often even recreational, athletics. This principle is unfair from the start because, like all principles based on gender binaries, it erases and excludes people who do not fit into one of the categories. As scholars and activists have increasingly pointed out, it fails in numerous other ways, too. Set aside, for a moment, that nonbodily variables compromise any level playing field that gender segregation is imagined to secure—like how you really can go faster on that super-expensive bike, even more so with an edge in coaching and training time. Even were those variables removed, gender sorting simply does not

account for all human variation relevant to sport. Males are not always tall. Height does not help in every sport. Numerous physical advantages—eyesight, hemoglobin levels, and many, many more—do not map onto gender anyway.<sup>9</sup> Some that generally do, like testosterone levels, the most recent measure chosen by the International Olympic Committee for the heinous project of “sex verification,” do not have consistent or guaranteed effects either, and the IOC uses some criteria to regulate transgender athletes that have no logic whatsoever.<sup>10</sup> For instance, the IOC requires all trans athletes to undergo “sex-reassignment” surgeries as a precondition to competing in accord with their gender identity. Given the lack of evidence that any such surgeries prevent competitive advantage that athletes (allegedly) gain by shifting classification—and note that male trans athletes are expected to face competitive disadvantage instead—this requirement bears no apparent purpose other than to align the bodies of trans athletes with the fixed notions that Allums critiqued about the bodily criteria for male and female.

With needless restrictions promulgated by no less august a governing body than the IOC, it is no surprise that Allums’s apparent new requirement to forgo surgery raised little outcry in mainstream news sources, which kept reporting and repeating news of the prohibition. Several cited a statement from Erik Christianson, a different NCAA representative than the one Zeigler had spoken to, that “a female who wants to be socially identified as a male but has not had hormone treatments or surgery may compete on a women’s team, and the team remains a women’s team.”<sup>11</sup> Christianson soon revised this public position. In a November 9 *Outsports* piece, Zeigler quoted Christianson’s clarification to him that “as discussions continue and after further review of this topic at the national office,” surgery would not be a deciding factor. Zeigler also reported in the piece that “George Washington University spokesperson Candace Smith said the school has worked with the NCAA on the issue and informed Kye he could have gender-reassignment surgery and keep his NCAA eligibility.”<sup>12</sup>

The flip-flopping of university and NCAA spokespeople points to another reason for the sudden intrusion of surgery into the mix of possible restrictions on Allums: the alarming frequency with which people announce or enforce gender rules based merely on a presumption that they exist. Anecdotal evidence abounds. No you cannot, yes you must: at the airport, at border control sites, at the school records office, at sports contests, at the DMV. So, too, regarding Allums. Despite alluding to evolving discussions, Christianson never had been citing assumed rather than actual NCAA policy. The document *Current NCAA Position and Resources regarding Transgender Student-Athlete Participation* from May 2010, the most recent statement when Allums came out, did not include surgery

regulations, although it certainly awaited improvement about determining gender identification. For instance, it advised administrators to find students' genders on their driver's licenses.<sup>13</sup> But unless someone has gone through the usually arduous process of changing one's gender marker—a process that varies by state or country and may require evidence of medical transition, “professional” opinion, or both—a driver's license merely indicates the gender assigned, usually, at birth, regardless of gender identity or, indeed, physical characteristics or transformations that policies about trans athletes seek to regulate. Gender on paper works no better than gender by body parts.

Had Allums come out a year later, NCAA policy would have been improved, clearer, and easier to find. In August 2011 the NCAA adopted the recommendations of *On the Team: Equal Opportunity for Transgender Student Athletes*, a policy guide published in October 2010, just in time for Allums's case to help publicize it, but not to help him personally right away.<sup>14</sup> Written by Pat Griffin of It Takes a Team and Helen Carroll of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and based on the work of a think tank on the topic, *On the Team* joins a critique of binarist gender presumptions to policy recommendations that push beyond presumptions about how gender matters in sports. Given what gender sorting does not accomplish, for instance, the report recommends that athletes through high school simply play as they identify. It also debunks policies like the IOC's sex-reassignment-surgery requirements and firmly takes surgery out of the mix for trans athletes switching, or not, from one team to another. Ironically, these moves all use critique of the binary's explanatory value to retain it: while athletes can step from one category to the other, sports retain two. But since sex segregation is not disappearing from competitive sports any time soon, that is a more than decent step toward securing more athletes' abilities to play.

### ***Likely Suspects***

Besides helping Allums secure support for playing basketball in a context where announcements that he would refrain from surgery traveled as a mark of reassurance rather than ignorance, clean lines also, I suspect, helped Allums counter diverse habits of bigotry working against his ability to present himself as unsecretive and honest. Writing about the representation of trans women in the media, Julia Serano notes that trans people are routinely judged for how well they conceal their original sex attribution (which presumes, of course, the desire to do so), with negative interpretations available to attach to any assessment: success makes trans people “deceptive”; failure makes them “pathetic.”<sup>15</sup> Even positive representations usually incorporate the persistent cultural narrative that trans people

have something beneath their surface that can be, should be, or has been uncovered. Accounts of surface and depth may vary: garb, manner, or actions hide or betray bodies underneath; bodies do or do not match inner identities or essences deemed as such by self-discovery or regulation. Truths may come out in sensationalized reveals or gently managed revelations—chosen, half-chosen, or forced. But the constant presence of this narrative in accounts both hostile and sympathetic contributes to naturalizing an approach that appears repeatedly in coverage of athletes who are trans, gender nonconforming, or both as onlookers hunt for clues of true, doctored, or irregular gender in muscles, stature, or even dress. I will not give such comments another outlet here; search any athlete whose gender nonconformity makes news and you can find them.

When I survey material about Allums, I am also reminded of Regina Austin's comment almost twenty years ago in "‘A Nation of Thieves’: Consumption, Commerce, and the Black Public Sphere" that ordinary acts of buying and selling goods and services are routinely considered deviant when black people perform them, especially, but not only, when white people are doing the interpreting.<sup>16</sup> Her point helps make sense, I think, of the frequent treatment of Allums's desire to keep his scholarship, and thus his ability to pay for school, as sketchy, scheming, and possibly covert. The most blatant example occurred during an episode of ESPN's *Outside the Lines* in April 2011 that included a segment on Allums followed by a panel discussion with Carroll and the sportswriters Kevin Blackstone and Wendy Parker.<sup>17</sup> On the panel, Parker questioned whether Allums had stayed on the women's team only to keep his scholarship. She reiterated the question in a follow-up blog post, adding, "those were questions he avoided during the interview, and the lack of candor was obvious."<sup>18</sup> It was not. To the contrary, when the interviewer John Barr said, "There are people who will say, well, heck, he's just doing it to keep the scholarship." Allums replied, "I *am* trying to graduate. If I wasn't playing basketball, I probably wouldn't even be in . . . a college like this. But I came here to get an education *and* play basketball."<sup>19</sup> It is hard to be more direct than that, and Allums had never hidden his interest in education; it featured in that first *Outsports.com* piece.

I take Parker to be a bit of an outlier. Although her blog, *Extracurriculars*, announces "No bimbos. No celebrities. No snark," her snarkiness about queer issues in sports, which she considers "wasted obsessions," is obvious when she talks about Allums's supporters:

Why, in God's name, is the National Center for Lesbian Rights—which finally snared disgraced former Penn State women's hoops coach Rene



Portland after she was in its crosshairs for many years —taking up Allums’ cause? Here is someone who wants to leave The Sisterhood. He may have identified with sapphism at one point, but that’s clearly not the case now.

Rene Portland maintained a public “no drinking, no drugs, no lesbians” policy in over two decades of coaching women’s basketball at Penn State.<sup>20</sup> A person like Parker, who perceives Portland as the persecuted victim of a “sapphis[t]” cabal, will find sneakiness at every queer turn. But the more common notion of Allums “just doing it to keep the scholarship,” as Barr put it, contains the same implication: that wanting an education might be a questionable hidden agenda and desire besmirching Allums’s character and undermining his cause.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, like the oft-repeated anecdote about Allums’s mother texting “Who do you think you are, young lady?,” which invokes enduring parent-child conflicts modernized by cell phone delivery, clean gender-dividing lines contribute to the layering of familiarities that makes Allums’s story legible, “relate-to-able,” and appealing outside as well as inside the sports world. In a 2006 essay titled “When We Became Normal: Transgender People in Popular Culture and the Politics of Normalcy,” Shana Agid notes that sympathetic representations of trans people, both fictional and nonfictional, share certain characteristics: unambiguous lines between two genders; an intention to travel from a wrong-body before to a right-body opposite-sex after in ways that leave “touchy subjects like challenging a binary gender system” out of the discussion; and the omission of specificities involving race, class, and sexuality.<sup>22</sup> Allums’s narrative matches that description exactly.

### ***Tell Me about It in February***

To look at media coverage of Allums, it would appear that race matters little to his story or situation aside from generating certain occasions and sources of interest. Predictably, those occasions include Black History Month, when, in 2011, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Network (GLSEN) named him one of the month’s “Heroes” and Allums made the Top 100 on TheGRio.com, an NBC News site described—in us-them language suggesting a gift benevolently bestowed from above by an unapologetically white-focused media power—as “the first video-centric news community site devoted to providing African Americans with stories and perspectives that appeal to them but are underrepresented in existing national news outlets.”<sup>23</sup> Monica Roberts, “a proud African-American transwoman,” followed Allums attentively on her blog TransGriot, with links to videos, articles, and his team’s schedule.<sup>24</sup> In “Kye Allums’ Courage Transcends Gender, Athlet-

ics,” Blackistone compared Allums to other black athletes who took stands for civil rights and social justice: the football players of North Carolina A&T, who lent their strength to the 1960 Woolworth lunch-counter actions against segregation; Magic Johnson, “conscripted” to fight stigmatization of people affected by HIV and AIDS.<sup>25</sup> But Blackistone’s suggestion by analogy that Allums joins a black activist tradition constitutes perhaps the most profound comment in the mainstream straight or queer media about how race matters—that is, the most profound unless one interprets Joseph White’s use of “dream . . . deferred” about Allums’s medical transition to be a substantial if whispered gesture through Langston Hughes to raced conditions of possibility.<sup>26</sup> Judging from the rest of White’s article, I do not think it was.

But Allums’s story is, of course, all about raced conditions of possibility. Tuition, room, and board at GW cost over \$50,000 a year. That is prohibitive for countless and increasing numbers of people of all races, but given the concentration of wealth in the hands of white people, those who can pay it outright are most likely white. Allums could not. On a November 4 podcast, Zeigler’s *Outsports.com* cofounder Jim Buzinski commented to Zeigler that, judging from posted comments, even sympathetic readers wanted to know why, if Allums identified as male, he was not playing for the men’s team. Zeigler replies:

If he leaves the women’s team, he loses his scholarship, and he loses his education. He has to leave George Washington. . . . As I talked to him in the spring, that’s what he was focused on. Yes, he loves playing basketball. . . . But if he somehow lost basketball, it wouldn’t be as crushing to him as losing his education.<sup>27</sup>

Zeigler also suggests that in an “ideal world,” Allums could secure a starting position and therefore a scholarship on the men’s team. No. In an ideal world, Allums, and everyone on the planet, could be getting the education they want without having to play basketball for it. At the very least, athletes should not lose a scholarship if they lose the sport. The notion that staying in school depends on athletic performance exacerbates an already dubious notion that some people should put their bodies on the line for their education. The large number of black athletes among Division I starting positions in big-ticket sports like football and basketball, as well as the smaller graduation rates of black players, contributes to recurring accusations like that made by Taylor Branch in a much-circulated 2011 article in the *Atlantic*. He saw in university sports “an unmistakable whiff of the plantation” or, he suggested, colonialism, “rationalized with hoary sentiments

about caring for the well-being of the colonized.”<sup>28</sup> Contributing, too, are raced notions about the mix of brain and brawn that student athletes, and people in general, bring to sport, which stereotype black athletes as primarily brawn, Jews and Asians as too brainy to shine athletically, and white people as a judicious mix.<sup>29</sup>

Blackistone argued on *Outside the Lines* that Allums should have had a four-year scholarship in the first place. But the NCAA did not permit schools to award more than one-year athletics scholarships for Division I sports until 2012. Now it permits, but does not require, multiyear contracts. This means, importantly, that students may still depend on the will of coaches, and on their institution’s willingness to step up instead if necessary, to finish their education.<sup>30</sup> Thus, as Jamilah King points out, we should be thinking about student-athletes’ scholarships, and not just their chance to play or love of the sport, when we think, for instance, about Portland dismissing suspected lesbians at Penn State.<sup>31</sup> So, too, regarding Allums’s situation. But the topic rarely comes up in coverage focused primarily on establishing clear gender lines. Considering the readily available *Hoop Dreams* narrative to describe a black kid aiming for a basketball scholarship as a route to college and a better life, that silence stands out all the more.

### **Johnny Weir, or The Case of the White Russian**

#### ***Man Up***

Sex segregation generates little comment in figure skating, except among feminist sports scholars and anyone else who pays attention to readily available evidence that despite sex segregation being the rule for solo competition, it rarely if ever serves its alleged purpose to protect females from competing against more powerful males.<sup>32</sup> But figure skating is plagued by two binarizing notions about gender that fuel and follow from sex segregation: that athleticism itself has a gender, which is male or at least masculine; and that sports segregated by sex should have appropriate, recognizable differences in the male and female versions of them. The first, despite being bigoted on its face, has vast and toxic reach, contributing to every accusation of gender fraud based on extreme athletic achievement by people who compete as female and to the disproportionate allotment of resources, rewards, and attention for athletes deemed male and sports deemed masculine. This prejudice comes at figure skating largely from external sources, delivered often as its flip side: If figure skating is feminine—which given its artistry, dance component, and sparkles it must be—then it is not a real sport. The second, like sex segregation and the gendering of athleticism, functions as a defining or organizing principle of innumerable athletic activities besides figure skating. But it

besets the sport more from inside than outside, as coaches, judges, and skaters work to determine what athletic feats, manifestations of grace, body adornment, choreography, movement styles, and music should be categorized as appropriate for either females or males but not both.

The (first) gender-test incident involving Weir occurred amid other dustups in 2009 and 2010 about sufficient maleness and masculinity, conflicts that involved a dual concern to demonstrate the athleticism of skating and the gendered specificity of skaters, particularly in the gendered solo categories, “boys,” “men,” “girls,” and “ladies.”<sup>33</sup> In 2009 Skate Canada faced a public-relations debacle when its apparent attempt to “message where possible the difficulty of the sport” was widely interpreted as a homophobic attempt to dissociate the sport from gay fans and to counter common perceptions that all (male) athletes are gay.<sup>34</sup> Then during the 2010 Olympics, the Russian skater Evgeni Plushenko, competing in the men’s event, claimed that men’s skating required a quad (four-rotation) jump. “Without a quad, it’s women’s skating,” he said, in what one commentator on the “Cold War . . . gone nuclear” called a “shot . . . aimed directly at the manhood of U.S. competitor Evan Lysacek.”<sup>35</sup> (When Lysacek beat Plushenko without the quad, former Olympian Elvis Stojko, another fan of manly skating, referred to the event as “the night they killed figure skating.”)<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, Lysacek had subtly become a fitting representative of manliness and often, thus, of the United States, through the media’s praise for his alleged heteronormativity in style and gesture, especially in contrast to Weir. For years by then, Weir had been repeatedly characterized as “flamboyant,” which, as he and others noticed, accompanied a notable inattention to his athletic feats.<sup>37</sup> To the contrary, as Bryan Safi asserted in a “That’s Gay” segment on *InfoMania*, “‘athlete’ is a word *never* used to describe Johnny Weir” during the Olympics, even though he had won the US national title three times, among other accomplishments.<sup>38</sup> As Safi shows, words like *flamboyant* appear in sports coverage precisely where commentators describe his competitors in terms of the titles they have won.

Characteristically, then, the gender-test incident began with a focus on Weir’s style. After the men’s short program in Vancouver, two commentators on the Quebec station RDS, Claude Mailhot and Alain Goldberg, trashed Weir for his feminine presentation. After Mailhot said to Goldberg, “This may not be politically correct, but do you think he lost points due to his costume and his body language?,” Goldberg replied that Weir wears lipstick, dresses in feminine attire, and “tries to be as feminine as possible on the ice” and that his femininity would set a bad example for male skaters by creating the impression that his persona was the sad future of boys in the sport. The commentators also brought up Caster Semenya, the runner from South Africa whose exemplary performance and nonfeminine pre-

sensation subjected her to sex verification testing in 2009. Goldberg suggested that “we should make him [Weir] pass a gender test at this point,” and Mailhot joked that Weir should really compete in the women’s events. The two later apologized under pressure, but only for commenting on Weir’s clothes and style.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Splitting the Queerest of Hairs***

In Allums’s case, I have argued, the focus on neat, if crossable, divisions separating male and masculine from female and feminine successfully functioned, at least partly, on Allums’s behalf. Maybe it obscured the rich complexities of gendered life, Allums’s included, and bigger questions about why he needed basketball to stay in school. Maybe it forced needless delay of the body modifications he should have been able to have earlier. But at least it supported his right to play. One thing that strikes me about the focus on gendered divisions in skating is that reiterating them to defend athletes usually looks primarily like protesting too much. The reasons are hardly mysterious. Both the widespread interpretation that Skate Canada trumpeted “tough” to mean “heterosexual” and the string of insults aimed at Weir exemplify the toxic brew of sexist, antifeminine, anti-effeminate, antigay, and antitrans prejudice—under which I include bias against skating in a manner allegedly proper to the so-called opposite sex—that figures into skating binarisms. Genderings of athleticism as male and artistry as female make tenuous, besides figure skating’s status as sport, the male skater’s hold on manhood and on possible heterosexuality, given common stereotypes that people who violate gender norms are not heterosexual. Consequently, fans of looking heteronormative want males to be legibly skating as males (who could very well be straight). Females, presumed to be straight, should be skating in a feminine manner, not least to mark what males do as different.

But then here is the question: If *skater* signifies dangerously close to *feminine*, which, for males, is dangerously close to *fag*, then why do people repeatedly support claims for the real manhood of particular skaters by splitting, really, the queerest of hairs? You cannot banish those f-words by publicizing a fight over whether twirling four versus three times in the air proves manliness, or about whether a skater’s use of sparkles conforms to some tacit but supposedly obvious manly standard that, apparently, cannot accommodate Weir’s sparkly swan costume, worn in the 2006 Olympics, but can accommodate the sparkly snakes on one of Lysacek’s costumes in 2010. These strategies seem worse than useless, and they have not worked yet. Can a desperation to avoid looking queer fully account for their continued use? Or, as in Allums’s case, is relevant explanatory material right to the side of predominant focus?

### ***Alien Inhabitation***

In *Red Nails, Black Skates: Gender, Cash, and Pleasure on and off the Ice*, I briefly suggested looking to other movement genres, like ballet, ballroom dance, and cheerleading, that bear similar reputations for being largely populated by feminine (straight) women and gay men. Perhaps, I wrote, figure skaters were stuck parsing sparkles because the sport's raced ideals of movement, music, and cultural patrimony were incompatible with popular raced means of butching men up, which often involved black-coded forms like hip-hop.<sup>40</sup> I want to pursue this possibility further here, locating it in a broader concept of inhabitation.

Especially but not only as they appear in popular representations, outside influences characterized by difference figure prominently among ways to improve or normalize sexed and gendered performances. A standard plot in movies and TV involves an alien life force required to help (often moneyed, often white but occasionally Asian) people bring life to movement. That life force may be queerish from San Francisco, like Lily, the character in the 2010 movie *Black Swan* who brings out the dark side in Nina, the dancer with White Swan, nice girl insides.<sup>41</sup> Or it may be found among the darker-skinned workers on the resort staff in *Dirty Dancing*, who have sexy dance parties in the workers' quarters where the swarthy dance teacher begins to teach the light-skinned Baby about "dirty dancing," sex, and love.<sup>42</sup> Or, in competitive ballroom dancing, also known as DanceSport, it may be the dance teachers who, as Juliet McMains analyzes in her book *Glamour Addiction*, are paid to help their customers develop hyperstylized, spray-tanned expertise at (whitened-and-up-classed forms of) Latin ballroom dance.<sup>43</sup>

In numerous cases, the alien life force is black or Latin@ from the hood, and the plot underscores the life-giving alien notion through blithely inscribed stereotypes about who has natural rhythm. In the 2001 movie *Save the Last Dance* the white, uptight ballerina Sara has moves and contortions developed through the training that white people require to move expertly. "How do you get your leg to twist like that?" asks one of her new friends at school, mystified by Sara's ability to stand with one leg overhead, turned open, and slightly bent in a pose performed by numerous dancers, cheerleaders, and skaters who have learned to overstretch themselves by lifting the foot or skate from behind, although Sara no longer needs the assist. But Sara is helpless at the local dance club, where people of color feel the beat in a way that apparently eludes her completely, despite years of moving to music, before she receives a lesson from future boyfriend and hip-hop expert Derek. In the cheerleader movie *Bring It On* (2000), again, dark-skinned natural talent meets primarily light-skinned training, as it does in *Bring It On: All or*

*Nothing* (2006), in which the white girl actually trains the cheerleaders of color at her new school to do legitimate, rule-following versions of the wild booty maneuvers and street-dancer crumping that they showed her.<sup>44</sup>

These examples show females as the people inhabited by people racially other or racialized as dark (swarthy working-class white, black swan), often with a sexual or sexualized relationship underscoring the inhabitation. But such transformations affect men and heteromascularity, too. On *So You Think You Can Dance*, season 7, the show butched up Asian ballet dancer contestant Alex Wong by partnering him with African American Steven “tWitch” Boss—an “All Star” contestant from season 4—for a crunk routine. Set to the song “[Get] Outta Your Mind,” performed by Lil Jon featuring LMFAO, it starts out with tWitch as Wong’s nerdy shrink, the scenario adding the idea of leaving behind the mess in your head to song lyrics focused on going crazy at the club. The choreography offers a potentially complex take on nature, training, and inhabitation because once tWitch, a crunking wild man beneath his nerd get-up, gets Wong crunking, Wong then challenges him with ballet moves. At the end, Wong does quickly rotated turns, on and off the ground, before a final pose. tWitch, now the one with the mind ache, holds his head, gestures at Wong, starts to walk away, then returns to do a klutzy, minimally rotated version of Wong’s final moves, ending behind him in the same but less gloriously executed pose.<sup>45</sup>

I describe the choreography in some depth because the judges’ comments on the routine show the power of alien inhabitation as an explanatory and transformative model. Despite the suggestions of interdependent influences and directions, the judges all have the same basic response: OMG a ballet dancer who can do hip-hop! “WHO the hell are you? I don’t even know. . . . You dancing next to tWitch is unreal,” as Mia Michaels put it. Or, in the words of Adam Shankman, adding Wayne’s World bowing to sci-fi cliché: “This is your world, and I am just visiting.”

### ***Racial Toolbox***

In figure skating, by contrast, race- or ethnicity-crossing—besides the enculturation of every skater into a balletic style of white European origin—occurs primarily with females of color, who are continually choreographed through orientalist mishmash. In the most famous example, the Chinese American Michelle Kwan skated her long program of 1995–96, broadly considered her breakthrough to artistic womanhood (at fifteen) as the Semitic temptress Salome, who unknowingly secured the murder of John the Baptist through her dance of the seven veils.

Carolyn-Ann Alba, one of the rare Latina skaters, skated to Salome twelve seasons later, the same year that South Korean Kim Yu-Na skated to *Miss Saigon*, and the list goes on. But this common practice, I am certain, almost always involves not an intentional infusion of difference but a failure to register difference. People who run the skating careers of young female skaters of color draw frequently from a largely undifferentiated pool of brown-skinned female characters, often with exoticized, eroticized story lines and personas, like Salome, that might be considered unflattering or age inappropriate in other circumstances or for white girls. Brown to brown, East Asian to Middle Eastern, Korean to Vietnamese: it all functions as racial typecasting, which is the rule in competitive skating. White females do not play Salome so much.

Racial typecasting also depletes available resources for projecting normative heteromascularity, particularly for white and Asian male skaters, and indeed some trends in corrective masculinization might cause a bit of skepticism about their straightening pedigree. Men skate as the Cary Grant debonair type or to the more swashbuckling Broadway musical or music soundtrack: they Sing in the Rain; they Pirate in the Caribbean; they Dream the Impossible Dream. Sometimes they perform to blues or Led Zeppelin. But the Japanese skater Daisuke Takahashi's 2007–8 short program to a techno/hip-hop version of *Swan Lake* represents a rarely approached outer limit in figure skating's engagement with the black-coded styles of music, movement, and dance associated with bringing virility to people whose pursuit of certain athletic or artistic forms may compromise their masculinity.

In his autobiography *Welcome to My World*, Weir suggests that gay skaters almost always remained closeted because skaters are supposed to represent a "sanitized ideal." "The U.S. Figure Skating Association (USFS) wanted it to stay that way," he writes, "and even skating in a 'feminine' way was tantamount in their rule book to declaring yourself gay. One had to act like a man. On skates and in sparkles."<sup>46</sup> That sanitized ideal is also profoundly raced. So Weir's competitors are not going to separate themselves from him by crunking or crumping. They probably will not even skate to hip-hopped techno ballet. So they are left signaling masculinity by macho twirling, codes of manly sparkling, and appropriate animal kingdom shout-outs: snakes yes, swans no. "On skates and in sparkles." Weir's line underscores the absurdity.

### ***Alien Nation***

I have been writing above about racialized models of gender and sexuality as if they were largely imposed from outside. Often they are. Kwan had never heard of



the dance of the seven veils before she skated as Salome at fifteen and surely did not design her skating costume.<sup>47</sup> But I do not presume that people never choose such roles. Nor do I presume how anyone who undertook them felt about doing so. As Celine Parreñas Shimizu elaborates in *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene*, people have complicated relationships to the racialized sexual and gender stereotypes that purport to represent them.<sup>48</sup> People also use racialized, including cross-racial, cultural forms and personas in sex and gender self-fashioning. Daniel Y. Kim offers an astute look at adoptions, transformations, and interruptions of received models in *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow*. Frank Chin, for instance, Kim notes, described using black and Mexican tough-life vernaculars to present a “racialized masculinity” popularly associated with blacks and Mexicans but not granted to Asians. It was “a kind of interracial performative mimesis” akin to the one involved, I suggested, in Wong’s crunking assignment.<sup>49</sup>

Weir’s gender presentation can also, I think, productively be understood as racialized self-fashioning. I make this argument even though Weir is usually described in racially unmarked dimensions of fabulousness, even though the racial category I have in mind, Russian, no longer stands as one in ordinary usage, and even though Russian is associated often with people as light-skinned as Weir. But Russian functions as a racial category in Weir’s autobiography, signaling supposedly distinct physical, temperamental, and cultural characteristics described alternately, simultaneously, and sometimes contradictorily as either natural and innate or as a passed-down heritage. Weir describes being praised and slammed for “look[ing] like a Russian on the ice,” partly by virtue of choosing to costume himself in a Russian-style “onesie” and partly for having a body well suited to the costume. The Russian coach who worked with him, Tatiana Tarasova, “liked [his] body, which mimicked those of Russian ballet dancers.” There, precisely, is culture presented as nature. A ballet dancer’s body—shaped by intensive training in a movement genre that crosses national boundaries but has regional trends—epitomizes the body as never a specimen of untouched nature or of isolated genetic, ethno-geographic, or racial identity.

Tarasova, Weir writes, helped him get “in touch with [his] inner Russian-ness,” which had already been nurtured by years of being a fan of all things Russian and his “Russian soul.” That involved choreographing him to enhance the balletic, feminine-labeled moves that his prior, longtime coach, Priscilla Hill, had tried to coach him out of, under “direct orders” of USFS to have him “skate more like a man.” Tarasova eventually came up with the famous Swan program for his 2005–6 season, which Weir first felt trepidation about undertaking. He expected

censure for a role usually reserved for females. He received derision, notoriety, and a third US national title.<sup>50</sup>

As this brief summary of Weir's account of his relationship to Russian-ness suggests, it was integral to the representation and expression of his gender and sexuality in diverse ways. Russian coaching and culture supported and nurtured him against the heteromascularity demanded in US figure skating, although, importantly, those links between national culture and gender ideals are far from as fixed, consistent, or timeless as Weir's account might suggest. Writing about the development of tango in and in relation to Argentina, Marta E. Savigliano writes that "maleness and its counterpart, the unmale (*not* necessarily the feminine), are products and records of gendered and sexualized class and racial struggles and of the struggle over the ghostly question of national identity."<sup>51</sup> As she explains, historically contingent and shifting interconnections, informed by colonial relations, state power, and transnational pathways of desire, shape the national stamp(s) of movement forms as well as beliefs about who does, and can, represent the nation.<sup>52</sup> Situating Plushenko's claim to manly skating against Weir's sense of his own very different skating as Russian illustrates this point.

Before Weir came out as gay publicly early in 2011, "Russian" also functioned a little like that "gay or European" confusion sung about in the song from *Legally Blond: The Musical* titled "There! Right There!" ("You see they bring their boys up different in those charming foreign ports./They play peculiar sports./In shiny shirts and tiny shorts./Gay or Foreign Fella?/The answer could take weeks.") The juxtaposition attests to the cultural specificity of heteromascularity but also allows "European" to serve as a bit of a transparent cover for "gay."<sup>53</sup> That cover can serve queer self-presentation (I fit over there) or antigay euphemism (he does not belong here), especially in figure skating, where Russian has long been understood to signal a distinct category of the sport. Like men's skating, which refers to an official category occupied by people assigned "male" but also has been loaded with content and value to make it qualitatively different from women's skating, the label "Russian skating" has been applied to everything from skating by people from Russia to particular forms of training (the state takes over!), body, attitude, movement, costume, and being. As Weir tells it, a judge once spat out, upon seeing his costume, "He looks like one of them, a Russian! . . . We can't let him go out there like that." That comment might well allude beyond and through Russian skating fashion, transferring oppositions about heteronormative gender and sexuality onto a different realm of sports differentiation where nationalist, Cold War-inflected rivalry can express hostility to an outfit and more.

After Weir came out, Russian as vehicle fully supplanted Russian as euphemism. In the fall of 2011, a year before he married his Russian boyfriend, Weir appeared as the “Winter Monarch” in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. Neither the king nor queen, and therefore even more extravagantly queer, he wore a full-length white dress coat with furlike trim (accented with a sparkly top hat and pale blue scarf) that called up his long history of articulating his unorthodox persona as Russian.

### *Hurling and Twirling*

At a press conference he initiated to address the gender-test incident, Weir called the terms *masculine* and *feminine* “very old-fashioned,” adding, “There’s a whole generation of people that aren’t defined by their sex or their race or by who they like to sleep with.”<sup>54</sup> My own paradise would not involve throwing out masculinity and femininity or sex and race altogether. They can serve as sources of pleasure, strength, community, and solidarity, inside and outside sport, in ways that do not require policing them. If people of all genders could express, present, or perform in sport in whatever gendered ways they wanted to—which might or might not match up with the way they present themselves in other contexts—that would make for more joyous sport. But Weir’s distaste for having people define others by those terms gestures to effects of gender policing beyond fitting people into categories. As he states in *Welcome to My World*, being called flamboyant, a label that he contributed to cultivating, is one thing. Being called “flamboyant” instead of “athlete” is another. His frustration was echoed in the next Olympics, London 2012, by the gymnast Gabby Douglas when she Googled herself after winning the women’s all-around—the first black woman to do so, as well as the first American woman to win individual and team all-around golds—and learned that her hair seemed to dominate the discussion. Was it too messy? How well could she represent for black women? Her hair had been straightened, which some people consider self-hating and white-imitating. Then she had sweated, leading to frizz, which some people who are fine with straightening considered insufficiently groomed. Douglas’s response: “I just made history and people are focused on my hair?”<sup>55</sup>

The visual and syntactical simplicity of adjectives modifying nouns—trans athlete, white athlete, flamboyant athlete—belies so many disconnects, splits, coverings, detours, divertings, linkages, and connections that are much more complicated than putting one word next to another can image or that the grammatical term *modifier* can convey. Athletes and athletic bodies are about more than, and other than, genders that do or do not make news. Concussions, not gender iden-

tity, put an end to Allums's 2010–11 season, his second concussion that season and eighth overall, although that is not to say that his history with gender did not inform his life with concussions. Allums reports being told by doctors that “if this was football, I’d pretty much be done.”<sup>56</sup> His concussions were not a transgender issue—assuming no trans-hating unnecessary roughness—but innumerable gender-related factors might have been involved, from gender stereotypes that affect identifying and treating concussions to gendered hierarchies of sports and people that lead to inequities in medical services.<sup>57</sup> Gender matters in innumerable ways, yet, as Keelin Godsey explains, sometimes, simultaneously, gender does not. In an essay written soon before he competed at the 2012 US Olympic Trials in the women’s hammer throw, he says, “While I may compete in the female division, we are not in the grand scheme of things judged on our femininity. We are deemed a champion based on our ability to throw a hammer the farthest. I am in a sport where we all must be very strong and muscular but also have enough finesse to spin and release the hammer in a way that looks rustically elegant.” Twirling and hurling can be loaded with gender from within a sport or without. “I am in a sport,” Godsey continues, “where women ask you what you squat or clean rather than your dress size.”<sup>58</sup> How different this is from figure skating where twirling is parsed for gender appropriateness, where the rulebook itemizes costume deductions for gender-inappropriate clothing (only trousers, not leggings, for males), where gender is policed in numerous ways that do not have exact point values but factor into scores, and where men, almost always, do the hurling visibly presented as such.<sup>59</sup> Males lift the females in pair-skating lifts and “throw” the females in throw jumps, with the term *throw jump* camouflaging a bit of hurling itself; the throw is really an assist that also requires the thrown skater to hurl herself into the jump.

Gender’s place in sport is also partly what participants make of it. Despite being famous as an “out transgender athlete,” Godsey finds in his sport both an occasion for deliberate gender presentation and a break from gender. “Most of my competitors,” he writes, “are trying to present as womanly as possible where I use this wonderful opportunity to help me pass as masculine as possible.” At the same time, he writes:

When I enter circle it is the only time I can be completely gender free and be completely free of the gender stigmatizations. . . . Being an athlete is genderless to me, it is my way of stepping away from the constraints of being male or female. It is a character description, a sign of passion, a way of life, a religion, a cult. Simply put, being an athlete is freedom.<sup>60</sup>

The athlete identity, Godsey told Ann Schatz, “saved [his] life” when his gender was agonizing. He was proud of the “athlete” identity before the gender identity, despite hiding the first sometimes, too. He wanted to avoid the label “dumb jock,” another impediment to thinking that the scholarship matters to student athletes.<sup>61</sup>

### Effects of Repetition

I have been arguing in this essay that public discourses about Weir and Allums often focus on simplistic gender binaries in ways that obscure matters both already hidden and highly visible, although what can look like tedious rehashing may be more like catch-up for rehashers. I said earlier that Allums’s situation and coverage might have been better a year later, after *On the Team* had more exposure and the NCAA had released new guidelines. Yet I know better from my own subsequent interactions with the press on trans issues than to presume that reporters prepare themselves even with the basic information that, as Janet Mock writes, should be part of their job to learn in advance. In “Trans in the Media: A Call to Elevate the Conversation,” Mock calls out as ignorance, insensitivity, and poor preparation the questions that interviewer Don Lemon asked of guests on a segment of the *Joy Behar Show* called “Transgender in America.” Why ask Chaz Bono what it felt like to have facial hair, and other “transgender 101” questions, as a frustrated Bono put it during the interview? For instance, Mock points out, two trans women of color on the panel revealed that they had been or were currently homeless: Isis Young of *America’s Next Top Model* and Harmony Santana of the film *Gun Hill Road*, respectively. The panel could have helped illuminate how race, class, queer-hating, and trans-hating informed their lives as trans.<sup>62</sup>

People posing the same old questions or seeking the same old narratives: some may be just learning; some may be avoiding; some may be obstructionist; many by trade, role, or politics ought to know better. In any case, failure or refusal to learn more has deleterious effects on people’s lives, including and caused by the perpetuation of impoverished narratives by gatekeepers of diverse sorts. Mock writes of having to unlearn the “trapped in the wrong body” narrative herself after recounting it in *Marie Claire*. She calls it the “soundbyte of struggle” that “makes trans people’s varying journeys and narratives palatable to the masses”; at seventeen, the body as a victimizing enemy also represented how she had learned to understand herself.<sup>63</sup> Diana Courvant recounts having an editor pressure her to turn an incident through which “intolerable terror [was] reduced to manageable insecurity” into a triumphant coming-out story, and of being repeatedly asked for depoliticized biography and biology when she spoke in college classrooms regard-

less of the course's subject matter.<sup>64</sup> Dean Spade describes learning that his resistance to telling the expected stories would actually prevent him from getting the low-cost (ideally free) and respectful counseling he needed to get access to chest surgery. Answering "'When did you first know you were different?'" by talking about being poor, on welfare, not Christian ("terribly noticeable in the South"), having a single mom, being a feminist ("which caused me all kinds of trouble, so I guess I always knew I was different") did not suit counselors even at LGBT or gender centers who wanted to see gender apart from and above "the class, race, and parentage variables through which it was mediated." Only certain narratives, he found, make someone "real enough for surgery," which matters especially if you cannot shop around for therapists.<sup>65</sup> The simplifications that helped secure Allums's spot on the team likely smoothed his access to hormones, too.

But they hardly smoothed everything. In "The Transgender Athlete," an important and well-informed piece in *Sports Illustrated* by Pablo Torre and David Epstein published in May 2012, Allums, by then a public speaker still looking for a scholarship (this time to play men's basketball while pursuing a master's degree in sociology or psychology) indicated that the unified support he had reported from his coach and teammates, to the extent that it existed, did not last beyond the initial publicity.<sup>66</sup> As Godsey told Schatz, anticipating some hard times after "medical transition," relationships change, and in ways that cannot fully be anticipated. How could they be? Besides the vagaries of relationships in general, consider the complicating factors when multiple and shifting perceptions of someone else's gender (and often consequently one's own) meet long-standing gender expectations necessarily also informed by interdependent matters. In *Still Black*, Ethan, one of the trans men portrayed, recounts dealing with prejudices against black men that even exceeded his own predictions, most dramatically when his wheelchair was stuck in the snow. Instead of helping him, people either drove by or asked from their car if he'd like them to call for help, as if, he commented, they expected he might carjack them if they got too close to his wheelchair.<sup>67</sup>

Perceptions of what people do, can do, and cannot do bear some predictable prejudices, mediated at most partly by agency. Figure skaters trying to advertise masculinity or athleticism may not look so different to some beholders than skaters happily, or obligingly, camouflaging grunting effort as poetic grace. Predictable bigotries, however, may operate in ways as convoluted as they are stale. As I have argued regarding "men's figure skating," for instance, dubious posturing to convey masculinity depends partly on racist exclusionisms that prevent equally dubious racial stereotypes from being used in their service. That is a messy entan-

glements of good and bad. Prejudices do not help each other out, and maybe that is great. But maybe thereby they become more virulent.

At the same time, however, complication and complexity do not mean that gender policing happens in a chaotic way. As the cases I have discussed here illustrate, it plays out in integral relation to the particular institutionalized sports contexts and institutionalized racism in which it occurs. With Allums, who owes his visibility over other trans athletes partly to sports hierarchies that elevate Division I basketball, systemic racism inside (and outside) education contributes to staging a debate about whether Allums deserves to keep an athletic scholarship he received as female instead of about why attending or staying at GW depended on basketball in the first place. With Weir, the articulation of bigotry in terms of needing a “gender test” builds intentionally on the history of subjecting all or some Olympic athletes competing as female to medical “sex verification” testing, while the use of Russian, by or against him, to designate “gender outlaw” depends on long histories in US skating of rejecting particular racial, ethnic, and national cultural and political models. The athletes’ queer sports-studies date, then, is a first date like many others: the baggage emerges as the details come out.

## Notes

Thanks to Jennifer Doyle for her amazing guidance in this next installment of our sparking mutual interests, to the helpful anonymous reader, to Keelin Godsey and Toby Beauchamp for collaborative thinking in queer and trans sports studies, and to Quinn Miller for smart listening, great suggestions, and much more throughout my work on this piece.

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3. Potente Susurro, “BHM: *Still Black*, a Movie Review,” *Like a Whisper: Feminism, Critical Race Consciousness, Queer Politics, and Dr. Who, Too!?! (blog)*, February 8, 2009, [likeawhisper.wordpress.com/2009/02/08/bhm-still-black-a-movie-review/](http://likeawhisper.wordpress.com/2009/02/08/bhm-still-black-a-movie-review/).
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  8. GW Athletics, University Statements.
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  10. As Katrina Karkazis, Rebecca Jordan-Young, Georgiann Davis, and Silvia Camporesi write in “Out of Bounds? A Critique of the New Policies on Hyperandrogenism in Elite Female Athletes,” testosterone does not serve as the guarantor of athletic edge as is often supposed (*American Journal of Bioethics* 12, no. 7 [2012]: 3–16, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15265161.2012.680533](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15265161.2012.680533)). Jordan-Young and Karkazis usefully summarize the article’s conclusions in “You Say You’re a Woman: That Should Be Enough,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2012, [www.nytimes.com/2012/06/18/sports/olympics/olympic-sex-verification-you-say-youre-a-woman-that-should-be-enough.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/18/sports/olympics/olympic-sex-verification-you-say-youre-a-woman-that-should-be-enough.html?_r=0), in which they write that “testosterone is one of the most slippery markers that sports authorities have come up with yet” and “Yes, average testosterone levels are markedly different for men and women. But levels vary widely depending on time of day, time of life, social status and—crucially—one’s history of athletic training. Moreover, cellular responses range so widely that testosterone level alone is meaningless.”
  11. Erik Brady, “Transgender Male Kye Allums on the Women’s Team at GW,” *USA Today*, November 11, 2010, [usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/college/womensbasketball/atlantic10/2010-11-03-kye-allums-george-washington-transgender\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/college/womensbasketball/atlantic10/2010-11-03-kye-allums-george-washington-transgender_N.htm). In a widely published AP article, White states that “NCAA rules say ‘a female who wants to be socially identified as a male but has not undergone hormone treatments or surgery may compete on a women’s team,’” without naming the exact source of the quotation (“Transgender Player Deals with Wave of Publicity”).
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13. NCAA Supplement No. 23, *Current NCAA Position and Resources regarding Transgender Student-Athlete Participation*, May 10, 2010, fs.ncaa.org/Docs/Misc\_Committees\_DB/CWA10/May/Supplement%20No.%2023.pdf, 1.
  14. *NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student Athletes*, August 2011, www.uh.edu/lgbt/docs/Transgender\_Handbook\_2011\_Final.pdf.
  15. Julia Serano, “Skirt Chasers: Why the Media Depicts the Trans Revolution in Lipstick and High Heels,” *Bitch Magazine*, no. 26 (2004): 41.
  16. Regina Austin, “‘A Nation of Thieves’: Consumption, Commerce, and the Black Public Sphere,” *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 225.
  17. *Outside the Lines*, ESPN, April 3, 2011. Unfortunately, this video has become unavailable on the Internet. It is summarized well by Pat Griffin, “Does Acceptance of Women’s Sport Require Dismissal of LGBT Discrimination?,” *Pat Griffin’s LGBT Sports Blog*, April 5, 2011, ittakesateam.blogspot.com/2011/04/does-acceptance-of-womens-sport-require.html.
  18. Wendy Parker, “Will It Always Be a Cause; Can It Ever Be a Sport?,” *Extracurriculars* (blog), August 3, 2011, www.wendyparker.org.
  19. *Outside the Lines*, April 3, 2011.
  20. On Portland’s reign and the end of it at Penn State, see the documentary *Training Rules* (dir. Dee Mosbacher and Fawn Yacker; 2009).
  21. The racing of training as a white thing appears also, I think, in television talent shows, where the hard-luck stories of white dancers most often involve scraping together money for training; dancers of color are praised for going without. In season 4 of *So You Think You Can Dance*, the fetishization of the untrained “street” dancer of color reached a ludicrous extreme during a season-long mystification regarding the eventual winner, Joshua Allen. First, judges bogusly contended that he had hidden his training to authenticate his story about coming from the hood. At the end, they praised him for triumphing without the training that he had said all along that he had. The possibility of prior training made him look shifty, rather than, for instance, dedicated or enterprising; lacking it made him golden. I discuss Allen’s case extensively in *Red Nails, Black Skates: Gender, Cash, and Pleasure on and off the Ice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 180–85.
  22. Shana Agid, “When We Became Normal: Transgender People in Popular Culture and the Politics of Normalcy,” *Clamor* 38 (Fall 2006): 24–25, rindpress.com/writing/Clamor%20SMA.pdf.
  23. “Black History Month Heroes,” *GLSEN Day of Silence Blog*, February 11, 2011, blog.dayofsilence.org/2011/02/black-history-month-heroes-kye-allums.html; “TheGrio Top 100,” TheGRio.com, February 1, 2011, thegrio.com/2011/02/01/2011–kye-allums/#s:kye-allums-jpg; “About,” 2013, thegrio.com/about/.

24. Monica Roberts, "Kye Allums AP Interview," *TransGriot* (blog), [transgriot.blogspot.com/2010/11/kye-allums-ap-interview.html](http://transgriot.blogspot.com/2010/11/kye-allums-ap-interview.html).
25. Kevin Blackstone, "Kye Allums' Courage Transcends Gender, Athletics," AOL News, November 3, 2010, [www.aolnews.com/2010/11/03/kye-allums-courage-transcends-gender-athletics/](http://www.aolnews.com/2010/11/03/kye-allums-courage-transcends-gender-athletics/).
26. White, "Transgender Player Deals with Wave of Publicity."
27. Cyd Zeigler and Jim Buzinski, "Kye Allums," podcast.
28. Taylor Branch, "The Shame of College Sports," *Atlantic*, October 2011, [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/10/the-shame-of-college-sports/8643/1/](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/10/the-shame-of-college-sports/8643/1/). These analogies, of course, depend on the huge amount of money that college sports may bring in.
29. Stanley Thangaraj, "Ballin' Indo-Pak Style: Pleasures, Desires, and Expressive Practices of 'South Asian American' Masculinity," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45 (2010): 377; Jabari Mahiri and Derek Van Rheenen, *Out of Bounds: When Scholarship Athletes Become Academic Scholars* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 42–45, 64–65.
30. On activism to change that situation, see the website of the National College Players Association, [www.ncpanow.org/](http://www.ncpanow.org/). For an instructive comparison with what athletes on scholarship risk when they take chances politically, see the differential consequences at many institutions, including my own, Bates College, for male-assigned US citizens who do not register for the draft. A school may respect that decision of conscience enough not to police noncompliance, while nonetheless, despite promoting access and inclusion, decline to help a student who thereby loses federal aid to secure other funding, even in loans.
31. Jamilah King, "How Scholarships Leave Student-Athletes Powerless in the NCAA Game," *Colorlines*, March 23, 2012, [colorlines.com/archives/2012/03/ncaa\\_scholarships\\_rules.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/03/ncaa_scholarships_rules.html). As the NCAA's recent sanctions against Penn State for the Sandusky cover-ups underscore, an extra layer of whim related to scholarships applies. Student-athletes ordinarily must wait out a year if they transfer to another school; Jennifer Harris, who filed a federal lawsuit against Portland after being dismissed, had to do so. But the NCAA waived that requirement for new and returning football players. See "Penn State Students Bear Brunt of NCAA Sanctions for Sandusky Cover-up as Trustees Emerge Unscathed," *Democracy Now*, July 24, 2012, [www.democracynow.org/2012/7/24/penn\\_state\\_students\\_bear\\_brunt\\_of](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/7/24/penn_state_students_bear_brunt_of).
32. At the top levels, evidence is blurred because the scoring system and other factors are actually weighted against women. Below that, the primary effect of sex segregation is a much smaller competitive field for men, given the far smaller number of male skaters. See Mary Louise Adams, *Artistic Impressions: Figure Skating, Masculinity, and the Limits of Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 230–32.
33. Joking about Weir's sex made the news again later that year in a series of tweets involving Evan Lysacek, or as Lysacek claimed, his hacker. For an account of the

incident and an analysis of that claim, see *Gender Test THIS* ([gendertestthis.wordpress.com/](http://gendertestthis.wordpress.com/)). All people who compete as female in the official category of Adult Skating compete as “ladies”; people who compete as female on the regular track are “girls” through the Juvenile level, after which they are “ladies,” too.

34. Statement of William Thompson, CEO Skate Canada, Skate Canada website, May 6, 2009, [www.skatecanada.ca/AboutUs/News/20082009/may\\_6/tabid/300/language/en-US/Default.aspx](http://www.skatecanada.ca/AboutUs/News/20082009/may_6/tabid/300/language/en-US/Default.aspx).
35. Scott M. Reid, “Let Figure Skating’s Cold War Begin,” *Orange County Register*, February 17, 2010, updated February 18, [www.ocregister.com/articles/quad-234946-plushenko-lysacek.html](http://www.ocregister.com/articles/quad-234946-plushenko-lysacek.html).
36. Elvis Stojko, “The Night They Killed Figure Skating,” *Yahoo! Sports*, February 19, 2010, [sports.yahoo.com/olympics/vancouver/figure\\_skating/news?slug=es-thoughts021810](http://sports.yahoo.com/olympics/vancouver/figure_skating/news?slug=es-thoughts021810).
37. Johnny Weir, *Welcome to My World* (New York: Gallery Books, 2011), 129.
38. Weir, *Welcome to My World*, 129; Bryan Safi, “Johnny Weir: That’s Gay,” *InfoMania*, February 25, 2010, [current.com/shows/infomania/92224102\\_thats-gay-johnny-weir.htm](http://current.com/shows/infomania/92224102_thats-gay-johnny-weir.htm).
39. Rémi Nadeau, “Des Excuses ‘Insuffisantes,’” *Journal de Québec*, February 19, 2010, [www.journaldequebec.com/journaldequebec/actualites/quebec/archives/2010/02/20100219-115615.html](http://www.journaldequebec.com/journaldequebec/actualites/quebec/archives/2010/02/20100219-115615.html).
40. Rand, *Red Nails, Black Skates*, 159.
41. *Black Swan* (dir. Darren Aronofsky; 2010).
42. *Dirty Dancing* (dir. Emile Ardolino; 1987).
43. Juliet McMains, *Glamour Addiction: Inside the American Ballroom Dance Industry* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).
44. *Save the Last Dance* (dir. Thomas Carter; 2001); *Bring It On* (dir. Peyton Reed; 2000); *Bring It On: All or Nothing* (dir. Steve Rash; 2006).
45. *So You Think You Can Dance*, season 7, Fox, July 30, 2010. The song is from Lil Jon’s album *Crunk Rock* (BME and Universal Republic, 2010).
46. Weir, *Welcome to My World*, 124–25.
47. See Dick Button’s voice-over comments during Kwan’s long program at the US Figure Skating National Championships, January 2006, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQ5x0Lpy\\_so](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQ5x0Lpy_so).
48. See Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Priscilla Peña Ovule, *Dance and the Hollywood Latina: Race, Sex, and Stardom* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011).
49. Daniel Y. Kim, “*Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow: Ralph Ellison, Frank Chin, and the Literary Politics of Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 210–11. Thanks to Stanley Thangaraj for suggesting this source.
50. Weir, *Welcome to My World*, 50, 73, 68, 78, 124–25.

51. Marta E. Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995), 46.
52. Savigliano, *Tango*, 140–41.
53. The song in question is actually called “There! Right There!,” from *Legally Blonde: The Musical*, music and lyrics by Laurence O’Keefe and Neil Benjamin (2007).
54. SKM, “Johnny Weir Responds to Gender-Conformity Police,” *Shakes Ville*, February 28, 2010, [www.shakesville.com/2010/02/johnny-weir-responds-to-gender.html](http://www.shakesville.com/2010/02/johnny-weir-responds-to-gender.html). The press conference took place on February 23.
55. “Gabby Douglas Responds to Hair Comments,” *TheGrio*, August 6, 2012, [thegrio.com/2012/08/06/gabby-douglas-responds-to-hair-comments-i-just-made-history-and-people-are-focused-on-my-hair/](http://thegrio.com/2012/08/06/gabby-douglas-responds-to-hair-comments-i-just-made-history-and-people-are-focused-on-my-hair/); Doral Stewart, “Haters Need to Shut the Hell Up about Gabby Douglas’ Hair,” *Jezebel*, August 7, 2012, [jezebel.com/5930785/haters-need-to-shut-the-hell-up-about-gabby-douglass-hair?comment=51472058](http://jezebel.com/5930785/haters-need-to-shut-the-hell-up-about-gabby-douglass-hair?comment=51472058); Julie Wilson, “Gabby Douglas Hair: Olympian’s Mom, Natalie Hawkins, Responds to Daughter’s Hair Critics,” *Huffington Post*, August 7, 2012, [www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/07/gabby-douglas-hair-mom-responds\\_n\\_1751109.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/07/gabby-douglas-hair-mom-responds_n_1751109.html). Hawkins also pointed out that Douglas trained in Iowa and lived with a white family who had no idea how to help her with her hair, suggesting the diverse factors in gendered, raced self-representation of any kind.
56. Associated Press, “GW’s Kye Allums Reflects on Season,” [espnW.com](http://espnW.com), March 29, 2011, [sports.espn.go.com/new/news/story?id=6268948](http://sports.espn.go.com/new/news/story?id=6268948).
57. Libby Sander, “Female Athletes Concussion Symptoms May Be Overlooked,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 7, 2010; Carl Ehrlich, “A Relentless Opponent Stalks the Locker Room,” *New York Times*, November 12, 2010.
58. Keelin Godsey, “Olympic Trials,” *Original Plumbing*, no. 10 (2012): 36.
59. US Figure Skating, *The 2013 Official U.S. Figure Skating Rulebook*, July 2012, [www.usfsa.org/content/2012-13%20Rulebook%20for%20eReaders.pdf](http://www.usfsa.org/content/2012-13%20Rulebook%20for%20eReaders.pdf). Men must wear trousers, not tights, in any discipline of skating (Rules 4033, 5033, and 6021 C). “Ladies” may wear pants, except in ice dancing, in which “Ladies must wear a skirt. The skirt must go around her entire waist; however, there may be slits in the skirt on one or both sides up to the waist. The ladies dress must not give the effect of excessive nudity inappropriate for an athletic sport. The majority of the upper body must be covered” (Rule 6021 B).
60. US Figure Skating, *U.S. Figure Skating Rulebook*, 35–36.
61. Ann Schatz, “Keelin Godsey Interview: 2012 U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials,” July 7, 2012, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Nvlz2nfNvQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Nvlz2nfNvQ).
62. *Fish Food for Thought* (blog), August 24, 2011, [janetmock.com/2011/08/24/transgender-don-lemon-chaz-bono-joy-behar/](http://janetmock.com/2011/08/24/transgender-don-lemon-chaz-bono-joy-behar/); see also “A Conversation with . . . Isis King and Janet Mock,” *In the Life*, ITLMedia.org, June 30, 2012, [www.itlmedia.org/clips/entry/a-conversation-with-. . .-isis-king-and-janet-mock](http://www.itlmedia.org/clips/entry/a-conversation-with-. . .-isis-king-and-janet-mock).

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65. Dean Spade, "Mutilating Gender," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 319. The essay is also available online at [www.makezine.enoughenough.org/mutilate.html](http://www.makezine.enoughenough.org/mutilate.html), (Spring 2000).
66. Pablo Torre and David Epstein, "The Transgender Athlete," *Sports Illustrated*, May 28, 2012, [sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1198744/1/index.htm](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1198744/1/index.htm); Kye Allums, "Biography," IMEnough, [kyeallums.com/Biography\\_2HS9.html](http://kyeallums.com/Biography_2HS9.html).
67. *Still Black: A Portrait of Black Transmen* (dir. Kortney Ryan Ziegler; 2008); on this topic, see also Debra A. Wilson's film *Butch Mystique* (2003).

