The Cost of Disobedience: Resisting Gender Categorisation in Professional Sports

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Abstract
In the binarily sex segregated space of professional sports, sex-gender diversity is met with suspicion, derision, and exclusion. Globally, there has been a widespread attempt to regulate intersex athletes' rights to compete and, in the US, legislation is being pushed to entirely ban transgender athletes at the school level. However, little scholarship has considered the implications of nonbinary athletes, those who identify outside the spectrum of man and woman, beyond the conversation of a "third gender" category in sport. In this paper, I seek to examine how nonbinary athletes embody disobedience by challenging the binarisation of sex-gender within professional sports. I explore the racialised embodiment of sex and gender in professional women's sports, with specific reference to WNBA player Layshia Clarendon, and how disobedience is employed for both personal identity development and to incite resistance against the narrow categories that are forced upon athletes. Finally, I argue that embodied disobedience provides a key pathway for nonbinary athletes to undermine the regulatory nature of sex-gender categorisation in sport.

Keywords: nonbinary; material-discursive; sex-gender; embodiment; binaries

Introduction
In August 2020, WNBA shooting guard Layshia Clarendon[1] proclaimed: "Being Black and Non-binary is my superpower" (Bar-Lavi). Clarendon joined a small but growing number of professional athletes who both embody and advocate for gender fluidity in sport[2]. At the same time, professional leagues, international sports governing bodies, and national governments continue to create and push policies that regulate how nonbinary, transgender, and intersex people can access and navigate sociopolitical spaces. As one of the most highly consumed entertainment products in contemporary society, professional sports remains a crucially visible platform for the negotiation of binarised sex-gender.

Clarendon uses multiple pronouns interchangeably, which will be honoured throughout this paper as a discursive subversion that is both crucial to their agency as a nonbinary person and to my argument herein. Clarendon's simultaneous ontological claim of Black and nonbinary identities, particularly in sport where race and sex-gender are both historically and

[1] Layshia Clarendon uses they/them/she/her/he/him pronouns. Clarifications will be made by using Clarendon's name periodically.

[2] In this paper, I write in British English and utilise the word sport to refer to the institution of sport. I pluralise the word when referring to professional sports and sports fans in an effort to engage with various different sports.

contemporarily regulated, is powerful. The use of superpower as a singular noun shows that Clarendon doesn't view her race and sex-gender as conflicting or contesting; rather, they are intrinsically connected to her notion of strength, courage and success. Furthermore, by rooting his superpower in his embodied positionality, Clarendon is challenging how we understand superpowers. Sure, "being Black and Non-Binary is [their] superpower" (Bar-Lavi) but that does not mean that Clarendon will take on the mantle of saving us from the rigorous binarisation of sex-gender that pervades our material-discursive lives.

In this paper, I assert that sex segregation in sport relies on the intentionally exclusionary and regulatory nature of bioessentialism — the belief that identity as a whole is immutably rooted in binarised biological understandings of sex. Thus, sex segregation in sport regulates and polices the intersecting, overlapping, messy, and confusing realities of both material and discursive sex-gender. Furthermore, an increasing number of professional athletes who resist the binary sex segregation of sport (such as Layshia Clarendon) illustrates just how insufficient the notion of a "third gender category" is in terms of grappling with the sexed and raced bodyminds of athletes. The goal of this paper is not to suggest a nonbinary or postgender framework of sport, largely because I believe these suggestions to be theoretical at best and further marginalising at worst. Rather, I aim to show how the embodied disobedience of nonbinary athletes expose and undermine the material-discursive manifestations of gender in sport.

Nonbinary: A Working Definition

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines nonbinary as "a gender identity that is neither entirely male nor entirely female" (2019). Though intentionally vague, likely to account for experiential nuances, the definition still considers nonbinary a (single) gender; that is to say that nonbinary is often perceived as an "other" third gender that falls somewhere between that of man and woman. However, queer theorists and gender diversity advocates argue extensively that nonbinary is an umbrella term to describe gender embodiments and experiences that do not fit on the gender spectrum as we currently know it (Nicholas and Clark 38; Dembroff). Rather than being a third category, nonbinary identities perhaps constitute one of the most effective ways of challenging and dismantling the binary of gender.

Nonbinary emerged as a social and political identity label in the early 2000s and gained prominence over the last decade (Erikainen et al. 3). Beginning with trans/gender scholarship and gaining traction within trans activist movements, nonbinary became a specific path to gender subversion (Garrison 615). While often overlapping and interacting with trans issues in multiple ways, nonbinary is importantly used to critique binarised cis- and transnormativity. Furthermore, nonbinary is used in conjunction with and contests labels of trans and genderqueer in various ways for different people.

For this paper, I will loosely draw on the definition of nonbinary put forth by philosopher Robin Dembroff:

> "I consider nonbinary identity to be an unabashedly political identity. It is for anyone who wishes to wield self-understanding in service of dismantling a mandatory, self-reproducing gender system that strictly controls what we can do and be … To be nonbinary is to set one's existence in opposition to this system at its conceptual core."

For Dembroff, nonbinary identity is a sociocultural construct that resists and sometimes goes so far as to reject capital g Gender (Malatino, *Trans Care* 33). In other words, both Dembroff and Malatino note that genders can be useful ways of identifying, positioning, and expressing ourselves; at the same time, nonbinary identity can be instrumental in order to "refuse and dismantle" the ways that capital g Gender systemically structures our engagement with sociocultural systems (Malatino, *Trans Care* 33).

Similarly, Nicholas and Clark posit that nonbinary identities are "political *positions* that undo gender rather than innate identities" (39). However, if nonbinary is reduced to a societal positionality only, that can serve to mark them as less "real" than the seemingly stable sex-gender categories of man and woman. Identity politics can often be reductive in fully conceptualising our material experiences (Tien 527). At the same time, though, identity formations can be crucial to our understandings of self and to the ways with which we engage social systems. Thus, I contend that we necessarily avoid dichotomising identity and positionality as oppositional ways of situating material realities; rather, having a nonbinary identity can allow people to more adequately articulate their (un)gendered positionality.

Nicholas and Clark assert that "genderqueer or non-binary are usually identity labels not tied to any physicality" (38), but I hesitate to disconnect nonbinary experience from the bodyminds of people who have those experiences. Crucially, it would be dangerous to ignore the relational interactions of nonbinary identities to biologies and bodies, simply because sex-gender are co-constituted as much as they may resist or undermine one another. Thus, while exploring the political potential of nonbinary identification, I will simultaneously reckon with the material implications of nonbinary biologies in relation to the ways in which they affect athletes.

Defining Material-Discursive

In "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," Karen Barad laments that "there is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter" (801). In the article, Barad challenges the ways in which feminist disciplines have come to over-rely on language, discourse, and culture as means for understanding sociality and subjectivity to the detriment of materiality itself. Particularly, in theorising and discussing gender, the material body is frequently shuttered out, an unwelcome mess of biologies with which critical discourse refuses to contend (Alaimo and Hekman 1).

In this paper, I grapple with matters of sex-gender in sport. Thus, it stands to reason that "any robust theory of the materialisation of bodies would necessarily take account of how the body's materiality – for example, its anatomy and physiology – and other material forces actively matter to the processes of materialisation" (Barad 809). That is to say that just as material notions of biologies have discursively shaped binary sex models, discursivity of gender performativity is embedded in its material construction. So, "by reading bodies as material-discursive intra-activity we can think of them as both cultural and material, but yet avoid biological determinism" (Linghede 581). We can engage as closely with the biologies of material bodyminds as we do with the ways in which those bodyminds are shaped, regulated, and annihilated by their interactions with sociocultural systems resorting to essentialisms. That is the intent herein.

Reflexivity

As an academic, situating my positionality in relation to the viewpoints contained in this paper is important as it impacts both why I am writing this paper and how my positionality informs the process. "Reflexivity is an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher" (Cohen and Crabtree) and, as such, being intentionally self-reflexive allows me to be considerate of power dynamics in my work. Like the athletes I will discuss herein, I am a nonbinary person and, while the personal meanings of that label are beyond the scope of my argument, I acknowledge that I have stakes in the ways nonbinary people are able to navigate various social spaces. Furthermore, I am a nonbinary person of colour and the interconnectedness of racial and gender construction is materially significant to my lived experiences. As such, my argument in this paper will reckon with the ways in which the sex-gender contestation are directly connected to sport's white supremacist foundations.

Perhaps most crucially, I am a sports fan who consumes multiple forms of professional sports content from watching football and basketball games to engaging with other fans online and participating in fantasy fan leagues. A researcher's "positionality not only shapes their own research, but influences their interpretation, understanding and ultimately their belief in the 'truthfulness' of other's research that they read or are exposed to" (Holmes 3). Thus, my interest in sport from an academic and sociocultural standpoint is directly rooted in my position as a sports fan.

In this paper, I examine bodies as material-discursive subjects of regulation. I analyse briefly some of the key arguments surrounding the sex-gender binary and against sexual dimorphism in queer feminist science studies, including the interplay of race and gender. I then provide a brief exploration of nonbinary as a sex-gender model and as an identity label. Next, I look at the ways in which sport relies on and perpetuates sexual dimorphism, including the arguments surrounding testosterone and how gender verification creates female bodies in sports. Finally, I explore WNBA player Layshia Clarendon as an example of the ways in which nonbinary athletes embody disobedience. I also argue that this embodied disobedience provides a contextual framework for the resistance to sex segregation and gender exclusion in professional sports.

Bodies Make Sex Make Gender Make Bodies

How do we define bodies and their boundaries? Certainly, bodies extend far beyond their physical limits, impacting how we perceive ourselves and others, build relationships, and shape or are shaped by our cultures. However, "biology remains something of a thorny conceptual and political issue" (Wilson 2) in feminist theory; as such, the blood, bones, muscles, hormones, and guts of bodies tend to be prematurely relegated to irrelevant status in most feminist research in comparison to the socioculturality of bodies.

In the same vein as Fausto-Sterling emphasising the importance of not getting stuck in the nature/nurture dichotomy (14), Linghede notes that "leaving bodily matters and biologies behind has unintentionally helped to reinforce a nature/culture divide where binary sex is considered a biological given" (571). Removing biologies from conversations about materially fluid experiences actually backfires in that it helps perpetuate the notion of biologies as stable. By refusing to engage with biologies as a salient object of feminist theory and praxis, "nature" in the nature/culture divide is dismissed as wholly antifeminist (Alaimo and Hekman 5). Thus, biological engagements become situated as oppositional to the notion of gender diversity when the two could strengthen one another and are arguably inherently connected.

Bioessentialism has been weaponised across history a way to produce and reinforce the notion of women as a naturally inferior sex. Thus, it has been a nemesis of feminist and queer theory for decades. However, as much as bioessentialist thinkers have sought to reduce gender to sexual dimorphism, feminist biologists have pushed back and embraced biologies as sites of important transformative potential for feminist and queer theory. While both bioessentialist and deconstructionist paradigms "hide the unruly and messy insides of bodies" (Linghede 517), feminist engagements with sciences recognise how "negating materiality can actually inhibit the development of a robust understanding of discursive production itself" (Alaimo and Hekman 4). Thus, material feminisms and feminist science studies intentionally seek to resituate sex-gender as simultaneously materially and discursively co-constituted.

In *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World*, Fausto-Sterling explores the biological pathways that contribute to sex development. "By birth, baby has five layers of sex" (Fausto-Sterling 21), which include chromosomal sex, fetal gonadal sex, fetal hormonal sex, internal reproductive sex, and external genital sex. In addition to the fact that no individual layer of sex is binary, the layers are not always consistent and may often conflict with one another (Jordan-Young and Karkazis 215). Utilising only one or two of the layers of sex, most commonly external genital sex, to assign sex at birth dismisses the impact of other layers of sex and how they influence the biologically sexed bodies of babies. In doing so, sex assigned at birth ignores fundamental elements of biology and renders most determinations inaccurate and incomplete.

Salient to discussions on sex-gender in sport is the existence of intersex people, who have sexual or reproductive anatomy that cannot be neatly placed into the category of male or female ("What is Intersex?"). This includes differences between chromosomal sex and genital or between genital sex. Intersex is a broad category that covers a variety of anatomical and endocrinal variations. The most typical one regulated in professional sports is hyperandrogenism, the production of excess levels of testosterone, androsterone, and other androgens in the bodies of people assigned female at birth (Stanczyk 177). A diagnosis is often made with a range of blood tests that examine the various levels of androgens in the body. Particularly, total levels of testosterone and free testosterone levels are tested. The notion of "excess" levels of hormones is contextual and usually involves determining a relatively large range of "normal" levels (Stanczyk 185); this is crucial as there is often overlap in hormone production across bodies designated as male, female or intersex.

Building on Fausto-Sterling's notion of sex/gender, I utilise a framework of sex-gender (hyphenated) to illustrate that the two concepts are co-constituted and have entangled impacts on bodyminds. Since "the body is produced and controlled through a series of regulatory practices" (Caudwell 375), it stands to reason that bodies are both materially and discursively created. For example, the X chromosome is a material component of all human biology to some extent — i.e. every living human has at least a fragment of an X chromosome — but was historically feminised both structurally and functionally such that it is still considered the "female chromosome" (Richardson 31). This is despite the scientific fact that "the X plays no special role in female development" (Richardson 35). That is to say that the way we understand chromosomes, hormones, and bodily functions "came from humans, not from nature" (Jordan-Young and Karkazis 21, 47). As such, through the specific framing scientific evidence, the materiality of the body becomes discursively weaponised to construct notions of femininity and masculinity.

Feminist theorist Judith Butler defined gender as "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory gram that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance" (*Gender Trouble* 44). In this way, Butler problematises the distinction between sex and gender; instead, she argues that discourses of gender work to produce the binarisation of sexed bodies as male or female. However, a number of scholars have critiqued how Butler's notion of discursively-produced gender does not sufficiently explore the nuances of material violences that are inflicted on gendered and raced bodies (Namaste 20, Nussbaum 10; Nelson 332;). As Namaste notes, "a simple appeal to the prevalence of … violence does not … offer an appropriate model for understanding these social relations (Namaste 20). Of course, the appearances of substance are shaped and reshaped but as Barad would argue the matter of substance itself is also salient in its material connection to power hierarchies.

Bodies make sex make gender make bodies. According to Butler, "all along the original was derived" (*Gender Trouble* 139) in terms of gender; Butler's logic extends to sex and the material body as well. Just as there is no such thing as "original" gender identity, there is arguably no such thing as "original" biological sex. Particularly, since sex-gender are co-constituted, the "realness" of biological sex is simply the repeated inscription of social ideals onto bodies as contextualised in a particular zeitgeist.

Race and Sex-Gender

A line can be drawn from almost every system of social organisation to racism and white supremacy, including our understandings of sex-gender. In fact, "to talk simply about metaphorical connections between discourses of race and sex may even be to overstate the autonomy of each" (Markowitz 43). The sex-gender system is both historically and contemporarily built on racialisation and scientific racism.

In order to justify colonialism and slavery, sexual dimorphism was deemed a reflection of racial evolution, such that the more evolved a race, the more dimorphic their associated sexes. Colonial sexologists were convinced (and convincing) that "a strongly marked differentiation between the sexes is a product of advanced evolution and civilization" (Storr 60, McWhorter 72). This, in turn, embedded whiteness as the norm in medical and scientific praxis, such that scientific and medical advancements have continually been utilised for the advancement of racial hierarchy even as these agendas become increasingly convoluted.

The medical shaping and regulation of gender are reinforced by white supremacy and the central concept that to be normal is to be white. Malatino notes that "the forms of gender normativity utilized by the medical establishment were — and remain — undergirded by race, insofar as what was understood as a normative gender ideal was implicitly white" ("Gone, Missing" 167). This is done by largely withholding these technologies from trans people of colour, while simultaneously forcing the same technologies onto intersex people. In that way, technologies of transition have been weaponised through and within the medical industry to uphold whiteness.

How Does Nonbinary (Un)Fit?

Conceptually, nonbinary gender identities are not a novel occurrence (Barbee and Schrock 575, Erikainen et al. 3). In fact, various cultures and societies across history have had, and continue to cultivate, systems of gender that are vastly more fluid and expansive than colonial European models (A Map of Gender-Diverse Cultures). This includes the Travesti people of South America and the Bakla of the Philippines, among many others. At the same time, though, these nonbinary sex-gender models cannot be conflated with the largely Western identity label of nonbinary.

The term nonbinary is often confused or used interchangeably with androgyny. However, androgyny more accurately refers to forms of gender expression that incorporate masculinity and femininity (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Nonbinary, on the other hand, connotes more to the way in which someone experiences their gender identity (Trans 101). Though androgyny is often expected of nonbinary individuals, due to the entrenched binary understanding of sex-gender, nonbinary people are not necessarily — nor should they be expected to be — androgynous in the ways that they express their gender. Furthermore, androgyny is more an aesthetic choice that is expressed through things such as fashion, while nonbinary relates more to embodied experiences.

While nonbinary and genderqueer identities can be seen as a challenge of and liberation from binary sex-gender, it is not wholly a subversive label or embodiment. Erikainen rightly notes that "the very notion of "non-binary" gender relies on the existence of the gender binary as the initial organizing framework, as "non-binary" only makes sense as the negation of "binary"" (3). In other words, the positioning of nonbinary as recognisable requires its positioning against that which is binary. As such, nonbinary serves to construct and maintain another dichotomy: binary/nonbinary. Thus, "if every maneuver to escape binary logic effectively reinstates it in a more subtle way" (Kirby 269), nonbinary identities can inadvertently render their own challenges of gender ineffectual.

Defying binarised gender can come at the cost of the social self as long as "gender attribution continues to play a fundamental role in attaining cultural intelligibility" (Garrison 614). Furthermore, because "one relies on the other to grant it, to confer the desired [gender] recognition" (Malatino, *Trans Care* 36), there is a fundamentally inscribed need for reciprocity in order for our genders to be socially valid. To undermine gender as an embodied practice often means to take on the risk of being socially erased or undecipherable; this means that nonbinary people tend to be coerced into adhering to transnormativity in order to validate their gender experience. When "non-binary people find themselves walking a treacherous tightrope, with invisibility on one side and unintelligibility on the other" (Garrison 633), sex-gender subversion remains dangerous.

Either/Or and Nothing More: Sport as Binary

Since its inception, sport has been a phallocentric space, dominated by traditional notions of masculinity. This has manifested first in the complete exclusion of women and non-men from sport and then in a system of binary sex segregation. Under the guise of protecting the fragility of women, and despite the significant impacts of Title IX on the development of women's sports, sport continues to be reinscribed for the longevity and success of boys and men.

It is crucial to note that, while professional sports provide a glaringly obvious display of bioessentialist understandings of sex-gender, "the gendered organisation of sports reflects and is a particularly rigorous example of broader socio-scientific, cultural, and political processes of gender binarisation" (Erikainen 148). That is to say, sport did not create the sex-gender binary, nor is it wholly responsible for its continued role in regulating sex-gender diversity. However, professional sports is a cornerstone of contemporary society and provides an active platform upon which binarised sex-gender can be perpetuated and maintained.

The binary system of sport relies on discrete and immiscible categories of sex-gender, such that "to be male and masculine is not to be female and feminine" (Krane and Symons 122). This is important because (i) "binaries only make sense to the extent that the two sides are exclusive of each other" (Erikainen 14) and, (ii) this exclusivity inherently forbids any hybridity that might threaten the distinctions of those binaries. The binarised organisation of sport is not a mistake that relies on incomplete or inaccurate sexual dimorphism; rather, it is an intentional form of regulation that ensures the exclusion of athletes and bodies that do not or refuse to fit into a given category.

The argument for sex segregation in sport is often rooted in the idea that it creates fairness, specifically for women. This argument relies on two specific beliefs: "firstly, female and male bodies are fundamentally different and, secondly, in sport this difference manifests as female performance inferiority" (Erikainen 3). The systemic separation of men's and women's sports stems directly from the exclusion of women from sport, in that it situates athleticism as a singular concept and deems "male biologies" more naturally inclined towards that athleticism.

Testosterone and the Mulder Effect

There is a word in professional sports that has come to be synonymous with cheating, surveillance, and banning: testosterone. Testosterone, colloquially known as T, is a minuscule biological chemical that seems to send international athletic federations and sports fans into a tailspin. It has been woven so deeply into the folklore of sex segregation that it has resulted in a "Mulder effect" — people want to believe (Jordan-Young and Karkazis 74). Because of that, as Jordan-Young and Karkazis ask, "is it even possible to separate out what T can do from what people want it to do?" (11). Unfortunately, it looks like the world of sport is simply not ready for that separation.

Testosterone, perhaps unique from its other hormonal counterparts, is deeply embedded in both medical and social discourses. "Because T is coded as natural and in the realm of biology, just the mention of T can lend the veneer of science to simply anecdotes" (Jordan-Young and Karkazis 17); in sports, this means that incomplete or anecdotal studies are utilised as the basis for policy-making that is entirely exclusionary. Testosterone is not a simply biochemical that individually produces athleticism and strength, but rather "a multipurpose molecule whose specific actions elude our models" (Jordan-Young and Karkazis 212). As research on the complexity of testosterone continues to grow, science is met with increasingly contradictory results.

The myth of neutrality in science is dangerous, implying that the materiality of bodies is fixed and predictable. However, "hormonal levels and cultural ideas about gender cannot be separated - they are entangled and co-constitute each other" (Linghede 577). That is to say, that science is shaped by sociocultural beliefs in much the same way that science reinforces those beliefs. Jordan-Young and Karkazis note that "the idea of an endocrinological sex didn't emerge from nature; it was created in the lab" (12). Testosterone is not the "male" hormone any more than estrogen is the "female" one (Oudshoorn 8), but these beliefs are so deeply embedded in cultural and scientific discourses that it is difficult to change perspectives.

Testosterone is contextual, working in multiplicitous ways in the human body; this includes a fundamental role in reproductive function (in bodies designated as male AND female), muscle development, and sexual libido (Jordan-Young and Karkazis 49, 105, 193). Testosterone is also deeply embedded in the social structures that regulate bodies. In sports, while it could be argued that studies do not show consistent relationships between testosterone and athleticism, it is more important to note that testosterone may be but one intra-acting component that makes professional athletes elite. Thus, it is crucial to "slow down the avalanche of assumptions about athleticism and T, and the related assumption that sex overwhelms other differences between trained athletes" (Jordan-Young and Karkazis 194). Athletes do not develop, train, and compete in vacuums of neutrality; they materially and discursively interact with various sociocultural systems of power and oppression.

A Rose By Any Other Name: Sex-Testing and Gender Verification

The binarised organization of sport contemporarily relies on myths regarding testosterone to perpetuate an ongoing system of sex testing and gender verification. This highly regulatory system targets women and nonbinary athletes such that the patriarchal foundations of sport can be maintained. Furthermore, gender verification is increasingly becoming a directed method of disenfranchising athletes from the Global South.

A historical view of sex testing reveals humiliating and violating naked walks and physical exams on women's bodies whose sexes were deemed suspicious. While this method may seem completely unpredictable, it is no more arbitrary than the current regulations and policies regarding the boundaries of femaleness in sport. Because "the sport system is based on the sex binary and assumes that athletes can be unambiguously separated into the rigid categories of biological sex assigned at birth" (Braumüller et al 3), advancements in technologies of gender surveillance in sport still rely heavily on capricious understandings of sex-gender binaries.

Five years after South African runner Caster Semenya was first subject to "gender verification" by the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF), Indian sprinter Dutee Chand faced targeted discrimination on the basis of sex-gender in 2014. Particularly, Chand has hyperandrogenism which results in elevated levels of androgens (read: testosterone). Chand's exclusion from the 2014 Commonwealth Games and the 2014 Asian Games on the basis of her hormonal levels occurred around the same as CrossFit athlete Chloie Jönsson being banned from the 2013 games. Jönsson, a trans athlete who had undergone gender affirmation surgery and hormonal therapy, was banned on the basis of her "male" X and Y chromosomes (Erikainen 2). The same regulations that excluded Jönsson would have allowed Chand to compete and vice versa (Erikainen 3), thus showing that the definition of femaleness in sport is entirely contextual and arbitrary.

The IAAF continues to find itself in the spotlight as the governing body's battle with Caster Semenya remains ongoing. While representatives of the IAAF maintain their stance that their regulations are scientifically evidenced, it is not difficult to see the way athletes' race, class, and geographical locations are weaponised against them during gender verification (Erikainen et al. 19). In sports, as in other societal systems, "to be truly feminine is, in so many ways, to be white" (Markowitz 43). The IAAF's targeting of Black and Brown gender-nonconforming women is simply another example of how white supremacy undercuts sporting regulations. Linghede poetically said that "the brokenness of gender is not an abstract matter, it hurts (and it hurts differently depending on your intra-sectional location)" (580). While the IAAF are especially obvious about it, sport governing boards wholly and intentionally marginalise gender-nonconforming athletes of the Global South, discursively and materially inflicting harm on those already marginalised by systems of power and privilege.

Embodying Disobedience

To embody disobedience is to materially and discursively resist regulation and categorisation. It is to challenge and subvert dominant paradigms of societal understanding. Despite the unyielding regulation of binarised segregation in professional sports, or perhaps because of it, nonbinary athletes continue to challenge the dimorphism of sex-gender. The year 2020 saw multiple high-profile athletes come out as nonbinary, including prolific WNBAplayer Layshia Clarendon (Ennis).

Layshia Clarendon

Layshia Clarendon is a shooting guard for the New York Liberty in the WNBA and the vice-president of the WNBA Players' Association (Kim). As a self-defined Black, queer, nonbinary person, she embodies disobedience in multiple intersectional and nuanced ways (Bar-Lavi). Since coming out, Clarendon is an outspoken advocate for trans rights in sports and society at large, as well as being part of tremendous social justice endeavours in the WNBA.

Citing poet Andrea Gibson in an Instagram post in December 2020, Clarendon has stated: "My pronouns haven't been invented yet." At the same time, he makes it clear that pronouns should never be the only way to include and embrace gender diversity, and notes that acknowledging the ways in which learning must evolve in the same ways that gender evolves. "I know that we all have masculinity and femininity inside of us and mine show up equally and wholly and fully," says Clarendon. Here, Clarendon simultaneously problematises the masculinity/femininity binary and the idea of masculinity and femininity as a spectrum. Rather than masculinity and femininity existing independently or counteracting each other, one rising as the other falls, she claims both "equally and wholly and fully." Thus, her critique is simple yet powerful: experiences of masculinities and femininities, rather than being a balancing act, are beautifully and complicatedly co-constituted.

Limiting resistance to discourse fails to account for the material ways that gender-nonconforming people are violated for their subversion. That is to say that more widespread respect for pronouns must happen in concert with increased access to medical transition and legislative protections (Bar-Lavi). As trans activists note, people are not trans because they transition; they transition because they are trans ("FAQ About Transgender People"). This understanding, now common in trans communities, has been an important counterargument to detransition narratives. Crucially, the notion further emphasises that discursively amendments alone are insufficient in dismantling the binarised sex segregation of sport.

The current barrage of anti-trans bills aimed at affirmation medicine for children and trans girls in sports indicates that embodying disobedience is not an entirely celebratory endeavour (Yurcaba). For nonbinary athletes, "as glitching phenomena in a structured and binary sporting system they hold both beauty and sadness, both political explosiveness and pain" (Linghede 580). From exclusionary policies and harassment to lack of access to technologies of transition, bodily resistance often comes at a tremendous cost.

In January 2021, Clarendon had top surgery to remove their breast tissue and described it on Instagram as "freedom at last". Though Clarendon embraces trans as an umbrella of gender diversity, she categorically refuses the binary model of justification that is often required of people seeking technologies of transition (Malatino, "Gone, Missing" 163). Clarendon's decision to have top surgery allowed him to access both material and emotional levels of gender euphoria. The surgery was in effect "a refusal of the notion that [their] corporeal queerness needed to be fixed or remediated" (Malatino, "Gone, Missing" 165); without ascribing to the common trans narrative of being trapped in the wrong body, Clarendon accessed a technology of transition that helped her more wholly align her material-discursive experience of sex-gender.

Clarendon's outspoken nature and ease with publicly showing love for her wife and young baby are crucial to the way she embodies disobedience. With the support of his team and the league (Kim), Clarendon continues to push back against the ways in which gender is binarised. In their "coming out" post on Instagram in December 2020, Clarendon argued for the fluidity of gender as a resistance to the "molds that keep trying to hold it down and box it in." When asked about their platform as a role model for genderqueer and gender nonconforming athletes, Clarendon noted that the bottom line is that "we've *always* been here" (Bar-Lavi) even when being underrepresented or intentionally erased. Her provocative statement challenges the notion that sex-gender diversity in sports is a new phenomenon, instead asserting that subversions and contestations of sex segregation have always existed in sports histories. Similar to Jules Gill-Peterson, who critiques the "so-called newness and now-ness of trans life" (1), Clarendon directly connects current embodiments of disobedience to an established and expansive genealogy of resistance.

The categorisation of nonbinary as simply 'another gender' in sport fails to challenge the construction of sex-gender itself and the arbitrary regulations that arise. "Simply adding a gender category in between the conventional female and male categories… may have the effect of reinforcing the underlying female/male binary framework" (Erikainen 156), while disenfranchising nonbinary athletes from being able to compete. Particularly, the support Clarendon received from the WNBA after undergoing top surgery was largely indicative of her own labour and self-advocacy in the months leading up to the procedure (Cretaz). Thus, sports teams and leagues across the current binarised system need to support sex-gender expansiveness in their athletes.

It is crucial to note that most out nonbinary athletes currently compete in women's sports, a fact that continues to reinforce the phallocentrism of professional sports. Because nonbinary athletes, even trans-masculine ones like Clarendon, are sequestered in women's sports, there remains an emphasised dichotomy between men and non-men. This dichotomy again works to reassert the hierarchical assumption that athletic prowess is more aligned with traditional masculinities and maleness. Thus, while the support of the New York Liberty and the WNBA for Clarendon are crucial in expanding how sex-gender is allowed to play out in sport, larger efforts need to be made in men's sport and in the policies that delineate the boundaries of appropriate feminity in professional sports.

Disobedience and the Collective Future of Sex-Gender in Sport

Gender is a "fundamentally interpersonal and collective endeavour" (Nicholas and Clark 47) and, as such, reducing nonbinary identities to individualism ignores the materially communal performativity of gender. Athletic bodies do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they are "active in cultural-natural-technological entanglements where anything present is potentially agential, within as well as around us" (Linghede 573). Furthermore, the ways athletes negotiate with and challenge the binarised sex-gender system in sport cannot occur on an individual basis; any hope of sex-gender expansiveness must occur through collectively embodied movements.

Though Layshia Clarendon continues to cultivate her platform as one of gender expansiveness and fluidity, the quest for a new system of sport that does not rely on sexual dimorphism cannot be wholly placed on queer and trans athletes. "The work of undoing gender should not fall to those with the largest interactional burden to bear" (Garrison 633) and professional sports continue to create policies that regulate and exclude athletes who embody resistance to the sex-gender binary. "Can this critique of individualism co-exist with an acknowledgement that proliferated or 'spectrum' approaches to gender can be a stepping-stone and may be both pragmatically essential in a gendered world, and a challenge to binary gender?" (Nicholas and Clark 45). I argue that co-existence is central to changing the way we understand sport. Surely the embodied resistance and disobedience of nonbinary athletes continuing to compete in professional sports can be both instrumental to and insufficient for long-term changes to the binarised model of sex segregation in sport. The future of sex-gender liberation in sports must be insistently communal.

Conclusion

In its current form, professional sports is considered a beehive, where each athlete must be exactly like everyone around them and fit perfectly into the mould that they are given. At its best, though, sport is a mosaic of bodyminds that constantly evolves to fit together in new and exciting ways. While it may be difficult to visualise professional sports transcending the embedded and highly regulated system of sex segregation, "starting from the presumption of non-binary inclusion instead of gender binarization can facilitate inclusion not just for non-binary people but diverse subjects with different kinds of bodies and needs" (Erikainen et al. 23).

Linghede noted that "since a new and non-binary understanding of athletic bodies would implode the whole structure of sport (as we know it) it is hardly surprising that sporting authorities are so eager to hide and disarm non-binary bodies" (581). Thus, athletes such as Layshia Clarendon living as openly nonbinary and queer are more than simply demanding agency as individuals. Through their material-discursive resistance to being binarily categorised, Clarendon and other nonbinary athletes embody disobedience against a system that seeks to disenfranchise them. "The athletic figure is queer: it is elemental, fleshy, and intersubjective," says Jennifer Doyle (426). I would say that the athletic figure is also nonbinary, both enduring and undoing the suppressive binarised sex-gender system.

Layshia Clarendon continues to claim his Black nonbinary identity as a "superpower" (Bar-Lavi) and, while this material-discursive challenge to the rigid binarisation of sport is critical, we cannot wholly rely on their superpower to save us. Though Clarendon's public and powerful rejection of categorisation is instrumental to the ways in which we understand the expansive ways of embodying sex-gender, sport remains a deeply regulatory space for athletes' bodyminds. So where do we go from here? Perhaps, the work is rooted in making "superpower" identities less super, in making it such that sex-gender is not a burden of activism and simply a facet of human ontology.

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