ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses varying constructions and expressions of masculinities in two of the rodeo communities in Calgary, Alberta. For this work, I focus on the rodeo produced by the Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association and the one produced by the Calgary Stampede. Using a combination of participant observation and textual analysis, I examine the ways in which the institutional bodies of the rodeos, as well as some of the community members, construct and communicate definite ideas about gender and sexuality.

Using Connell’s concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity,’ I describe the Calgary Stampede as a place where the major tenets of that masculinity are represented, enacted, and thereby reinforced. This includes ideologically divided gender roles, a privileging of whiteness, and a compulsory heterosexuality. Conversely, I found the gay rodeo to be a site of great resistance to that hegemonic construct in terms of both gender and sexuality.

At an institutional level, the gay rodeo produces a space that refuses to confine itself to the strict confines that are dictated in straight rodeo. This subversion is quite extensive and can even be seen as an arena in which gender is detached from the sexed subject. That is to say that under these circumstances, the broad concept of masculinity is one that is accessible to everyone, regardless of physiology. On the individual level however, we can see how the ideas that guide the production of the gay rodeo are not fully assimilated by all of the people who attend the rodeos. Within gay rodeo culture, there remains a strong presence of hyper-masculinity complete with its sexism and homophobia. This presence limits the transformative possibilities that the gay rodeo otherwise holds.
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This thesis is dedicated to Wayne Jakino, Jeff Shaw, Robin Selte
and all of the brave "cowfolk" of the IGRA...
May your entry fees always be paid.
Chapter I

PASTIMES, PROPOSALS, AND POLITICS: OR, WHY GAY COWBOYS?

Well, it's bulls and blood
It's dust and mud
It's the roar of the Sunday crowd.
It's the white in his knuckles,
The gold in the buckle,
He'll win the next go 'round.
It's boots and chaps
And Cowboy hats
It's spurs and latigo.
It's the ropes and the reins
And the joy and the pain,
And they call the thing "rodeo"

(Bastian, 1991, "Rodeo")

A successful ride only lasts a matter of seconds. For me, there are few things more exciting than the opening of a bucking chute in a rodeo arena. In that split second the entire arena holds its collective breath. An animal erupts from the chute kicking and twisting, trying to remove the unwanted rider from its back. Sometimes the animal succeeds and sometimes it is the rider who prevails. A mere eight seconds holds the risk of injury, the hope of victory, the possibility of a paycheque and the agony of defeat. A mere eight seconds can lead to immortality as it has for American champions like Jim Shoulders, Donnie Gay and Ty Murray, as well as Canadians like Cody Snyder. In rare cases, a mere eight seconds has ended a life as it did for world champion, Lane Frost and Canadian bull rider, Glenn Keeley. We do not watch rodeos to see people get injured, but risk, danger and possibility make every spin and every kick part of a mesmerizing dance between two athletes - one human and one animal.

I have spent the last five years immersed in the world of rodeo to some degree or other. At some times I have simply been a spectator going to rodeos in major
centres, like Surrey and Calgary, as well as small town rodeos in places like Merritt, BC. At other times I have spent part of my summer traveling to several rodeos in British Columbia where I have worked as a vendor of cowboy hats and other western wear. In addition, I spent several years working at a Vancouver store that specializes in western wear and caters to a clientele made up of working cowboys and cowgirls, western enthusiasts, and 'city folk' who want to dress up for a local country music concert.

Unfortunately, the time that I have spent in the world of rodeo has also been a time in which I have found myself feeling socially uncomfortable and angry. I have encountered blatant racism, sexism and homophobia at levels that I do not often see in the 'liberal' confines of the university, and this atmosphere has often tainted my experience. In addition, there is a very firm definition about what it means to 'be a man' in the world of cowboys and cowgirls. This construction of masculinity, that prizes aggressiveness, competitiveness and individualism, is one to which I have never been able to conform. Combined with the oppressive attitudes that I have observed, the exaggerated embodiment of each of these attributes contributes to a social setting which sometimes appears to be incompatible with many of the values that inform the decisions that I make. I have continually wrestled with this conflict and tried to understand how I justify my participation in a subculture that has some elements that are so distasteful to me.

About five years ago, I came across an article in an entertainment magazine that told the story of a gay cowboy in the International Gay Rodeo Association. I read the article with interest but, initially, did not fully grasp the potential that this organization would hold for me. It was not until I had to write a funding proposal a few years later that I really looked again at the article. In that time, I had further developed an interest in the critical study of gender and sexuality and the article prompted me to think about a project that would attempt to deconstruct the notion of 'masculinity' at a gay rodeo.
This thesis is the result of that idea.

The work that is being presented here serves two major purposes. First, it is a direct response to the conflict that I have described. It is a very personal attempt to find a doorway into a world where my interests can be maintained, without a direct affront to my social values and my politics. When I began this project, I had the hope that I would find a rodeo that would alleviate the social concerns that I have with the larger rodeo community, while satisfying my desire to continue to attend and enjoy the sport of rodeo and other elements of the 'western lifestyle'.

Second, it is an opportunity to sociologically explore the ways in which the concept of 'masculinity' is understood, reproduced and contested. What makes the International Gay Rodeo Association so academically exciting for me is the bringing together of two conflicting stereotypes: the hypermasculine (and very heterosexual) construction of the 'cowboy' and the stereotype of the effeminate gay man. When these two constructs are brought together, the necessity that they be destabilized is evident. I embarked upon this project in an effort to find out how this destabilization is negotiated by the Gay Rodeo Association and the individuals who participate in the rodeos. I wanted to explore how the gay rodeo challenges common sense assumptions about 'cowboys', 'sexuality' and 'masculinity' as well as to examine how some of those assumptions and ideas were reproduced.

To address this question, I engaged in both participant observation and textual analysis. I traveled to Calgary twice in the summer of 2003; once to attend the gay rodeo and once to attend the Calgary Stampede. I also collected textual data from rodeo programs, mainstream and alternative newspapers, personal websites, novels and other sources, and used them in tandem with my observations.

Through the process of doing this research, I found that the Calgary Stampede...
produces gender and sexuality in ways that are very consistent with the form of masculinity that enjoys a hegemonic status in the world of rodeo. Through printed materials and the very structure of the rodeo, the Stampede offered a very heteronormative and hypermasculine vision of the 'cowboy' whose work sets him apart from the women who are constructed as beautiful, but not suited to work in the rodeo arena. The gay rodeo, on the other hand, worked very hard to counter these constructs. Through the same processes that the Stampede used to reinscribe heteronormative ideas of masculinity, the gay rodeo embarked upon a process of creating latitude within the categories of 'man' and 'woman' so that they were not constrained by ideas about 'masculinity', 'femininity' and 'sexuality'. Despite this, many in the gay rodeo continue to perform a masculinity that maintains some sexism and homophobia while others actively challenge those same prejudices.

I begin this work as someone who is deeply committed to applying a pro-feminist, queer-positive and anti-racist lens to this work. For me, this means that at every stage of the work, I attempt to reflect on my own position as a straight white man and to examine how that position might be influencing my thinking and my decisions. I seek to be aware of both the things that I am choosing to include as well as those that I decide to exclude from my analysis. Ultimately, to me it means that I am aware of my academic work as having the potential to act positively vis-a-vis the movement that seeks to bring greater social justice and equality to the world in which I live. This awareness has helped to shape and guide this thesis.

This work has also been shaped and informed by several bodies of existing academic literature. Theoretical work that has been developed in fields such as feminist theory, critical masculinities studies, and queer theory has grounded me academically and prepared me to do this work. I am also indebted to the researchers who have engaged in the sociological study of sport and the very few scholars who have examined rodeo and cowboys with an academic lens. I have drawn heavily from their
work and would have not have been able to produce this analysis without it.

While none of these academics have dedicated much time to the examination of gay rodeo, the apparent social paradox that emerges from the 'gay cowboy' has been addressed before in popular culture form. In a collection of short stories, Annie Proulx presents "Brokeback Mountain" about Ennis and a young rodeo cowboy named Jack. A summer spent herding sheep together is the beginning of a longterm love affair, despite their public presentation as two straight men (1999). Several films, such as "Stir Crazy" (1980), and "Midnight Cowboy" (1969) have also incorporated gay cowboys into their storylines. More recently, the animated television show "King of the Hill" (2003), and a CBC radio drama series ("Dudley Chronicles", 2003) have produced an episode each about the gay rodeo. However, while there are some examples of gay cowboys in popular culture, the world of mainstream rodeo remains one in which homophobia is prominent and acceptable and, as such, the gay cowboy remains largely absent from the popular imagination and popular culture (Allen, 1998:170).

Undoubtedly, the place that the 'gay cowboy' receives the most attention is within gay communities, where the cowboy has often been sexualized and fetishized as an iconic object of sexual fantasy and desire.

Of course, the 'cowboy' has also been a source of sexual fantasy outside of queer circles. In addition, the 'cowboy' has become an emblem of morality through the development of an unofficial set of rules that govern his acceptable behaviours, mannerisms, and sensibilities and which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. To best understand the development of the 'cowboy code', it is useful to begin with the origins of rodeo. It is common, within the popular imagination, to think of the rodeo as a link to an aspect of the history of the United States and Canada. This was certainly my belief as a spectator and vendor on the local rodeo circuit in British Columbia. I understood rodeo as a direct extension of the work that was done on ranches all over the Canadian and American 'west'. However, I later realized that this
understanding was incomplete and was indicative of the subscription to a myth that has been perpetuated through media, culture and the institution of rodeo itself. This will also be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Looking Ahead: An Overview of This Thesis

Chapter 2 of this thesis provides some important background information about rodeo. This chapter includes a brief history of rodeo, including the genesis of the gay rodeo association, as well as an overview of the various events that will form part of the analysis.

Chapter 3 is a review of the literature that is most relevant to this topic. The chapter is divided into three sections and addresses five areas of literature. In the first two sections I examine some of the literature that exists in the field of critical masculinities studies and queer theory. These sections provide some key theoretical ideas and concepts that form the basis of the rest of the thesis. Next I introduce some literature from the sociology of sport. Here, I specifically examine how ‘alternative sports’ have addressed the dominant constructs of gender. Fourth, I examine the existing academic literature on rodeo. Finally, I will survey the ways that academics have addressed and understood the archetype of the ‘cowboy’.

I begin chapter 4 by discussing the development of my personal standpoint from which I conducted this research. I then provide details of the methodology that I employed in carrying out this research. Finally, I discuss some of the successes, challenges, and shortcomings that I faced as a result of the methodological decisions that I made in planning and conducting this project.

I begin my analysis in chapter 5 where I examine the ways in which the Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association and the Calgary Stampede communicate ideas about gender and sexuality as institutional bodies. In addition to the data that I collected
through the participant observation components of my research, I examine the texts that have been produced by the institutions themselves.

Chapter 6 turns to the individuals that participate in rodeo. Through observation and data gathered from newspaper articles, personal websites, and several other sources, I examine how some of the individuals in rodeo understand and express their ideas about gender and sexuality.

Finally, in chapter 7, I offer some concluding thoughts. After summarizing the findings of my research, I make some suggestions for future research in the field.
Chapter II
CREATION OF A MYTH: A BRIEF HISTORY OF RODEO AND THE “COWBOY”

The concept of public exhibitions of humans and animals is certainly not unique to rodeo. In ancient Minoan civilization, people competed in bull-jumping, performing acrobatic leaps over the backs of bulls (Haney and Pearson, 1999: 309). Roman Coliseums were the sites of chariot races, while knights in medieval Europe exhibited their equestrian and physical skills in the joust. “Likewise Russian Cossacks and Arabian Bedouins were known for their daring horsemanship and (some) Native Americans also competed on horseback at their gatherings” (Ehringer and Wooden, 1996: 7). Modern day rodeos are yet another example of these practices in a different social, economic, and cultural context.

The mention of ‘Native Americans’ gives reason to pause before we engage in this examination of the history of rodeo. This history will begin with the frontier, ranching, and the emergence of the wild west show, leaving aside the long history of First Nations that inhabited the land, now called the Americas. The myth of the frontier, in which rodeo is heavily immersed, is one that presents the Americas as empty land, devoid of civilization and free for the taking (Furniss, 1997: 10). This aspect of the frontier depends on the marginalization or complete erasure of the ‘Indian’ from the pages of history. Furniss writes about the Williams Lake Museum and the display that highlights the local Stampede. One image depicts two men in a chariot race but forgets (or refuses) to identify them as Shuswap (1997: 37). Rodeo has a tendency to do the same thing. The celebration of ‘our’ (imagined) collective roots on small frontier ranches will rarely acknowledge the history of disenfranchisement, disappropriation, and assimilation of the first people of this continent. Being from British Columbia, I am especially aware of the large amount of territory that is occupied by non-Aboriginal Canadians despite the fact that, in many areas of B.C., treaties have not yet been signed.
and the land has never been ceded by the First Nations.\footnote{There is a large and growing literature about land policy and colonialism. For instance, see Cole Harris’ recent book “Making Native Space” (2002).}

Indeed, the history of the rodeo begins with the European colonization of North America. Spanish settlers in the lands that are referred to as the American Southwest established cattle ranches in the late seventeenth century. As American expansion continued towards California, the Spanish colonizers were displaced to the south. The newly arrived Anglo settlers continued the practice of ranching in the American West, on both family ranches and corporate ranches owned by individuals in the East and in England (Stoeltje, 1993: 144). Like the Spanish \textit{vaqueros} before them, the new colonizers held festivals which included music, dancing, gambling with cards and dice, and games that exercised certain skills such as riding and roping.\footnote{The word “rodeo” is itself taken from the \textit{vaqueros}. In Spanish, the word \textit{rodear} means to “encircle” or to “round-up”. The first “cowboy-fun” would have been held in the spring when many cowboys would come together and the entire herd was brought in for tagging and branding. Branding parties are also referred to as the Spring round-up and, to this day, while some rodeos call themselves “stampede”, “rodeo”, or “exhibition, others still refer to themselves as a “round-up”(Allen, 1998b: 70).} Some of these festivals were simple exhibitions and some were competitions between individuals or teams from different ranches (Stoeltje, 1993: 146). In this sense, the origins of rodeo lie on the frontier ranches of North America. However, the transition from highly localized events to a broader phenomenon, that was national in scope, came with the genesis of the wild west show and the creation of the character of the ‘American Cowboy’.

Wild Bill Cody created the first wild west show in North Platte, Nebraska, as a Fourth of July celebration in 1882. This show included shooting, riding, bronc busting, trick riding, fancy roping, and a ‘Grand Entry’ (Ehringer and Wooden, 1996:11). This addition of pageantry, which will be described in more detail, has become a hallmark of rodeo. Soon, other wild west shows, such as the “101 Ranch Wild West Show” and “Pawnee Bill’s Wild West Show”, emerged and developed other traditions such as the rodeo parade and events such as steer wrestling (Ehringer and Wooden, 1996:11).

In the early days, many people became involved in both forms of entertainment.
It was a Canadian trick roper in the 101 Ranch show named Guy Weadick who arrived in Calgary in 1912 and decided to hold the first ever Calgary Stampede. Offering the largest ‘purse’ in rodeo, Weadick attracted competitors from Canada, the United States and Mexico (LeCompte, 1993: 49). In her work on Rodeo Cowgirls, Mary Lou LeCompte highlights the fact that female athletes played a very important role at the original Calgary Stampede. “It created the first real cowgirl superstars, and helped establish women’s place in professional rodeo” (LeCompte, 1993: 49).

The role of women in rodeo has shifted substantially over time. Currently, the mainstream professional rodeos provide only one event for cowgirls. And, although the gap between the purses for men’s and women’s events is shrinking, the role of women in rodeo today is far smaller than what it once was. The period from the early part of the twentieth century until sometime around 1929, saw cowgirls competing regularly in professional rodeo, sharing the spotlight with the men. In fact, female rodeo athletes were far ahead of other female athletes of their day, in terms of both wages and celebrity status (LeCompte, 1993).

Mary Lou LeCompte attributes the loss of that spotlight over the following ten years to two major events (1993: 142). The first was the departure of Col. W.T. Johnson from the world of rodeo. Johnson was a promoter and had actively supported the role of women in rodeo, even when it was being threatened. The second was the ascension of Gene Autry as a major rodeo promoter. One of his lasting legacies was the standardizing of rodeos through an emphasis on five major events, none of which were open to female competitors. There were other factors as well. In 1929, Bonnie McCarroll, was thrown and trampled to death in a saddle bronc competition at the Pendleton Round-Up in Oregon. This event became the justification for banning “Cowgirls Bronc Riding” from Pendleton and many other rodeos on the circuit (LeCompte, 1993: 94). Another major barrier for women in rodeo was the creation of

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*Women were banned from most rodeos even though, at that time, there were several recorded instances of men being killed in rodeo, without the suggestion that men no longer compete.*
the Cowboys Turtle Association (CTA) which helped to solidify the masculinization of professional rodeo by securing the roles of men.

The Turtles were created as a response to the Rodeo Association of America (RAA) which was a group of rodeo boards, sponsors, and stock contractors (Allen, 1998b: 74). To protect themselves against the RAA, a group of cowboys formed a union to exert greater pressure on the organizers. However, these two adversarial groups reached a lasting agreement in 1936. “The combined power of the two patriarchies ensured the survival of both, but it left the cowgirls in a very vulnerable position” (LeCompte, 1993:114). And, from that position, they were virtually removed from professional rodeo competition, leaving it an arena completely dominated by men.

Since that time however, women have continued to compete in rodeo. Through amateur rodeos and the creation of groups such as the “Women’s Professional Rodeo Association” (WPRA) and the “Canadian Girls Rodeo Association” (CGRA), women have continued to rope and ride despite being marginalized by the mainstream body of rodeo. Recently, a small amount of progress has been made in returning cowgirls to a more equal place in professional circles. “Women’s Barrel Racing” has become a fully recognized event on the professional circuit and at the National Finals Rodeo (NFR) and the competitors now earn more than women have ever earned in the history of the sport (LeCompte, 1993: 196). Another interesting note is that, in May 2003, Kaila Mussell became the first woman to ever compete against men at a PRCA-sanctioned saddle bronc competition (Ramsey, 2003: A1). Some women have also competed against men in PRCA rodeos, in places such as Cheyenne, Wyoming (Allen, 1998b: 74).

Whether these remain isolated incidents or become a larger pattern of women competing against men remains to be seen.

In 1944, eight years after the formation of the Turtles in the United States, a

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5 I was lucky enough to be in attendance at the Cloverdale Rodeo the night that this historic performance occurred. It should be noted that this incident went by largely unmentioned. In fact, it was not until I read the newspaper the following day that I was made aware that I had witnessed an important “first” for women in rodeo.
group of Canadian cowboys formed the “Cowboy’s Insurance Association.” Over time, that name evolved into the “Canadian Rodeo Cowboys Association” (1965) and eventually, in 1980, the “Canadian Professional Rodeo Association” (CPRA) under which name it still operates. The CPRA is a regulating and sanctioning body that oversees, promotes, organizes, and controls professional rodeo in Canada. In 2004-05, the CPRA will sanction fifty-seven rodeos as well as the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR) that is held every year in Edmonton, Alberta. These rodeos are held in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan and include rodeos such as the Cloverdale Rodeo and the Calgary Stampede. The CPRA has also signed an agreement with its American counterpart, the “Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association” (PRCA). This letter formalizes an agreement that allows competitors to be members of both organizations and allows for championship points to be transferred from CPRA events to PRCA points. In a sense, although it remains autonomous, the CPRA could be considered a satellite organization of the PRCA.

The next forty years witnessed continued growth for rodeo in North America. Increased sponsorship, the development of varsity rodeo programs at some universities and television coverage all contributed to that growth. More recently, Bull Riding, which has always been the marquee event of rodeo, has taken on a life of its own. With the advent and popularity of the “X-treme Games,” the danger of Bull Riding has found a niche in the North American market. Founded by PRCA champion Tuff Hedeman, a new organization called the “Professional Bull Riders Association” (PBR) has emerged as a major player in the world of rodeo.

Over time, a set of values and characteristics have become associated with cowboys. As Allen states, “these cowboy characteristics include individualism, courage, disregard for personal pain and injury, innovation, loyalty to the cowboy group, reticence, plain speech, humor, anti-intellectualism, and a strong belief in equality and

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6 The Turtles have changed their name twice since their formation in 1936. Most recently, they have become the PRCA.
democracy" (1998b: 6). This is what is commonly referred to as the ‘cowboy code’.

In addition, the 1980s were a period in which rodeo became heavily involved in a reaction to the changes and ‘liberalism’ of the 1960s and 1970s. Rodeo and the myth of the West were constructed as places of purity, safe from the corruption of the modern society that had ‘lost touch with traditional Christian values’. A part of that reaction was the emergence of a strong Christian element in rodeo with public prayers before the events, Christian cowboy associations, and a Sunday service called Cowboy Church. “The lessons, taken from Christian fundamentalism, promoted a clear-cut set of conservative social behaviors” (Burbick, 2002: 184). Among these behaviors and attitudes is a distinct adherence to a heterosexual norm that includes a high level of homophobia (Burbick, 2002: 207).

It is important to note that rodeo culture is not bound by national, state or provincial borders. While there may certainly be some variations, there is an overarching ethos that exists across geographic lines.

...North American cowboy and rodeo culture thrives in an uninterrupted zone stretching from northern Mexico to the Canadian prairie provinces. Rodeo and cowboy culture together form a unifying force that knows no national or ethnic boundaries... When you’re a cowboy, you’re a cowboy.

(Allen, 1998b: 13)

Given the privileging of whiteness that became especially pronounced within rodeo circles since the early 1980s (Burbick, 2002: 177), the claim about traversing ethnic lines is debatable. Nevertheless, the point is clear. The division that exists along the 49th parallel is a very weak one when it comes to rodeo culture and competition. Included in that are the beliefs about what it means to be a ‘cowboy’. And, as it has been suggested, a major part of a cowboy’s identity is his assumed, and indeed unquestioned, heterosexuality.
RAINBOW RIDERS: THE ADVENT AND HISTORY OF GAY RODEO

This assumption, that ‘gay’ and ‘cowboy’ are mutually exclusive categories, can not however stand up against any kind of scrutiny. “There no doubt existed homosexual working cowboys in the nineteenth century, and homosexual rodeo competitors appear regularly today in segregated rodeos throughout the West” (Allen, 1998b: 170). In fact, it is known that there are closeted gay men who participate in straight rodeo as well (Ehringer and Wooden, 1996: 214); however, as important as their stories are, the lives and experiences of these men will have to wait for another time. What can be said for certain is that, in 1976, the official history of gay rodeo began in Nevada.

The origins of gay rodeo lie in an attempt to raise money to support the “Muscular Dystrophy Association” and to challenge some of the stereotypes about homosexuality. This occurred in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots in New York City in June of 1969 which marked the beginning of the modern gay and lesbian rights movement in both Canada (Kinsman, 1996: 288) and the United States (Retter, 2000: 196). In Canada, that decade saw the emergence of gay liberation groups and newspapers (Ross, 1995: 30-1) as well as other gay sports clubs (Pronger, 1992: 219). It is not surprising that the gay rodeo association, which has both political and social dimensions, emerged in that same era.

Despite difficulties in securing stock for the show, Phil Ragsdale organized the first National Reno Gay Rodeo (RNGR), in which over a hundred and twenty-five contestants participated. The following year, Ragsdale formed the Comstock Gay Rodeo Association and included some of the pageantry of mainstream rodeo with performances by gay dancing groups and western-themed parties. In the following

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7 There are certainly closeted queer women as well but there was no mention of this in any of the research that I found.
8 As there is almost nothing written about gay rodeo, the information in this section comes overwhelmingly from the International Gay Rodeo Association’s website (www.igra.com). Other sources are cited where they have been used.
In 1981, the newly crowned Miss Reno National Gay Rodeo approached a representative from Colorado, and suggested that the Colorado contingent need not have shown up considering their poor performance. To this, Wayne Jakino reportedly replied, “Yeah, but check us out next year.” The following month, Jakino and ninety-three others, formed the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association (CGRA) with Jakino elected as founding president. As promised, Jakino and the CGRA returned to Reno the following year as a group of over four hundred. Within this group, there were dancers, the first ever mounted gay drill team and more contestants than from any other state. At the 1982 edition of the Reno rodeo, contestants appealed for standardized rules to be developed, as the rules were changing from one rodeo to the next. However, they would have to wait several more years before this occurred. The development that did occur 1982, was the support of the group from Texas, to have Colorado host another gay rodeo. As Texas had a much larger population base from which to draw, it seemed imperative that they commit to attend if Jakino and his group were to put on a show in their home state.

Although the CGRA supported the idea of hosting a rodeo, the difficulty came in trying to secure rodeo grounds to hold the event. Just as Ragsdale had found that stock contractors were unwilling to lease stock to a gay rodeo, Jakino found that no suitable site seemed to ‘have an opening’. It wasn’t until a lawyer pointed to one site’s non-discrimination clause that a site ‘became’ available for the following summer. And, in June of 1983, Colorado became the second state to hold a gay rodeo. True to their word, a large contingent came from Texas as did a group from California.

Over the next two years, there were two major developments in gay rodeo. The first was the creation of several more Gay Rodeo Associations. The “Texas Gay Rodeo Association” (TGRA) was formed several weeks after the first Colorado rodeo and after
a very successful gay pride celebration in Houston. 1984 saw the formation of the “Golden State Gay Rodeo Association” (GSGRA) in California and the “Arizona Gay Rodeo Association” (AGRA) in Arizona. One year later, the “Oklahoma Gay Rodeo Association” (OGRA) became the fifth gay rodeo association in the United States.

The second major development was that, in 1984, Reno hosted its final rodeo. Little information is available about the demise of this event. There was a dispute between the NRGR organizers, the fairgrounds and a hotel. The IRS became involved and, although the rodeo’s attendance was over 10,000, the ninth installment would be the last due to ‘financial difficulties’. However, Ragsdale’s fundraiser had laid the groundwork for a major development in gay rodeo.

In 1985, the five existing gay rodeo associations formed an umbrella organization called the “International Gay Rodeo Association” (IGRA). The major orders of business were to formalize a set of rodeo rules (as the competitors had asked in 1982), to set a schedule of five rodeos and to elect Wayne Jakino as founding-president. IGRA also adopted its guiding principles which are,

> to promote and nurture, through fellowship, the sport of rodeo within the gay community; to foster a positive image of gay cowboys and cowgirls within all communities; to provide anyone with education and training in the production of, and participation in the preservation of our western heritage.

(IGRA Website)

The following year, the IGRA added three new member associations$^{10}$ and held the first “IGRA Finals Rodeo” in California. By 1991, the number of member associations had

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$^9$ The use of the word “our” is a good example of the common subscription to the myth of the west, that was mentioned earlier. Using Benedict Anderson’s (1983) terminology, one can see how this group is imagining itself as a community. The notion of a shared history silences and excludes those who do not share that history, while erasing any inequalities that exist within the group. This simultaneous act of exclusion and masking will be taken up again in my analysis.

$^{10}$ The three new member associations were the “Kansas Gay Rodeo Association (KGRA), the “Missouri Gay Rodeo Association (MGRA) and the “New Mexico Gay Rodeo Association” (NMGRA)
grown dramatically,11 Country and Western dance competitions had been institutionalized and the total number of divisional rodeos had grown to seven. Another important development was the acquisition of the IGRA’s first sponsor, when the Miller Brewing Company decided to support all of the rodeos on the IGRA circuit. In 1992, the IGRA made forays into Canada, when British Columbia was included in the “Northwest Gay Rodeo Association” (NWGRA) which had previously been composed of representation from Washington, Idaho and Oregon.

In 1993, the IGRA grew again. Among the three new chapters was the fledgling “Alberta Gay Rodeo Association” (AGRA).12 This group actually originated in 1991 and spent two years securing sponsors and preparing to host an event. Prior to IGRA membership, AGRA produced the Canadian National Gay Rodeo in 1993. This unsanctioned rodeo was held with “two cows, some pigs and sheep as livestock” (2003 CRIR Official Program: 10). Later that summer, AGRA became a member of IGRA although, as their acronym was the same as that of the “Arizona Gay Rodeo Association,” the Alberta group eventually agreed to change their name to the “Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association.” In 1994, Calgary hosted the first “Canadian Rockies International Rodeo” (CRIR) and, in doing so, became the first non-American city to host an IGRA-sanctioned event. ARGRA became an active member and, when the NWGRA disbanded,13 decided to include British Columbia within its membership.14 In 1993, ARGRA hosted the tenth annual CRIR and has been selected to be the 2005 host of the twenty-first annual IGRA convention.


12 The other two groups were the “Heartland Gay Rodeo Association” (HGRA) in Nebraska and the “Illinois Gay Rodeo Association” (ILGRA) in Illinois.

13 Over the course of IGRA history, six rodeo associations have disbanded. The SSGRA eventually reemerged as the “Nevada Gay Rodeo Association” (NGRA) and, as mentioned above, British Columbia found a new home in ARGRA.

14 ARGRA also officially represents Manitoba and Saskatchewan.
While all of this has been happening north of the forty-ninth parallel, IGRA has also continued to grow. Despite the loss of several affiliated groups, there are now twenty-four member associations that collectively put on twenty-three rodeos annually, in addition to the IGRA Finals Rodeo. These groups represent twenty-seven states, Washington D.C., and four Canadian provinces (www.igra.com), and there are plans to expand into Ontario and Australia (Ehringer and Wooden, 1996: 212). IGRA also has a number of large sponsorship deals\textsuperscript{15} and, as of 1996, had redistributed over 1.5 million American dollars to charities through the events that they, and their member associations, host (Ehringer and Wooden, 1996: 212). In order to discuss rodeo any further, it is important to understand its events and other components.

**ROPING AND ROUGHSTOCK STRAIGHT UP: CPRA RODEO EVENTS**

The events at CPRA-sanctioned rodeos vary. That is, not all events will be offered at all CPRA rodeos. For the purposes of this paper, I will only discuss those that were performed at the 2003 Calgary Stampede. In addition, these descriptions will be cursory and will not identify some of the more technical aspects of the event except where that technicality will be contrasted with the events of the IGRA rodeos. The 2003 version of the CPRA "Objects, By-Laws and Rules" divides the events into four categories: The 'Roughstock Events', the 'Timed Events', 'Ladies Barrel Racing'\textsuperscript{16} and 'Other Events'.

There are four distinct Roughstock events in the CPRA. Each of these events requires a cowboy to ride an animal for eight seconds. Each ride is scored out of one hundred possible points. Fifty of those points are awarded based on the performance of the animal and fifty are awarded based on the skill of the rider. For each event, riders

\textsuperscript{15} Among its sponsorship deals, the IGRA has agreements with "Bud Light", "Bacardi Silver" (both products of Anheuser-Busch) and American Airlines.

\textsuperscript{16} As indicated by its name, barrel racing was the only event in which women competed at the Calgary Stampede. Although the rules appear to allow for women in the roughstock events, and some women have participated recently, the roughstock, timed and other events remain the domain of men.
are matched to their animal by means of a random draw. Scores from each go ‘round’ are added together to determine the cowboy’s final score. The person with the highest score wins the event.

The most glamorized roughstock event is ‘bull riding’. For the duration of the ride, the cowboy may only grip the bull by means of a ‘bull rope’, that he holds with one hand, and by gripping with his legs. Should the cowboy touch the bull with his ‘free hand’ or fall off the bull before the eight seconds has expired, he is disqualified and receives no score. A variation of this event exists as a beginner’s level for boys who wish to eventually ride bulls. ‘Boy’s steer riding’ follows the same rules as bull riding with one exception. Apart from being on animals that can be as much as half the size of the bulls, the riders have the option of riding with either one or two hands.

‘Bareback riding’ involves a cowboy riding a horse with only a ‘rigging’ for one hand. As with bull riding, one hand must remain free at all times. If the cowboy touches the animal, the equipment or himself with the free hand, he is disqualified. The rider is scored on his ability to spur the horse above the front shoulders, in rhythm with the bucking motion. There is also an event called ‘novice bareback riding’ that operates under the same rules. This exists as an opportunity for younger and less experienced riders to gain the experience and earnings required to compete in the bareback event.

The final roughstock event is the ‘saddle bronc riding’ competition. Similar to the bareback event, saddle bronc allows the rider to use a saddle. Without a rigging however, the rider holds onto a long thick rein that is attached to the horse’s halter. Saddle bronc riders must also spur; however, the spurring motion is somewhat different than that in bareback. While bareback riders spur forward from a near-horizontal position, saddle bronc riders sit more upright and draw their legs to the rear of the saddle and then extend them down and forward. There is also a ‘novice’ event

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17 A “go ‘round” is one round of competition. Different rodeos will have different numbers of go ‘rounds depending on the duration of the rodeo. Most rodeos will only be made up of two or three go ‘rounds. The Calgary Stampedede consists of four over the course of ten days.
18 A rigging is essentially a handle that is tied to the horse near its front shoulders.
19 This rein is commonly referred to as a “shank rope”.
19
that serves the same purpose as the novice bareback.

There are two ‘Timed Events’ that are sanctioned by the CPRA: ‘tie-down roping’ and ‘steer wrestling’. For each, the cowboy begins on horseback, in the ‘roping box’, next to a chute in which an animal has been loaded. A device called the ‘barrier’ is set up to ensure that the animal gets a predetermined head start. If the cowboy fails to give the animal enough space, he is assessed a ten second penalty. The person with the fastest time wins the go ‘round. Cumulative times are calculated to determine the winner of the rodeo.

‘Tie-down roping’ has the cowboy chasing a calf that is released from the chute. To score successfully, the cowboy must make a head catch with a lasso that is attached to his saddle. Once the catch has been made, the cowboy will dismount and follow the lasso to the calf. The calf is then ‘flanked’ and tied with the ‘pigging string’ that the cowboy has carried in his mouth. At that point, the timer is stopped but the calf must remain tied on a slack rope for six seconds. If the calf manages to free itself, the ride is disqualified and a ‘no time’ is assessed.

In the ‘steer wrestling’ event, the cowboy chases a steer from the chute. Another cowboy, called the ‘hazer’ will ride alongside the steer to ensure that it does not veer too far off to the right. The competing cowboy rides along the left side of the steer, slides almost off his saddle and grabs the steer by the horns. Once he has the steer, he releases himself from his horse, digs his heels into the ground for leverage and tries to ‘dog’, or wrestle, the steer to the ground. Once all four of the steer’s legs are facing the same direction, the ride is complete and the timer is stopped.

‘Ladies barrel racing’ is placed in a category by itself. This event is the only event

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20 Tie-Down Roping is also sometimes called “Calf Roping”. I will use the term “Tie-Down Roping” as it is distinctly different than the versions of calf roping that are used in IGRA rodeos.

21 The length of the barrier rope is determined by the length of the arena.

22 The lasso must be tightened around the calf’s neck. If the calf runs through the lasso’s loop and/or if it is caught by the legs, a disqualification will occur and a “no time” will be assessed to the cowboy.

23 This simply means to flip the calf onto its back so that its legs can be tied

24 Also commonly referred to as “Bulldogging”.

25 The Hazer and the competitor are not a team. Steer wrestlers take turns hazing for each other throughout the competition but the score is for the competitor only.
in which women compete at most mainstream rodeos, although recent exceptions have already been noted. In this event, cowgirls navigate their horses through a 'cloverleaf pattern' around three barrels that are placed between ninety and a hundred and five feet from one another. The ride lasts approximately sixteen to seventeen seconds and is measured by an 'electronic eye'. For every barrel that is knocked over, the cowgirl is assessed a five second penalty.

There are three competitions that are placed in the 'Other Events' category. Like the 'novice' and 'boys' categories in the roughstock events, these events are not considered the 'main events' of the rodeo. For instance, at the Calgary Stampede, the competitors in these events do not compete for $50,000 purses as do the competitors in the more prominent events.

'Team roping', the only team event in rodeo, is a second form of roping competition. A team of two cowboys on horseback work together to immobilize a steer. The 'Header' must catch the steer by the head, neck, or horns. Once he has done so, he directs his horse to the left and 'turns' the steer so that its hind legs are facing his partner. The 'Heeler' then throws a lasso under the steer's hind feet and pulls when the steer steps into the loop. The cowboys finish by turning their horses to face each other with the steer immobilized in between them. If the Heeler only catches one foot, a five second penalty is assessed.

Unlike the events listed above, in 'cow milking' all cowboys participate at the same time. Each cowboy is allowed one helper. The mounted cowboy, who is the competitor, is the 'Roper' and the helper, who is on foot, is called the 'Mugger'. There are different ways of starting the event, but the most common is that all of the cowboys start at one end of the arena and a herd of about twenty head of cattle is brought into the other end. Once the signal is given, the mounted cowboys rush toward the herd and attempt to rope one of cows. The Mugger runs to the roped cow and grabs it around the neck and horns, covering its eyes, in an attempt to calm and still it. The
Roper then dismounts and attempts to extract a small amount of milk from the cow’s udder. Once successful, the Roper runs to a predetermined spot and hands the bottle to the judges. Cowboys are ranked in the order in which they hand their bottles to the judges.

In some ways, ‘wild horse racing’ is very similar to cow milking although in these races the competitor is allowed to have two helpers and none of the cowboys begins the competition on horseback. The horses that are used in this event are each outfitted with a halter and a halter rope although they are not ‘halter broke.’\(^\text{26}\) When the signal is given, the cowboys attempt to get a hold of one of the horses. The two helpers hold the horse while the competitor tries to fasten a saddle to the horse’s back. Once secure, the cowboy mounts the horse and attempts to ride it across a predetermined line. Cowboys are ranked in the order in which they cross that line.

These are the events that one is most likely to see at a CPRA event. Smaller rodeos may not have all of the events. Particularly the ‘novice’, ‘boys,’ and ‘other’ events may be lacking at any given rodeo. It is also very likely that non-CPRA rodeos will draw almost exclusively from these events in scheduling their events.

WITH A TWIST: RODEO EVENTS AT THE IGRA

The events held at IGRA rodeos are very similar to those found at CPRA rodeos, with some exceptions. Undoubtedly, the greatest difference between the two is that, while women are quite limited in CPRA rodeo, there are men’s and women’s categories in all events at the IGRA.\(^\text{27}\) Women participate in the bull riding and men race the barrels. The events in the IGRA are also divided into four categories: ‘Roughstock’, ‘Roping’, ‘Speed,’ and ‘Camp’.

\(^{26}\) When a horse becomes accustomed to wearing a halter, it is considered “halter broke”. It is in this sense that the horses in this event are considered “wild”.

\(^{27}\) Why the gay rodeo took this step is unclear. There is no indication that women played key roles in the formation of the IGRA and no indication as to whether this particular decision was politically, socially or otherwise motivated. In terms of this analysis however, this is a key element of gay rodeo.
The Roughstock events are bull riding, steer riding and bareback bronc riding. The rules are similar to those found in professional rodeos with two notable differences. First, riders have the option of using two hands in the bareback event. Each of the two judges deducts five points for this infraction but the rider is not disqualified. The second major difference is that to make a qualified ride, a competitor must stay on for six seconds as opposed to eight. In terms of the animals, the quality of roughstock is comparable with that used in other amateur rodeos (Ehringer and Wooden, 1996: 213). Similar differences exist in the roping events.

At IGRA events, there are three roping events: ‘calf roping on foot’, ‘break-away calf roping,’ and ‘team roping’. Calf roping on foot is an event that exists to allow newcomers the chance to participate in the rodeo. The competitor stands in the roping box, next to the chute, and attempts to rope the calf as it is released. Where tie-down roping, in the PRCA, requires a ‘head-catch’, no such stipulations are put on this event. However, it is break-away roping that most resembles tie-down. The difference is that, rather than tying the calf down after a successful catch, in break-away, the lasso is released by the competitor once the catch has been made. IGRA rules for team roping are identical to those of the CPRA, except that the Header has two chances to make the head-catch.

Speed events are only represented by barrel racing in PRCA rodeos. In addition to the barrels, IGRA events also include ‘pole bending’ and ‘flag racing’. Pole bending involves steering a horse through a slalom course both out and back to the starting point. For every pole that is knocked over, a five second penalty is added to the contestant’s score. Flag racing is an event in which a rider begins by grabbing a flag from a bucket, that is placed on top of a barrel, at one corner of the arena. S/he must then ride around a pole, that is located mid-way across the far end of the arena, and then deposit the flag in another bucket that is placed on top of a barrel, directly across the arena from the starting point. If the flag does not remain in the bucket and/or if the
bucket falls from the barrel, the rider is disqualified.

Camp events are quite specific to gay rodeo. ‘Wild goat dressing’ is an event that allows anyone to participate. A goat is tethered, on a ten foot rope, fifty feet from a team of two competitors, one of whom is carrying a pair of ‘jockey style’ underwear. When the signal is given, the team runs toward the goat. The competitor who is not carrying the underwear, stands above the goat and lifts its hind legs in the air while the other competitor slides the jockeys onto the goat’s legs. The first participant then pulls the underwear up to the goat’s tailbone. The team runs back to the starting point at which time the clock is stopped.

Another two person event is ‘steer decorating.’ In this event, the steer begins in the bucking chute with a twenty-five foot rope attached to its horns. One member of the Deco team stands ten feet from the chute, holding onto the rope. The other team member stands forty feet from the chute, waiting for the signal from the official. When the signal is given, and the chute opens, the team member runs from the forty foot line and tries to tie a ribbon onto the steer’s tail. The team member who is holding the rope tries to immobilize the steer by moving along the rope to the steer’s head and grabbing onto the steer’s horns and covering its eyes. S/he will then unfasten the rope once the ribbon has been tied. The timer is stopped once the rope has been removed and a team member touches the timer who is in the arena.

The final event is ‘wild drag racing’. This event involves three team members: a cowboy, a cowgirl and a third member, of any gender, who must be in “female-type drag clothing and a wig” (IGRA Rulebook, 2004: 53). The steer begins as it did for ‘steer deco’ and the cowgirl begins at the ten foot line, holding onto the rope. The cowboy stands at the forty foot line and the “drag” begins at a line that is set seventy feet from the chute. When the chute is opened, all three team members try to move the steer over the seventy foot line. Once all four hooves are across, the ‘drag’ mounts the steer and must ride it back across the finish line. The time stops when all four hooves cross.

28 Commonly called “Steer Deco”.

24
the line.

These crowd-pleasing events are held at every IGRA rodeo and they form the major focus of the rodeo experience. However, there are many other aspects that exist and that play very important roles in either the production or experience of rodeo.

Working The Arena: noncompetitive Participants in Rodeo

Upon attending a rodeo, one will quickly notice that there are many more people than those that compete and that there is more involved in the day than the competition itself. Again, this description will be kept as brief as possible and will only address those aspects that will become relevant for my analysis of an IGRA event. While a great deal goes on outside of the arena, some very significant people work in the arena with the cowboys and cowgirls.

There are several people who work to facilitate and organize the events and to protect the competitors in the arena. The Chute Boss organizes all of the Roughstock events from the arena floor. S/he makes some important final decisions and ensures that the animals are loaded into the chutes properly. The Chute Boss inspects all of the stock and must have a good deal of experience with animals and with rodeo. Two ‘pick-up men’ are also in the arena during the roughstock events. Their main role is in the bucking horse events in which they will each ride along one side the bucking horse after the ride has ended. The contestant will slide onto the horse of one of the Pick-Up Men while the other will unfasten the cinch that is fastened around the horse’s mid-section. In bull riding, the pick-up men may help to get the bull out of the arena but usually that is left to the Bull Fighters. The Bull Fighters are often, and erroneously, called rodeo clowns. Usually two in numbers, they will be in the arena during the bull

In the final section of this chapter, I use the pronoun ‘s/he’ to refer to the people performing certain tasks at the rodeo. This is not to suggest that these roles are equally carried out by both men and women at the gay and straight rodeos. Rather, it acknowledges that the gender of the individual is not specified by the rodeo associations. A gendered analysis of these roles will be provided in chapter 5.
and steer events. Although they are dressed in baggy pants and wear ‘clown’ make-up,\(^{30}\) their major function is to distract the bull once the rider has come off, so that the rider can get away safely. Often, a third person in clown make-up will perform as a ‘Barrelman’.

Unlike the Bull Fighters, the Barrelman does play the role of the entertainer. Often, S/he will also perform as a ‘Rodeo Clown’ in an intermission show. Other forms of entertainment also exist in the rodeo. A legacy from the wild west shows, quite often there will be additional acts such as Trick-Riders, Hoop Dancers,\(^{31}\) Fancy-Ropers, Chariot Races or some other form of entertainment. There is also the ‘grand entry’ which is the very beginning of any rodeo. National flags, rodeo association flags and/or sponsors’ flags are paraded in the ring. Often this is done by a group on horseback who carry the flags while performing choreographed patterns to music. Along with the grand entry, there is usually the presentation of the ‘rodeo royalty’. The individuals selected to be in the ‘rodeo court’ are winners of contests that are run by the local, divisional, and/or national rodeo associations that produce the rodeo. In addition to what has been mentioned, rodeos are never held without some form of celebration surrounding them. Barn dances and rodeo parades are almost universal and, in some cases, the rodeo will be surrounded by a fair and a midway.

Although it has been lengthy, this remains a skeletal description of rodeo. These are the pieces that, when assembled, produce a ritualistic event that has been occurring in some form for over a hundred and twenty years. My task is to develop a deeper analytical understanding of the meanings that are embedded in these events and rituals. In order to do this, I will draw on some existing literature that deals with issues and/or topics that are connected to this project.

\(^{30}\) Hence the nickname “Greasepaint Warriors”.

\(^{31}\) There is room for an interesting discussion regarding the portrayal of First Nations in rodeo. The seemingly tokenistic inclusion of a hoop dancer at the Calgary Stampede (where First Nations are largely marginalized and ignored) is reminiscent of Daniel Francis’ assertion that the European imagination creates many different guises for the ‘Indian’, in order to serve changing ‘needs’ (1992).
Chapter III

SETTING THE SCENE: A REVIEW OF SOME RELEVANT LITERATURE

The IGRA as a venue, and the very concept of the ‘gay cowboy’ seems an ideal place to question and problematize the ways in which a good portion of Canadian society ‘imagines’ sexualities, masculinities, and sport. Upon initiating research, I discovered that the IGRA had not yet been approached as a subject of research. However, there is an increasingly large body of literature that is relevant to the area being examined. There are five main areas of inquiry that I will examine, and draw on, in order to frame this research: critical masculinities studies, queer theory, critical sociology of sport (that specifically addresses gender and/or sexuality), work that has examined rodeo, and work that has examined the cowboy as an archetype in the public imagination.

What Makes A ‘Man’: A Look at Critical Masculinities Studies

The critical study of masculinities has recently emerged as an important element of gender studies. Informed by, and drawing on, a good deal of the feminist literature that has been produced over the years, masculinities studies have tried to better understand the ways that the categories of ‘man’ and ‘masculinity’ are constructed, understood, and performed.

My perspective begins with the fairly well established notion that masculinity is a social construct. “Biology determines whether we are male or female; culture determines whether what it means to be male or female,” and what sorts of behaviours and personality attributes are appropriate for each gender role (Strate, 2001: 505). While some still utilize a sociobiological lens to understand men, this seems to be lacking.

This analysis overlooks the births of intersexed children which complicate the very binary of ‘man’ and ‘woman’.  

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especially considering the diverse ways that people have understood masculinity over geographic and temporal distances (Whitehead, 2002: 16). Indeed, it is this diversity of constructions that led R.W. Connell to develop one of the key concepts in this field.

'Hegemonic masculinity' draws from Gramsci’s notion of ‘hegemony’ as an explanation for the ‘cultural dynamic’ by which a dominant group in society maintains its control and status (Connell, 1995: 77). It refers to the particular construction of masculinity that enjoys privilege in a specific time and a specific society, group, or social context. This hegemonic role is always open to contestation and different masculinities will occupy it in different circumstances. However, the core of ‘masculinity’, as a concept that still enjoys an enormous amount of currency in mainstream society, is constant.

Drawing on Lacanian semiotics, ‘masculinity’ can be understood as being constructed as that which is not feminine. The two concepts exist only in exclusive relation to one another; what one is, the other isn’t. “Masculine identity is born in the renunciation of the feminine, not in the direct affirmation of the masculine, which leaves masculine gender identity tenuous and fragile” (Kimmel, 2001: 274). Thus an extensive set of oppositional binaries is constructed to define the terms. We are taught that men are strong and women are weak; that men think analytically (rationally) while women think intuitively (emotionally); that men are aggressive and women are passive. These binaries are not only exclusive but, in their social construction, are laden with value (Whitehead, 2002: 69). In each of these, and so many other cases, the ‘masculine’ trait is granted a higher value than the ‘feminine’. Thus, masculine domination of women is both reaffirmed and justified.

Gender binaries are further extended into the arena of romantic/sexual relations. The categories of husband/wife or boyfriend/girlfriend describe a logic that couples men and women together despite (or because of) the social messages that describe gender inequality. ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality’ is a concept that was initially
developed by Adrienne Rich (Gayle Rubin wrote about 'obligatory heterosexuality') in relation to women (Connell, 1995: 104). Connell notes however, that a parallel phenomenon occurs in relation to men. This is both an understanding and a regulatory device by which men and boys monitor themselves and each other, in order to ensure that they do not pursue a 'deviant' sexuality. 'Compulsory heterosexuality' is an essential part of 'hegemonic masculinity' in western patriarchal societies, as it works to reinforce the binary divisions that help to facilitate men's dominance over women.

Connell's assertion that compulsory heterosexuality is a 'regulatory device' is taken up by Michael Kimmel who writes that homophobia is central to our cultural definition of manhood. He identifies it not as the fear of 'gay men' but as the fear that other men will deem that we are too effeminate; that we are unfit to be called men (2002: 277). He goes on to say that, "As adolescents, we learn that our peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask us as feminine, as sissies" (Kimmel, 2002: 278). Kimmel argues that men are so afraid of being perceived as 'gay' that they will often exaggerate the common markers of 'masculinity', including sexist behaviour. Thus, sexism and homophobia are inextricably linked.

Compulsory heterosexuality is so strong that even men who are not straight-identified often go through something called the 'moment of engagement'. Through many interviews, Connell observes this 'moment' as something that the majority of the men experienced. For a time in their childhood/adolescence, these men become engaged with hegemonic masculinity and appropriate it as the basis for their own identity and masculinity. "The life histories show such familiar traits as competitiveness, career orientation, suppression of emotions and homophobia" (Connell, 1995:123). In addition, the moment of engagement teaches a physical way of being and meanings attached to the body and bodily practices. Such bodily practices include involvement in sport which, in turn, works to organize gender in such a way that it becomes natural to equate masculinity with competition, physical strength, toughness, and skills that
women cannot possess (Messner, 2001: 93).

In closing this section, I want to discuss another of Connell’s findings from his interview project in Australia. From interviews that he conducted with some gay-identified men, he describes a type of man that he calls ‘a very straight gay’ (1995). Here he examines the ways in which hegemonic masculinity affects the construction of some ‘deviant’ (in this case, gay) masculinities. He finds that despite some level of affiliation with the gay community, these men remained, in many ways, fairly ‘straight’. For instance, although they spoke of hypermasculinity in a negative light, some spoke of ‘queens’ or ‘effeminate gays’ with contempt (Connell, 1995: 156). This contradiction between gender conservatism and subordinate masculinities leads Connell to conclude that, “We are certainly not dealing with a bunch of revolutionaries here. But neither are we dealing with complete containment. The ‘very straight gay’ is a contradictory position in the politics of gender” (1995: 162). In the vein of queer theory, the ‘very straight gay’ challenges modern assumptions about identity categories by bringing to light differences within a particular identity.

**Beyond Identity Politics: Queer Theory at a Crossroad**

A central element of queer theory has been the project of destabilizing the binaries that serve to understand and describe sexualities (as well as many other social relations) in mainstream society (Adam, 2002: 19). These binaries include homosexuality/heterosexuality, abnormal/normal, and immoral/moral. As is the case with the dualisms that were examined above, these binaries are not only constructed as mutually exclusive categories, they are placed in a hierarchical relationship through the assignment of relative values. In a patriarchal society that adheres to a compulsory heterosexuality it is hardly surprising that the category of ‘straight’ is privileged or ‘inside’ while the category of ‘gay’ is marginalized or ‘outside’.
Eve Sedwick argues that we should neither discount the usefulness of these categories for the people who use them as reflections of their everyday experiences, nor should we attempt to dismantle them (1993: 55). She argues that the resiliency of the category homosexual has been both invaluable for those that it defines as well as those that construct their sexual identity in opposition to it.

However, identity politics that revolve around the hetero-/homosexual binary suggest a shared or common experience that masks differences among gay men and lesbians, and exclude other ‘deviant’ sexualities, ultimately leaving them at the margins (Meeks, Seidman and Traschen, 2002: 427). To remain within the linguistic restrictions of the hetero/homo binary is to legitimize it. Diana Fuss argues that it is in fact the very point of subversion that reconfirms the binary; by resisting heterosexuality by means of homosexuality, heterosexuality becomes the construct that one must resist and thus is given legitimacy as a category (2001: 351). Or, as Judith Butler writes, “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (2001: 333).

Gay politics have, however, been very successful in moving homosexuality from the status of pathology to the status of social minority (Seidman, 2001). By alluding to an analysis of American films from the second half of the twentieth century, Seidman suggests that some of the repressive tactics that dictated a heterosexual norm are disappearing while civil rights previously denied are being granted. However, Seidman also contends that heteronormativity is being maintained through a new normalizing process. Specifically, he argues that, within the homo-/heterosexuality binary, homosexuality is being accepted as a ‘legitimate’ minority, provided that it conforms to moral notions of monogamy and the other social norms of ‘heterosexuality’. As mentioned, one result of this ‘success’ is that sadomasochism, transgenderism, and other sexualities that do not conform to these norms and categories are left on the
outside of social acceptance and remain stigmatized and pathologized. Seidman suggests a transition from the pursuit of identity politics to a pursuit of queer politics. This political shift would judge the morality of sex acts on communicative standards, such as consent and mutual pleasure, rather than on the acts themselves. This notion is consistent with the project of queer theory in that it moves away from the binaries that are utilized by identity politics and focuses on the ways in which everybody’s sexuality is regulated. “Queer Politics is less about legitimizing minority sexual identities than widening the sphere of sexual and intimate life freed from the state and institutional control” (Richardson and Seidman, 2002: 4).

The postmodern/queer notion that sexualities are fluid and that binaries are inadequate descriptors has made inroads into the public imagination. As early as 1993, Eve Sedwick suggested that among westerners with a moderate to high level of formal education, a common understanding of homosexuality was one that was caught between identity politics and queer theory. “It holds that minoritizing view that there is a distinct population of persons who ‘really are’ gay; at the same time, it holds the universalizing views that sexual desire is an unpredictably powerful solvent of stable identities” (Sedwick, 1993: 56).

More recently, some have observed what Sasha Roseneil calls a ‘queer auto-critique’ in which queer-theory is put into practice in ways that further destabilize gay and lesbian identities.

Bisexuality, butch and femme, transsex, transgender, and cross-dressing are on the agenda; lesbians having sex with men, and gay men having sex with women are openly discussed, as the regulatory power of modern lesbian and gay identities crumble.

(Roseneil, 2002: 33)

This ‘queer praxis’ or ‘pomosexuality’ has been accompanied by a denaturalizing of
heterosexuality' that Roseneil terms 'hetero-reflexivity' (2002: 35). One example of this is the number of straight-identified students taking critical sexuality courses in university. Roseneil argues that this is an indication that rather than accept their heterosexuality unreflexively these students are critically engaging with it. From such a place of hetero-reflexivity, some theorists have even articulated a space, within the designation of queer, that might include a person who challenges heteronormativity but is, by the measure of their sexual practices, 'straight'.

Calvin Thomas explores this space and questions his ability to both inhabit a queer identity and to produce queer literature without appropriating and thus removing meaning from the category. In an effort to avoid this, he emphasizes Eve Sedgwick's assertion regarding the importance of retaining a same-sex core for the word queer. And yet, Thomas sees a potential danger in a 'straight' researcher's ability to uncritically return to the safety of their privilege. He argues that it is not 'straight' sex acts that need to be interrogated as much as the privileging of those acts through heteronormative mechanisms. Essentially, and similarly to Seidman's argument about the nature of liberatory politics, Thomas suggests that the emphasis must change from act-based identity to an identity that challenges normative assumptions about sexuality and might include 'straight queers'.

This element of queerness was particularly interesting to me in that, like Thomas, the term heterosexual has become far too constrictive for me, and yet, I am ambivalent about taking on a 'straight queer' (or simply 'queer') identity. This has been particularly problematic for me as I am still in the process of unpacking my own heterosexist assumptions; the very assumptions that queer theory is so fully opposed to. It seems that to vocally attempt to insert myself within the category of queer, without having more fully unpacked my own socialization, would verge on the appropriation of which Thomas speaks. Having said that, this work provides me with aspirations, with clues about how to become the researcher, as well as the person, that I
want to be. For the immediate present, it provides some ideas about how I might approach elements of this research into masculinities, sexualities, and sport.

**Resistance and Reproduction: Gender and Sexuality in the Sociology of Sport**

Although it did not become a central category of analysis for the study of 'men's sport' until the early 1990s, McKay, Messner and Sabo argue that gender has since become a heavily emphasized aspect of that work (2000: 2). Further, they suggest that there are three major questions that have emerged from centering gender in the study of the sociology of 'men's sports'. These questions address a) the integration of the study of masculinities and sport with critical feminist studies, b) the tendency to overemphasize the negative aspects and outcomes of dominant sport institutions and c) the inclusion of analyses of race and ethnicity, class and sexual orientation within the study of masculinities, gender and sport (2001: 3). I believe that my project will contribute to these new directions for the field. Specifically, I seek to examine the ways in which an 'alternative' sporting community interacts with hegemonic masculinity, as both a subscription to, and a transgression of, ideas about sport that are heavily informed by hegemonic notions of hetero-masculinity.

Laberge and Albert examine the presence of hegemonic masculinity in sport by interrogating attitudes towards gender transgression by athletes who participate in sports deemed more suitable for individuals of the 'opposite sex' (2000). To obtain their data, the researchers asked a number of high school students in Quebec to write essays on their ideas about 'masculinity', 'femininity,' and transgressions by male and female athletes. The students were selected from three different schools that provided representation from the 'working class', the 'middle class' and the 'upper class'. In total, 354 essays were used. Of these essays, 174 were written by boys and 180 were written by girls. The three schools each provided roughly a third of the essays for both boys
and girls.

Two results are especially relevant to my project. First, the authors observed variations between 'classes' in terms of the answers regarding 'ideal masculinities'. Each group emphasized aspects that were particularly prized by their 'class': leadership was central to the 'upper class' boys, sociability was important to 'middle-class' boys and physicality and bravado, in the form of hypermasculinity, were especially important to 'working class' boys (2000: 201). This serves to illustrate the specificity of hegemonic forms of masculinity, although, each form strongly insisted upon the subordination of women and other forms of masculinity beneath the hegemonic one (2000: 203). Second, the boys who participated in the study judged the perceived gender transgressions of male athletes far more severely than the perceived transgressions of female athletes. Men who participated in sports such as figure skating were viewed as 'threats to masculinity' (2000: 211) while, due to the gendered hierarchy of sports, women who participated in 'male sports' were seen as transcending, not transgressing, gender boundaries (2000: 213). This is an illustration of ways in which hegemonic masculinity may enter into the world of sports and exert its force on that sphere by condemning men who do not conform to the hegemonic norms. It also allows some insight into the impact that class can have on constructions of hegemonic masculinity.

The methodology used for Laberge and Albert's project, although effective, creates some limitations. Interviews were deemed less effective for this age group (2000: 198) so essays were employed as a strategy for collecting first person data. With 'class' and 'gender' centered as important components of this analysis, race and ethnicity, which might also have been interesting factors, were largely invisible in the course of the study. There is also the question of age. Although, this study may tell a great deal about attitudes among youth, it would also be interesting to see this study done with an older group, to see how strong and lasting these attitudes are. Laberge and Albert assumed that adolescents would be unwilling to express non-hegemonic
views in person, but they did not account for the possibility that many students in this age group are still very committed to the project of hegemonic masculinity, even though they may openly reject it within a few years. In terms of the IGRA, the notion of ‘gender transgressing/transcending’ is central to the potential for subversiveness or resistance to hegemonic masculinity. Clearly, this also holds true for a queer-identified athlete competing in a mainstream sporting organization.

An American study by Eric Anderson examines the experiences of openly gay athletes who ‘transcended’ norms by competing on high school and college sports teams. Anderson interviewed forty-two athletes, twenty-six of whom were openly gay. He finds that, although physical and verbal intimidation do not occur as frequently as one might have anticipated, homophobia is still present in the form of a ‘code of silence’ that refuses to acknowledge the sexuality of an ‘out’ team member. Most of these athletes performed the elements of the hegemonic sporting masculinity in all ways other than their sexualities but were expected to remain quiet about their romantic and sexual lives (873). This led to the ‘segmenting’ of their identities, by which their identity as ‘gay’ was forcibly separated from their identity as an ‘athlete’; a process that heterosexual team members did not have to go through. Anderson argues that the possibility of ‘softening’ hegemonic masculinity through the inclusion of gay athletes is lessened by this segmenting of identity and the prevalence of homophobic language. However, he argues that the very presence of gay athletes does actively challenge the ability of that masculinity to reproduce itself through sport.

Nancy Theberge addresses gender transgressing/transcending in her examination of women’s ice hockey. Unlike the athletes in Anderson’s study, these ones are playing in a league that is specifically for people of the non-dominant social category. In this analysis, Theberge centers the physicality of hockey, and a player’s ability to deal with it, as highly valued aspects of the sport (2001). She examines women’s hockey as a potentially subversive site of gender performativity, but
concludes that its construction as an 'alternative version' of the more 'legitimate' men's hockey, limits its ability to be truly radical. This study focuses on two aspects of physicality in women's hockey: the risk of injury and the relative merits of full-contact and partial-contact hockey.

In order to discuss her findings, several of the concepts that Theberge utilizes must be defined. A 'flag carrier' of masculinity refers to a sport that reaches a broad audience and actively promotes hegemonic masculinity. Theberge refers to football and hockey as the quintessential North American 'flag carriers' of masculinity. Rodeo might well be added to that list. Although it is not necessarily attended by an overly large audience in Canada, I would argue that most people are aware of it and have some sense of the physicality and embedded (hegemonic) masculinity that are integral to the way in which the sport is presented.

Theberge asserts that hegemonic masculinity has, in turn, informed the 'sport ethic'. This 'ethic' is the set of criteria used to determine who is a 'real' athlete and what is a 'real' sport. It works to define what is within the limits, and therefore legitimate, and what is outside the boundaries, and therefore illegitimate. In making that distinction, the sport ethic highlights physicality and the ability to play despite pain and injury (Theberge, 2001: 311).

Theberge's research was based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with the members of an elite women's hockey team over two seasons. In addition to the twenty interviews done with team members and the coach, Theberge interviewed eight other elite players and eleven other coaches. It is not clear why she chose to interview only elite players. The meanings and desires of elite players may be very different from those of recreational and lower level players and coaches. Furthermore, there is no examination of how other categories of analysis might intersect with the category of gender.

Theberge concludes that, although women's hockey can be empowering for
those involved, it operates within the framework of hegemonic masculinity and the sport ethic. She suggests further that, “A more fully transformative vision of hockey would offer empowerment in a setting that rejects violence and the normalization of injury in favor of an ethic of care” (2001: 315).

A similar prescription is offered by the work of Brian Pronger. On the one hand, Pronger (2000) sees gay sporting organizations as having contributed to the inclusion of gay and lesbian-identified individuals in mainstream society. A key aspect that has led to this inclusion is that the organizations utilize the same rules as the mainstream organizations that represent the various sports. At times, the gay sporting culture may even be subsumed within a larger body, thereby further legitimizing the participation of the gay and lesbian communities in sport through a subtext that states that people of varying sexualities are essentially the same, differentiated only by their object of erotic and romantic desire (2000: 225). By contrast, Pronger argues that the more radical agenda of liberation requires that gay sport culture transform the foundations of most sports through an alteration of the rules and objectives and a centering of homoeroticism. Here he argues that the very rules of institutionalized sports systematically exclude homosexuality by regulating the potential of homoeroticism through contact between people of the same gender. A new more inclusive logic that did not mirror hegemonic notions of masculinity, would enable social change at the level of sexuality and at other axes of discrimination and marginalization (2000: 234). Within this framework, Pronger is able to explore the ways in which gay participation in sport can be both subversive and supportive of hegemonic masculinity.

Price and Parker utilize some of Pronger’s ideas in their analysis of a British rugby club for gay and bisexual men (2003). This research was based on three qualitative methods: participant observation, semi-structured interviews and textual analysis. The focus of the research was on the activities and experiences of one team and was conducted during six sessions that spanned two and a half months. As Pronger
did, these researchers focus on the ability of gay sporting culture to both subvert and reproduce elements of hegemonic masculinity. "Gay sports either promotes a liberal view of ‘inclusion’ into mainstream sporting arenas or, alternatively, challenges heterosexist definitions of sport as an ‘exclusive’ cultural practice" (Parker and Price, 2003: 109). Like Pronger, Parker and Price also suggest that a gay rugby team has the opportunity to fundamentally challenge heterosexist norms through, "their specific interpretations of corporeal intimacy and gender expression within what may be described as the discursive practice of rugby" (2000: 111).

The findings of the study suggest that the athletes did not think of their aims as being overly political, although individuals had very different interests in the club. These interests included a desire for a positive social atmosphere in which to play rugby and the desire to construct a ‘macho’ gay identity (Price and Parker, 2003: 117), similar to what Connell (1995) termed a ‘very straight gay’. At the level of the club, the researchers examined documents that explicitly distanced the team from political activism while carrying the implicit message that, ultimately, the club challenged stereotypes about gay men, in both mainstream and gay communities (Price and Parker, 2003: 119). In this sense, the club was both a site of resistance and of reproduction vis-a-vis hegemonic constructions of masculinity and sexuality.

Each of these studies addresses ways in which hegemonic masculinity is destabilized by particular sporting situations and the athletes who participate in them. They also address ways in which the ‘transgressions’ that lead to destabilization are perceived by subjects and by others. Several of the writers also address the notion that organized ‘transgressive’ sports have the capacity for both conservative and radical political consequences as these sporting venues have both the capacity to resist and to reproduce hegemonic masculinity, stereotypes and expectations. However, for the purposes of this work, it is notable that not one of the above articles specifically addresses rodeo.
Researching Rodeo: Existing Literature on the Topic

The academic work that does exist about rodeo is scarce. There have been attempts to address rodeo, from several angles, but there are elements that remain virtually unexamined. For this reason, my research on the IGRA is largely exploratory in nature. One of the most recent works on rodeo is the book written by Wayne Wooden and Gavin Ehringer (1996). In doing their research, the authors conducted interviews with a number of people involved in rodeo, did archival research, and attended several rodeos. In addition, they administered a thirty-five item questionnaire to PRCA\textsuperscript{33} cowboys and cowgirls. The survey asks for information about such topics as the cowboys' and cowgirls' training, number of rodeos attended, results and opinions about travel, identity, and success (279). Over the course of a year and a half, they received completed questionnaires from six hundred and eleven male competitors and thirty-two barrel racers which they consider representative of the professional circuit. (274). However, the analysis of this data is largely uncritical and descriptive rather than analytical.

What makes Wooden and Ehringer's work notable however, is that it is one of the only pieces of academic literature to have acknowledged the existence of the IGRA. In a chapter called "The Many Faces of Rodeo," the authors overview gay rodeo, prison rodeo, seniors rodeo, Native American rodeo, and several other forms of rodeo that do not conform to the image that is portrayed by the professional circuit. The section on gay rodeo provides a brief history of the IGRA and touches on some of the thoughts that have been expressed by participants and organizers. Perhaps the most important element of this chapter is the brief treatment of homophobia in mainstream cowboy culture. From one of the research interviews conducted, a PRCA cowboy is cited as saying that an openly gay cowboy would not be treated differently than any other competitor. As the book goes on to show, this view is not shared by the closeted

\textsuperscript{33} The Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association
Drawing from an article in a California newspaper, Ehringer and Wooden quote a gay cowboy who is using the alias Mike Biggs. He was asked how he would be received were he to come out on the pro circuit. His response was simple: “I would be dead. No question. They would kill me. Literally. Gay rodeo and Straight rodeo do not get along” (in Ehringer and Wooden, 1996: 214). Biggs states further that there are other gay cowboys who remain closeted on the circuit. While the authors mention sport as a preserve of “stereotypical masculinity,” they do not try to understand why two cowboys had such radically different appraisals of the social climate in the PRCA. Regardless, as the testimony of Biggs attests, it must be understood that the climate on the pro circuit is such that there is enough homophobia to keep people closeted, using aliases and afraid of harm. In addition, the authors briefly address gender through a chapter about women and rodeo. However, this is explored more thoroughly in two other works. The first is a study of female rodeo competitors.

Mary Lou LeCompte, a sport historian in the department of Kinesiology at the University of Texas, wrote about the historic participation of female competitors in rodeo and the history of the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association (1993). In this ground breaking work, she traces the history of women’s participation in ranch life, through the wild west shows and into the world of professional rodeo. Through archival research and interviews, LeCompte recounts the successes of early cowgirls, the loss of status in the 1940s, and the progress that is being made for women in rodeo in the modern era through the WPRA.

LeCompte’s focus on women begins to illuminate the ways that gender and social values are tied to the performances of rodeos. She traces the decline of women’s roles in rodeo to the consolidation of Gene Autry’s power as a rodeo promoter and a reaction against the participation of women in the workforce during the Second World War.

34 A good deal of this history was overviewed in Chapter two of this thesis.
Even though the majority of Americans continued to support the belief that women should stay at home, women were actually joining the workforce in record numbers, often in positions once reserved exclusively for men. At a time where the epitome of masculinity was the soldier defending his country, this placed some civilian males in a demoralizing situation. Not only were they left out of the battlefield heroics, with so many females taking wartime factory jobs, many suffered with the ignominy of doing work that even women could do.

(LeCompte, 1993: 135)

Autry removed female competitors from the rodeos that he produced and added the subtitle “Cavalcade of Men Who Made America” to the billing. LeCompte’s analysis acknowledges how by doing this, Autry promoted and reinforced stereotypical gender roles (1993: 135). While Lecompte applies a gendered analysis to this change in terms of the masculinization of rodeo, she does not address the ways in which it also shored up the project of nation-building as a white male endeavour, erasing the roles that women, non-white settlers, and the First Nations played in the formation of the United States. Nor does she examine how such a project works to erase the history of North America’s first inhabitants that preceded the arrival of European colonizers.

LeCompte’s work was the first to address the WPRA, which had previously remained “totally absent from the literature of women’s sport history” (1993: 4). In doing so, she begins to uncover the gendering of rodeo. This work was recently complemented by a new book that uses ceremonial roles as a way of examining gender and rodeo.

Joan Burbick (2002) approaches the question of gender and rodeo through the lives of rodeo queens in the Pacific Northwest. Burbick attempts to understand the specific meanings that individual women constructed around their tenures as members of a rodeo court. The interviews that she conducted capture the words of women from every decade since the early 1940s: Native American women, women raised on ranches, and women raised in cities. She contextualizes rodeo within a cultural
landscape that includes the mythology of the ‘frontier’, as well as the material reality that includes the economic difficulties of families that struggle to keep their farms and ranches. She addresses the relationship with ‘nature’, relationships with animals, and the relationships between rodeo committees and rodeo queens.

For Burbick, rodeo queens offer us a way of understanding the messages that rodeo is transmitting in any given moment. In particular, she understands rodeo queens as individuals who are asked to represent a particular history or, rather, a national mythology that never actually shows a ‘real’ history.

What I had witnessed over the previous six years confirmed my sense that in the late nineteenth century, the Wild West show and its successor, the rodeo, became pageants to represent national history. They were what some historians called mass-producing traditions, dramatizing the imagined deeds of a frontier and pioneer past. As such, they never showed us what really happened. Instead they glossed over the conflicts and contradictions in our national past. They propagated a seductive collective story of bravery, individualism, and success. They combined popular entertainment, consumerism, and nationalism to create what Benedict Anderson called an “imagined community”.

(Burbick, 2002: 208).

Within this mythology, Burbick uncovers trends in the selection of women as members of rodeo courts. Women who had been chosen for their abilities on horses were being replaced by women who were judged for their physical appearance. Where women had been chosen from ranching and business communities, women were increasingly being selected on the basis of their connection to the local business community. Where women had been chosen from native and ‘white’ communities, by the late 1970s ‘white’ women had become the unanimous choice, furthering the
exclusionary and ‘limited’ nature of nation-building. “White rodeo queens would keep the borders between the outside corrupt world and the all-American inner circle clear. They were a renewed commitment to family, God, and country. They were perfect, lily-white, all-American girls (Burbick, 2002: 178).

Through this discussion, Burbick examines the reactions to the moral code that was being imposed by rodeo. “Many wanted a more adamant American rodeo that kept core values like hard work, strong morals, patriotism, and traditional gender roles alive” while others resisted what Burbick calls, “a perfect image” (155). One recent rodeo queen dyed a strand of her hair purple. Although this would remain under her hat, and thus a secret, when the rodeo board was made aware of it, controversy ensued (174). Rodeo queens’ sexualities are also heavily regulated. In fact, sexual liaisons are officially forbidden, although they certainly happen. While this regulation is acknowledged by Burbick, she addresses it through a purely heterocentric lens, framing the cowboys as the threat to the purity of the queens. The possibility of a liaison with another woman in the rodeo court or a competing cowgirl is never addressed. Regardless, while Burbick acknowledges the possibility for agency and resistance, she is clear about the way in which rodeo committees tie morality to a very specific and traditional construction of femininity, and the way that these cultural meanings are communicated through the chosen rodeo queen.

The earliest examination of the cultural meanings of rodeo that I was able to find is a 1982 work by anthropologist Elizabeth Lawrence. She too observes the way in which femininity is constructed by rodeo; however, unlike Burbick, she places it in the context of the relationship with a construction of masculinity that is embedded in the myth of the west. Lawrence argues that the defining characteristic of the ‘cowboy’ is his project of taming the frontier and that the rodeo is a reenactment of that conquest.

Lawrence argues that, in cowboy culture, women and horses are viewed very similarly.

35 Benedict Anderson describes the ‘nation’ as being limited in the sense that no nation imagines itself as being universal. That is, the building of a national identity defines both those that exist within it as well as those that are excluded from it (1983: 7).
“Both, they say, ‘need to know who’s boss’; both are unpredictable, wild until a man tames them, good for only one purpose, and so forth” (Lawrence, 1982: 109).

In reality, Lawrence’s primary interest is in the meaning of animals at rodeos. In her study of bucking horses for instance, she finds that the word that is most used to describe them is ‘outlaw,’ which remains consistent with the imagery of needing to be tamed (145). Lawrence argues that, through the cowboy’s eyes, the world is divided into the ‘domesticated’ and the ‘wild’. The mastering of animals, as partners or as opponents, is indicative of the frontier struggle to ‘tame’ the ‘wilderness’ and the cowboy’s mastery over the world around him.

The other significant contribution of this work is that Lawrence identifies rodeo, not just as a sport, but as a ritual. “On its deepest level, rodeo is essentially a ritual addressing itself to the dilemma of man’s place in nature, exploring the boundary lines between people and other life forms” (Lawrence, 1983: 270). For Lawrence, rituals explore the boundaries between nature and culture. She posits that such a dichotomy can be observed in binaries such as animal/human, female/male and wild/tame; all of which are present in the ritual of rodeo.

Beverly Stoeltje uses the notion of ritual and combines it with the explicit study of power. While other writers have noted relationships of power in rodeo, none of them have centred power in their analysis. “Studies of power as domination and subordination often fail to recognize that power also resides in the capacity to create, transform, or otherwise make things happen” (Stoeltje, 1993: 140). Although not explicitly, Lawrence and Burbick also acknowledge the power in rodeo. For Lawrence, that power is used to reproduce the myth of the frontier. For Burbick, rodeo’s power reinforces specific societal values around ideas such as race, gender and class. For Stoeltje, rodeo tells the story of capitalist social relations.

Stoeltje also identifies a deep contradiction in American society: a democratic

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36 Again, the notion of ‘terra nullius’ (empty land) is an important part of the myth of the west in terms of nation-building. It erases the human presence of the First Nations and produces the land as wild and free for ‘development’ and ‘civilization’.

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ideology promotes the concept of ‘equality,’ alongside an economy based on laissez-faire capitalism that is conducive to the development of an elite that produces and maintains its wealth through the exploitation of labour and corresponding inequalities (1993: 144). This contradiction is traced back to the development of American ranches in the Southwest. While the frontier in the mid 1800s held the promise of the acquisition of land and wealth, the working conditions on corporate ranches were heavily regulated, provided low wages and little possibility of fulfilling that promise. This contradiction was embedded in the character of the ‘cowboy’. This was the same time that saw a rise in the popularity of Social Darwinism which, with its emphasis on competition and the “survival of the fittest”, promoted individualism as a central concept. These characteristics were also attached to the figure of the ‘cowboy’ and became central to his character.

Stoeltje traces the form of rodeo from the ‘cowboy fun’ of the frontier ranches, to the wild west shows, to modern rodeo. For her, the significant shift came when the wild west shows, which were based on exhibition, were turned into rodeos based on competition. Rather than being paid a wage, cowboys and cowgirls paid entry fees to participate in rodeos and were not guaranteed that they would win any money back. Stoeltje cites this as a major shift in power, by which competitors were stripped of the control that they had as contract workers in the wild west shows (1993: 152). However, this shift aligned rodeo more closely with the image of the rugged individualist who thrived on competition. Rodeo became a vehicle by which that image and the attached values were reenacted.

The above work has all focused on rodeo. As suggested, the character of the cowboy is central to an understanding of this ritual/sport. While all discussions of rodeo acknowledge the ‘cowboy’, a few researchers have focused specifically on the meanings attached to that archetype. We turn now to a discussion of that literature.
Will Wright explores the 'cowboy' along similar lines to those employed in Stoeltje’s analysis of rodeo. Linking theory to popular culture in the form of western movies, Wright sees the archetype of the cowboy as a figure that is representative of capitalist social relations. He charts the work of several theorists around individualism, labour, and bureaucracy, and connects them all to the cowboy. "All social myths explain social relations through the dramatic cultural images, and the cowboy myth explains market society as its social myth of origin" (Wright, 2001:1). Wright also explores the construction of the cowboy’s personal life and the relationship between that construction and the market.

It is through his market analysis of cowboys that Wright explains the ways that gender has been structured in the ‘Western’ imagination. Wright discusses the notion, in early liberal theory, that only men were ‘rational’ beings. As such, the theory of the market did not take women into account. “Women were not so much forgotten by the theory as set aside and ignored” (Wright, 2001:143). However, while they could be written out of a theory, women had to be included in cultural stories, which are prescriptions for daily life. “So the cultural stories, and particularly the frontier myth, explained the issue of women and sex for the new market society” (Wright, 2001:144). This explanation relies on the notion of separate spheres for men and women. The rational and independent man belongs in the market while the moral and dependent woman belongs in the home with the family. This relationship depends not only on the dominance of men over women but on heterosexual love as a force that binds them. Only through the uniting of the two spheres can the market function. “This cultural image of love is clearly successful and appealing. It offers personal happiness together

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37 In this case, “western” refers to the “west” of North America as opposed to the Eurocentric notions of “Western Civilization”.

38 The notion of “separate spheres’ not at all uncommon in western thought can be traced back to the work of Hegel.
with sexual passion. It is probably the most familiar and pervasive image in our culture, and it always explains market relations” (Wright, 2001: 148).

Wright addresses love and its role in social regulation. A successful match must have the two partners playing their ‘proper roles’ in their ‘proper spheres’. In Westerns, the woman who does not remain in her sphere must be punished or disciplined until she returns to her ‘natural’ role. The notion of men transgressing these boundaries is never addressed. Once again, queer sexualities are completely ignored by a genre, a theory, and a writer. However, this omission is not duplicated by another observer of culture.

Michael Allen provides a comprehensive overview of the ways that cowboys have been portrayed in various media of popular culture. The majority of his work is on traditional representations of cowboys and the cowboy code in music, literature, and art. The notion that a phenomenon can be both radical and conservative is also explored through a textual analysis of artistic and media representations of non-traditional cowboys who do not comply with western hegemonic masculinity. These fictional and historic ‘rainbow riders’ appear on TV, in films, in books, and in songs.

Of the non-traditional cowboys identified, “...the homosexual rodeo cowboy is the least developed of the rainbow riders” (Allen, 1998a: 170). Allen also illustrates the strength of the cowboy code. In a book called “Heartlands”, the author notes disgust expressed by some competitors at the IGRA event in Denver. They feel that the rodeo is ‘too gay’ and needs to be ‘butched up’ (in Allen, 1998a: 171). In the final analysis, Allen suggests that while they all present challenges to the standard construction of a cowboy, they do so by appealing to the same qualities for which ‘he’ (the archetypal cowboy) is admired. Though they present challenges to the cowboy code, eventually they come to embody it and ultimately support it. In this sense, they become ‘archetypal anti-archetypes’. Perhaps as a result of this thinking, Allen explores the

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39 In addition to his examination of queer representations, Allen explores representations of cowboys who are ‘black’, ‘Jewish,’ and ‘Indian’ men.
question of what it means to be a ‘real cowboy’ in another work, in which he shifts his
focus from the cowboy of popular culture to the rodeo cowboy (1998b).

Indeed, this is part of my question: In the orbit of the IGRA, what makes a
cowboy a cowboy? Allen notes that if one identifies ‘cowboys’ by the original
definition, that is people (men) who work enormous herds of cattle from horseback,
there are very few left (1998b: 75). With the rise of factory farming and agribusiness
such an occupation is becoming more and more scarce. Yet rodeo cowboys have long
claimed the title of ‘cowboy’ despite the debate that surrounds it. Through a discussion
of this debate, Allen comes to understand the importance and currency of being
perceived as a legitimate ‘cowboy.’ “A rodeo man’s claim to cowboy status is a mighty
touchy subject, and rodeo men argue, quite rightly, that their cowboy credentials are
strong” (Allen, 1998b: 76). The primary reason that Allen makes this assertion is the
importance that is placed on the Cowboy Code in rodeo.

Allen identifies the key parts of the Cowboy Code and illustrates how the values
that were developed on the ranches continue to exist in rodeo.

Rodeo men are democratic, resourceful, and most certainly
courageous. They are individualistic when compared to
society at large, yet loyally conformist in their following of
cowboy norms. They show hospitality, sharing everything
from cash, beer, and a motel room to their riggin’ and roping
ponies. More important, they share precious information
about competition ‘roughstock’ with their rodeo cowboy
opponents, just because they respect them as fellow cowboys...
And while many rodeo men are married, many are not; their
treatment of women continues to take on at least the forms
of authentic cowboy culture.

(Allen, 1998b: 76)

While this statement makes sweeping generalizations and appears to come from
someone who has a great deal invested in the perceived integrity of cowboys, Allen
suggests that rodeo cowboys are not simply theatrical athletes that portray a figure
from the past. Although what they do is tied to history and mythology, rodeo is not simply a sport and rodeo cowboys are not simply athletes. Both the sport and the cowboys carry cultural messages about the real and imagined past, as well as messages about hegemonic masculinity. The multidimensionality of the cowboy is further explored by two other researchers.

Demetrius Pearson and Allen Haney examine the rodeo cowboy as a cultural icon, an athlete, and an entrepreneur. Using a variety of interviews, non-participant observation, and textual analysis, these researchers attempt to better understand the role of the cowboy in contemporary society. Ultimately, they find that the cowboy plays all three of the listed roles. Cowboys embody the mythology of the West. “The lore of the American West, steeped in heroic tales of the fearless cowboy attempting to tame an unforgiving frontier, is a cultural image” (Haney and Pearson, 1999: 315). This fearlessness is translated into the bravado with which so many rodeo cowboys compete despite injury and risk. As an athlete, the rodeo cowboy complies with the four tenets of the ‘sport ethic’ as outlined by Theberge: they show ‘a willingness to make sacrifices for the game,’ ‘the pursuit of distinction and excellence,’ ‘acceptance of risk and the ability to play despite pain, pressure and fear,’ and ‘a refusal to accept limits in the pursuit of possibilities’. Further, the individualistic nature of the cowboy’s job and, specifically, the reliance on performance for day (prize) money contribute to the third feature as defined by the authors: cowboys as entrepreneurs. This analysis draws heavily from, and supports, the work on cowboys that has been cited thus far. However, while this work blends the three components of the cowboy’s identity, it does not explicitly tie ‘masculinity’ to his persona. In fact, this work implicitly ignores female participation in rodeo and reduces participation to cowboys. This sexist silence mirrors the silences about queer sexualities that are so prevalent in literature about rodeo.
Filling the Gaps: Approaching the IGRA

The major question that arises for me is the degree to which a non-traditional sporting community can act subversively towards hegemonic masculinity. Some argue that there are two major ways that this resistance can occur (Pronger, 2000; Theberge, 2001): a) an empowering athletic participation that is counterintuitive to the mainstream discourses of gender, sexuality, and sport but operates through the politics of inclusion, rather than the politics of liberation, and thereby does little to seriously resist the hegemonic notions that operate in society; and b) a system whereby the rules of a sporting system are questioned and altered, giving rise to a new sporting ethic that prizes cooperation and love rather than the competition and the violence that reinforce the heterosexual capitalist patriarchy.

In the literature, I have highlighted descriptions of how mainstream rodeo, like other ‘flag-carrying’ sports, emphasizes hegemonic masculinity. This means that, far from being ‘just a sport’, rodeo carries ideological/naturalizing messages about gender, race, and class. These cultural messages are fortified through the ritual reenactment of rodeo performances and the archetype of the ‘cowboy’ who is unquestionably heterosexual. This element of his construction remains largely unexamined by scholars.

My exploration of the IGRA as a site of inquiry allows for an examination of the subversive and reproductive nature of this sporting organization through, in part, the destabilization of the archetypal cowboy. Specifically, I will examine the extent to which the IGRA is a site of resistance to the hegemonic masculinity and homophobic assumptions and stereotypes that are prevalent in mainstream rodeo. I will also examine the ways in which the rodeo and its participants reproduce and support these hegemonic forms. Following Stoeltje, I will examine the gay rodeo, not just as a sporting event, but as a nonstandard version of a ritual that is filled with meanings, values, and power.
Without a doubt, the most exciting part of this project was the opportunity to engage in some original research for the first time in my academic career. As a student, I have always been fascinated by not just the ideas and observations that are generated by social researchers, but the very processes and methods that those researchers employ. I can clearly remember my undergraduate ethnography course and how captivated I was by the stories and experiences of being ‘in the field’. Little did I understand how much thought and planning went into the process.

In order to understand the resistant and reproductive elements of the constructions of masculinities present at the gay and straight rodeos, I utilized two methods. First, I traveled to Calgary, on two separate occasions, to attend both the Canadian Rockies International Rodeo (CRIR) and the Calgary Stampede. Second, I gathered textual data from newspapers, programs, internet sites, and several other sources. This research process has been quite an adventure with both successes and failures. In this chapter, I will outline my process in more detail. I will then share and reflect on some of the methodological decisions that I made and discuss the successes, failures, and implications that arose from those decisions. First, however, I will briefly discuss the development of my personal standpoint from which I created the research design, conducted the research and wrote up the analysis of my work. I do this as a researcher who is heavily influenced by feminist, queer and profeminist ideas and writers.

I use the term ‘profeminist’ to identify male-identified scholars (eg. Michael Kimmel, Michael Kaufman, Robert Connell, etc) who are heavily influenced by feminist theory and apply and elaborate on that theory in their own analyses of gender, whereas I am using the term ‘feminist’ to identify only female-identified scholars who
engage in similar work. In making this distinction, I appreciate that some individuals refer to men who engage in ‘profeminist’ work as being ‘feminist.’ However, as I am uneasy when it comes to the potential for men to appropriate the ‘feminist’ project and recreate the gender hierarchies that we are trying to dismantle, I will continue to separate the two.

The Methodological Mirror: Developing my Own Standpoint

Since its inception, standpoint theory has become an important part of feminist scholarship. Recognizing the power that is intimately connected to the production of knowledge, standpoint theory attempts to demystify the supposed objectivity of the positivist scientific method by understanding and exploring the unique subject position from which the author writes and carries out research. Through this process, standpoint can expose how a researcher might be affected by potential biases and power dynamics that they will encounter in their work. This epistemological theory is not without its detractors however.

Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland detail some of the major criticisms of standpoint theory in their book on feminist methodology (2002). One of the biggest issues is that which arises out of the notion that knowledges are partial and contingent, and yet some of these ‘partial visions’ are seen as being ‘better’ or ‘truer’ than others. Sherry Gorelick argues that work done by a member of a marginalized group enjoys a level of epistemic privilege over that done by someone who is not a member of that group (1991: 473), while Sandra Harding suggests that, as all knowledges are socially situated, each has its advantages and limitations (1998: 186).

It has been argued (and I agree), that the key to this problem rests on the question of reflexivity and how seriously a researcher is willing to interrogate their own position and power throughout the research project (McCorkel and Myers, 2003).
Although many researchers identify their positions in their work, the failure to seriously examine one's self, is not uncommon in the social sciences (McCorkel and Myers, 2003: 200). If we are to accept that knowledges are contingent and that objectivity is a scientific ideal which no research can attain, then any honestly produced knowledge should be valid. Of course, this prompts us to ask how we can possibly evaluate how seriously a person interrogated their own biases before and during their work. To this, I do not believe there is an answer, although we can recognize the sincere efforts of some scholars in their work. For instance, Nwando Achebe reflects on her own experiences as a Nigerian-born, American-raised and educated woman, doing research in her homeland (2002). She wrestles with the multiple positions that she inhabits and explores the contextuality of each of those positions.

This understanding of standpoint accepts that nobody is ever fully an insider or an outsider (Naples, 2003: 49). Rather, our positions shift along the axes of our identities, depending upon the immediate circumstances (Achebe, 2002: 21). This notion allows some latitude for men to conduct high quality and valuable profeminist scholarship even though we do not share the experience of being a woman, which was the foundation of feminist standpoint theory.

They, too, can come to think about their lives and about the rest of natural and social relations from a gap between how their lives are shaped by their concerns as feminists and how the dominant conceptual frameworks perceive and shape men's lives.

(Harding, 1998: 186)

The notion that all women have a common experience is a very modern idea that, like identity politics, masks the differences within the category. Harding argues that, if white women can produce anti-racist feminist insights, then men should be equally able to make serious contributions to feminist literature (1998: 172).
In an effort to elucidate how men might make such contributions, Larry May (1998) develops a four-point model for the development of a 'progressive male standpoint'. This model includes a) the desire to gather/create experienced-based knowledge about traditionally 'male' roles and activities, b) critical reflection about the negative consequences of these activities, c) a morally based motivation to alter traditional roles and activities, and, d) proposals for ways of changing male gender roles that will be palatable to other men. This model became a critical element of my research and analysis.

I entered into this research as a self-identified profeminist man who situates the struggles for social justice as a central part of life. Though I do not vocalize this often, and even though I have only ever been seriously romantically/sexually attracted to women, I do not understand myself as being 'straight'. Or, if I do, I suppose that I, similar to Thomas (1997), could alter a line from Connell's work and call myself a 'very queer straight'. By this I mean that I reject many elements of hegemonic masculinity such as aggressiveness, stoicism, violence, homophobia, and sexism. I do not believe that hetero expressions of sexuality are more valid or more natural than others and I do not close the (closet?) door to the idea that my sexuality is not static and that I cannot anticipate how it might change over the years. However, to many, I am simply 'straight' and I wear that designation with the privilege and access that it affords. Despite this privilege, my gender and sexuality made me feel like an outsider at both rodeos that I attended.

Being a big man, I certainly felt like an insider, surrounded by images of cowboys and being in a space where men dominated in terms of attendance and participation. At the CRIR, I was able to easily meet men at the rodeo and the bars that hosted affiliated events. However, my sexuality moved me towards the outside. Perhaps it was my conflicted identity as a 'queer straight' man or perhaps it was

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40 This hesitation has more to do with a fear of appropriation then it does a fear of being identified as a 'queer' subject. For more on this, see Thomas, 1997.
residual internalized homophobia from my 'moment of engagement' with hegemonic masculinity. Regardless, I was left wondering what I might be missing as I made my observations. Certainly, there were elements of the rodeo that I did not fully experience. For instance, the cruising scene that was evident as I walked through the campsite was not one to which I had full access. Though I experienced flirtations and suggestions from interested men, there was a great deal that remained hidden from me and thus excluded from this work. Ironically, this same identity leaves me on the outside of events such as the Stampede. As a profeminist man, I place myself on the outside of such a masculinist culture and cannot fully participate in the elements of the culture that I find distasteful.

In Canadian society, I carry other marks that grant social privilege and I have benefited from that privilege in many seen and unseen ways. I am visibly 'white', being born into a German/Dutch family, and, though I am Jewish, I carry neither an overtly Jewish name nor the stereotypical physical characteristics that are often associated with Jewish men. By this, I am suggesting that I can 'pass' in a situation where being Jewish is seen unfavourably. Given how 'white' and 'Christian' rodeo is, my ethnic appearance allowed me to navigate through both of my research sites as an 'ethnic insider', avoiding some barriers that another researcher might have come up against. I wonder particularly about how an Aboriginal researcher would have been received, given the mythology of 'cowboys and Indians'. My ethnicity is one of the elements of my identity that situates me most firmly as an insider and I therefore wonder what they might have seen that I did not see in terms of the racialization and racism at the rodeos.

I also come from a family that values education very highly. Both my grandfather and my father have worked as professors and my one brother is in the process of getting his PhD. My mother, grandmother and one of my cousins have their Masters degrees and my other cousin has just finished his undergraduate degree. In

41 See Connell (1995) or chapter 3 of this thesis.
42 There were almost certainly other profeminist 'straight' men at both of the rodeos. However, if I did meet any of them, this element of their identity remained hidden from me.
addition to this, we have the financial resources to ensure that we are not denied our education due to a lack of money. While people wrangle over the location of the lines that divide 'upper class' from 'upper middle class' and 'middle class', I will simply say that I come from a family that has the financial resources to afford me to get to the Masters level in my education.

Rodeo is often associated with the rural working class and one might expect that my academic status places me as an outsider. I have little data in this regard and can only speak speculatively. At the rodeo, I met cattle ranchers from the country and government managers from the city. There was an insurance salesperson from Seattle and a Hostel employee from New Zealand. Several people owned bars and restaurants while others were restaurant employees. At the Stampede, I suspect that the participants tend to be more rural and have less formal education while the audience members tend to be more urban. My sense is that at the gay rodeo, both audience and competitors were more evenly distributed in terms of rural/urban living as well as formal education levels. The rodeos themselves are certainly constructed as 'working-class' events but, given the diversity of the people that I did meet, including my own position as an (upper?) middle-class urban man with a high level of formal education, I cannot know anything about the actual demographics in terms of class. Regardless, my education levels did not seem to complicate any of my interactions though that might have been facilitated by a comfort level that is the result of several years spent working at rodeos, fairs, and a western shop in British Columbia.

In fact, my knowledge of rodeo and my comfort with the environment situated me as an insider at both rodeos. Being able to enter into conversations about the rodeo that I was attending and to to speak knowledgeably on topics such as the Canadian professional points race, the past National Finals Rodeo results, and the best bucking bull on the PBR\textsuperscript{43} circuit made it very easy for me to navigate the research site.

\textsuperscript{43} “Professional Bull Riders” events, which take place on a separate circuit, omit all other rodeo events and focus only on bull riding.
Developing my personal standpoint meant trying to identify the ways that I have internalized the privileges that my social location affords me and to see the ways that my research was shaped and facilitated by my social location. The way in which I negotiated that will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

What To Watch? Participant Observation At The Rodeos

The Participant Observation component of this research was conducted over the course of two separate three day periods. First I attended the ARGRA event which took place from June 27, 2003 to June 29, 2003 at the Symon’s Valley Ranch in the northern outskirts of Calgary, Alberta. I then returned to Calgary from July 11, 2003 to July 13, 2003 for the Stampede which takes place downtown. For each of these events, I attended rodeo performances on both the Saturday and the Sunday. At all times, I carried a dictaphone and a notebook. Most notes were kept on paper, although some thoughts were recorded and transcribed later on the same day. I also attended functions that were connected to the rodeo. For the ARGRA event, this included organized events in the evenings and informal socializing both at the rodeo grounds and at the adjacent campsites, where many participants stayed. For the Stampede, I attended an evening show and wandered through the midway, observing and interacting with the people there. Most of the data that I will discuss comes from the rodeo performances themselves, although I will occasionally make reference to observations made outside of the actual rodeo venue.

As a novice researcher, I needed to be clear about what precisely I was doing. As Palys suggests, this exercise is not just about looking, it is about looking with a purpose.

44 The physical sites that hosted these two events are quite symbolic of the relative positions that the CRIR and the Calgary Stampede hold in the public imagination (ie. centre/ margin). This will be discussed further in chapter 5.

45 This was particularly useful for some of my theoretical observations for which taking notes might have been more cumbersome.
In preparing to conduct this portion of my research, I did some background reading about the gay rodeo. I learned about the history of the organization and something about what precisely I would see. This, with my existing knowledge about mainstream rodeo, allowed me to anticipate certain possibilities about what I might observe. I knew about some of the key technical differences between the two rodeos and that information gave me clues about what I might be looking for. For instance, knowing that I would see women competing in events that, in my experience, had always been reserved for men, prepared me to think about gender differences as I observed the rodeo. It also suggested that I might look to other areas where traditional gender roles were being challenged.

However, having never attended an IGRA event before, I opted for a largely unstructured form of participant observation. I allowed myself to move around the rodeo grounds and to occasionally get into a short conversation with some of the other participants/spectators. These conversations became very important since they added context for the events and, occasionally, people were able to suggest where else I might look for data (i.e., newspaper articles and books).

The most structured aspect of this participant observation was the coding scheme that I decided to utilize for my field notes. I ultimately decided to use Richardson's method of coding (1994) that distinguishes between observational notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes and personal notes. This seemed to be a sensible way to organize my thoughts for future reference, both during my research and during my analysis.

Reading Between The Li(n)es: The Use of Textual Analysis in this Work

My gathering of textual data was done systematically and through library and internet research. For both events, I gathered programs, brochures and posters. I also
collected the “Calgary Sun” and the “Calgary Herald” beginning one day before each event until one day after each event. I subscribed to the ARGRA newsletter and found several years worth of back issues online. More material was gathered through library and internet searches. These searches turned up newspaper articles from both mainstream and ‘alternative’ media. Still other material was discovered through interactions with people at the events. One particularly exciting piece was brought to my attention by Wayne Jakino, as we ate dinner together. He suggested that I speak to the Crew Chief, Kelly Poorman, who had written a novel about gay rodeo. “Roman and Jules” turned out to be a very rich source for this work and one that I never would have found without this contact.

Texts were especially important to me in light of financial and time restrictions that prevented me from conducting interviews in Calgary. As filtered as it may be, text in newspaper articles, websites, novels and other sources gave a voice to some members of the IGRA and allowed me to draw on more than my own observations. In addition to serving this function, the texts themselves were read as valuable sources in their own right, revealing some of the broader narratives that exist about gender and sexuality both within and outside of the IGRA. As Prior states, “Textually ordered knowledge packages and stabilizes the order of things as they appear within a wider realm of discourse” (2004: 320). With this in mind, the texts were read with a focus on the research questions that inquire about the ways that the rodeo communities resist and reproduce hegemonic ideas about gender and sexuality. I paid particular attention to any text that dealt with social constructions of men (ie. ‘masculinity’), women (ie. ‘femininity’), and the relationship between the two, whether or not they were heteronormative ideas (ie. ‘sexualities’). As patterns developed, I began to code the data and to group texts that communicated similar ideas together. As the patterns emerged,

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*Wayne Jakino is the International Gay Rodeo Association’s founding president and has served as the CRIR’s announcer for all ten years that the rodeo has existed. We met at the first social function on the Thursday night before the rodeo, and spent quite a bit of social time together over the course of the weekend.*
I cross-referenced them with my observations in order to see if there was a larger discourse that I could identify as suggested by May (2001: 193).

In reading the texts from both the IGRA and the PRCA, I also made an effort to see multiple meanings in regards to gender and sexuality as,

Ideologies that are embodied in texts and representations are never seamless and coherent but contain traces of struggle, such as gaps, contradictions, and opposition. Therefore, these points of fracture may be used to challenge hegemonic representations, messages, meanings, and ideologies.

(Pirinen, 1997: 292)

By exploring these fissures, clues about resistance to hegemonic ideologies are illuminated. For instance, amid the images of rodeo queens and princesses, the Calgary Stampede program (2001) contained an ‘Albert Beef’ ad. This ad features three women leaning against a fence on a ranch, wearing work clothes (including muddy chaps). While one of them has her hips cocked to the side in (what appears to me as) a somewhat seductive pose, the other two are not sexualized in any way that I could identify. The image legitimately seems to be of three women running a cattle ranch which, while it may be historically accurate, is not consistent with the dominant ideologies about femininity. Before my findings are discussed in detail however, I want to briefly explore some of the methodological questions and challenges that arose during the course of this work.

Looking Back: Reflections On Some Methodological Decisions

As I have suggested, in planning and doing this research I became aware of the implications of some of the decisions that I made about research design. Although I had been told so before, the reality that no research design is flawless became apparent to
me as I wrestled with some of the details of this work.

The first major decision that I made was to gather my data through participant observation and textual analysis, and to exclude other methods from my research design. Interviews would have provided invaluable and wonderfully rich and complementary sources of data for this project. Ultimately, I decided that, due to time and financial restrictions, interviews were not an option. I could not obtain ethical approval in time for the rodeo which took place in June. Even if I had been able to obtain approval, I did not have the funds available to make repeated trips to Calgary for any necessary follow-up interviews, and I did not know at the time if I would be able to find enough participants in the Vancouver area. Thus, the decision not to do interviews was the only one that was feasible for this project. However, the potential value of interviews with IGRA cowboys is clear. Given that my sexuality places me as an outsider at the CRIR, I know that interview data would have yielded insights that my analysis lacks. This is compounded by another limitation of this research.

Due to the same restrictions of time and resources, I had to limit my time in the field to the two rodeos that I examined. The time that I had was very valuable; however, I believe that my research would have benefited tremendously had I been able to attend more of the IGRA rodeos. Although the scope of a master’s thesis does not encompass such extensive field work, it would have allowed greater familiarity with the IGRA and, almost certainly, more nuanced observations. Nevertheless, these are limitations that are largely imposed by the structure of the academic program and my status as a graduate student. As such, I am comfortable with the decisions not to conduct interviews or to attend more IGRA rodeos. There were, however, other decisions that were less clear.

When I selected the CRIR and the Calgary Stampede as the two rodeos that I would observe, I did so for a variety of reasons. First, they are both in Calgary. Having the two rodeos in the same city added a level of control for the context of the research.
Second, there was the factor of time. Both rodeos occurred within several weeks of one another. This also provided a level of temporal continuity for the sake of drawing comparisons. Finally, both of these rodeos are on fairly large, year-round rodeo circuits. The Calgary Stampede is the largest and most famous rodeo in Canada and the CRIR is the only gay rodeo in Canada. In this sense, the decision to use these two rodeos was a good one. However, an important difference is that the IGRA is amateur rodeo while the Stampede is professional.

When the amateur/professional difference occurred to me, I began to think that another amateur rodeo might have been better than the Stampede as a site of comparison. Other amateur rodeos would have been more similar in attendance levels than the Stampede, which hosts over a million people a year. It might also have been more similar in terms of the structure of the CRIR, since there would likely not be a midway, agriculture shows, or other aspects that are not directly related to rodeo events. This difference is fundamental, as the other aspects of Stampede, such as the rides and games, draw people that never attend a performance of the rodeo, while the CRIR is attended by everybody who comes to the Symon’s Valley Ranch for the weekend. I suggest that this is important as the presence or absence of ‘other activities’ might have a large impact on the composition of the audience.67

It would also have been possible to attend a smaller rodeo sanctioned by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association such as the Labour Day rodeo in Merritt, B.C. This small rodeo in the Nicola Valley is more similar to the CRIR in terms of attendance size and structure, and it is still on the PRCA circuit. However, to do this would have meant giving up the geographic and temporal continuity that was afforded by the Stampede. It would also have provided a very different atmosphere. For instance, the Nicola Valley Rodeo is not a destination event in the same way the the CRIR and the Stampede are. This similarity between the CRIR and the Stampede would have been

67 This is not to suggest that rodeos (gay or straight) are never attended by people who have never attended before. Nor is it to erase the importance and/or appeal that the gay rodeo might have in queer communities, giving it the power to draw audiences that would never otherwise attend a rodeo.
lost if I had chosen to use the rodeo in Merritt instead of the Stampede. People travel
from all over to come to the Stampede, and the same is true of the gay rodeo in
Calgary. At the CRIR, I met people from Texas, Vancouver, Colorado, Toronto, and
New Zealand. My experience at small PRCA events is that they are attended almost
exclusively by the local residents, though I imagine that there would certainly be some
tourists in attendance. The decision about research sites has meant that, in my analysis,
there are certain comparisons that might have been very different had a smaller venue
been chosen, but on the whole, I am comfortable with the decision that I made.

I am less comfortable with the way that I negotiated my presence in the field. In
particular, I am not entirely comfortable with the way that I presented myself to the
people that I met at the CRIR. As my research was not to include interviews, I did not
spend enough time considering how much I would divulge to the people with whom I
interacted. Although it seems quite obvious in retrospect, I did not have a clear idea of
what I would say about my research or myself if I was asked. I imagine that I assumed
that I would simply ‘be myself’ but clearly that was not adequate. Ultimately, I made
these decisions about disclosure as situations presented themselves.

The two major points that arose repeatedly at the CRIR, were my role at the
rodeo as a researcher and assumptions that were made, by others, about my sexuality.
Most of these decisions were in relatively unimportant situations. When I was
approached by men who were interested in a sexual encounter, I simply told them that
I was in a monogamous relationship. This was a true statement and the gender-neutral
nature of the word ‘partner’ allowed me to remain in the ‘heterosexual closet’ when I so
chose. The question of my research did not often become an issue. I never volunteered
the information but if I was asked what I was writing, I would tell people. Everybody
who asked seemed relatively enthusiastic about the project and, whether the political
element of gay rodeo was important to them or not, they recognized the subversive
possibilities that existed. These two points did, however, become an issue in terms of
the people with whom I developed an amicable relationship over the course of the weekend.

This was first brought to my attention at the Thursday night festivities before the CRIR. I met three men very early on and we had dinner together. One of them asked me what I did and I told them all that I was a student and that, in fact, I was at the rodeo with the intention of writing a thesis. We spent some time discussing masculinities and the subversive and political elements of gay rodeo, and I was quite pleased that the idea of the thesis was quite well received. It was not until later in the evening that one of them asked me if I had seen any boys that I wanted to take back to my motel.

Until that point I had simply allowed people to maintain the assumption that I identified as a gay man. I suppose that it would be dishonest to suggest that I was completely unaware that the assumption was being made, but it was not completely evident to me and I had not planned how I would 'come out' to them. I became worried that this would change their perception of me and I did not want them to feel that I had mislead them. It was not until the next night that I told this particular group of people that I identified as straight and, while there was no overt sign that they were upset with me, to this day I do not know how they felt about it.

I have recounted this story in an effort to make an argument about reflexivity. Quite simply, reflexive practice, and other methodological tools for addressing the power imbalances in research, must be maintained at all times, regardless of the research methods being employed. Furthermore, reflexivity must take into account all stages of the research process (Naples, 2003: 38). While my failure to be adequately thoughtful about how I would negotiate interactions in the field did not necessarily compromise my research, I was left feeling that my lack of preparation could have led to several undesirable outcomes, including causing distress to certain members of the IGRA. It would have been possible to create a situation in which the people with whom

It was an interesting moment when I realized that one of the men was less enthusiastic about the project. As a cowboy, he was also the most "genuine" of the group and this was noted as an element of anti-academic skepticism that is a part of the cowboy code.
I was interacting would feel like laboratory mice; the ‘gay cowboys’ being examined by the ‘straight academic’. Certainly, such a result would be antithetical to the reasons for which I began this work in the first place. While I have discussed the inadequacies of the terms ‘gay’ and ‘straight’, there is a material reality in the ways people understand those words and those ideas. My understanding of these categories aside, I will be viewed by most in society as a straight man. I was certainly considering this as I prepared to begin research and was acutely aware that it would be crucial to examine this element of my social location in order to contribute meaningfully with this work.

The story about my failure to negotiate my sexuality with the men that I met is also a story about failing to fully grasp my heterosexual privilege. This became clear to me when I thought about what it would be like to be at the Stampede with a male partner. While my concern about ‘ outing’ myself at the CRIR was predominantly a question of comfort and wanting to be accepted, coming out as queer in a ‘ straight rodeo’ could be a question of fear and danger.

Having said this, I was also guilty of being blind to my desire to subvert. This became most apparent to me at the Stampede where I found myself asking a simple question, “If I find the sexism and homophobia of straight rodeo so socially abhorrent, why do I still come?” I had become so focused on finding the oppression in the PRCA event that I was not allowing myself to see the positive elements of the rodeo and of the enacted constructions of masculinity. I found balancing these two forces to be a very difficult task. The final aspect of my work that I find disquieting is that I am not satisfied with the degree to which I acknowledged and examined my racial privilege.

50 When I say this, I am speaking particularly about certain individuals who I know identify themselves as gay men. However, from what I understand, there were certainly other men at the rodeo who do not self-identify as ‘gay’. I met one young man who expressed his appreciation of both the ‘cowboys’ and ‘cowgirls’ in such a way that suggested his bisexuality. In addition, though I was not aware of any, there were likely straight-identified men as well. I use the words ‘gay’ and ‘straight’ in reference to the perception, that I expect people might have had, rather than to my personal understanding of sexualities.

50 There were certainly other considerations in developing a strong standpoint. Ability, ethnicity and other factors are inextricably linked to gender and sexuality in creating the lens through which I see the world. They are also highly connected to rodeo and, thus, will strongly influence how a researcher views and understands rodeo performances. However, I have chosen to limit this particular discussion to questions of gender and sexuality as they are my primary categories of analysis.
While I have tried to include it in my analysis, and have had some success, I found that aspect very challenging and my analysis likely suffered for it. While this in itself is discouraging, it has also been a learning experience that has offered me the chance to reflect and learn about myself. As Harding suggests, a standpoint does not come naturally (1998: 185). Rather, it is something that comes as the result of deep introspection and constant vigilance through reflexive methodological practices. Clearly, these practices that allow us to try to negotiate power imbalances in research are vital to any work. I have certainly found that they are essential for me.

As I suggested, the research process was both incredibly exciting and incredibly rewarding. I have attempted to draw attention to some of the key aspects that I was considering throughout my work. While some decisions were dictated by my financial and academic status, others were made with careful consideration. Some of those decisions were ultimately successful while others were less so. Failures in methodological planning are not just about methodological rigour. The fear of hurting or alienating the people that I met reminded me that there can also be material human consequences and that these, as well as the methodological integrity of the work, must be considered at all times. With this aim in mind, reflexive practices are critical to sound research. Overall, I am quite pleased with the process that I undertook. While there are some things that I might have changed, the experience of designing and conducting a research project was, on a personal level, infinitely rewarding and I believe that it produced data that can make a serious contribution to the existing literature.
Chapter V

INSTITUTIONAL (RE)PRODUCTIONS: READING THE RODEO
ORGANIZATIONS

The hourly news came on the CBC as I headed north, towards the gay rodeo. The lead story was a follow-up to the previous day’s news that the Sodomy Laws in the United States had been overturned.\(^51\) The case that lead to this ruling began when police officers in Texas had entered a home and arrested two men who were in the midst of having sex with each other.\(^52\) I imagined the scene and tried to place myself in the middle of it. I tried to imagine the shame, the anger, the powerlessness that I would have felt, standing naked in front of armed police officers. I changed the station. A local talk radio show was dealing with same-sex marriage in Canada. People called in expressing their support or outrage for the direction in which Canadian law was going. Those opposed spoke to the “natural” order of things. They drew on the standard arguments about procreation and religion. “This isn’t about being homophobic but in the beginning it was Adam and Eve... not Adam and Steve.” I changed the station again. Some country music would calm me down and get me ready for the rodeo. “... Only in America. Dreaming in red, white and blue. Only in America. We all get a chance. Everybody gets to dance. Only in America...” (Brooks, Cook and Rogers 2001). Well, maybe not everybody.

I passed through the intersection at Hill Valley Rd. and noticed the new developments. Calgary was expanding beyond its previous edge. Eventually the construction tapered off and I found myself on a single lane road, weaving through some grass-covered hills. After a time, I came to a small green sign on my right that informed me that I had reached the city limit, and was officially leaving its boundaries. I saw the rainbow flags and campers in the field so I turned left and pulled into the parking lot that lay a mere twenty feet from the Calgary line. As I thought of the Stampede grounds in downtown Calgary, the symbolism was not lost on me. Although the gay rodeo could likely find a venue in the city, being on the outskirts of town was far more representative of gay rodeo’s place in the world of rodeo.\(^53\)

\[^51\] On Thursday June 26th, 2003, The American Supreme Court ruled that the Texas sodomy laws, and any other state laws that prohibited hetero or homosexual anal or oral sex, were unconstitutional. The 6 - 3 decision ruled that the Texas law “demeans the lives of homosexual persons” and that, “The state cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime” (In Goodspeed, 2003: A6).
\[^52\] Johnson, 2003.
\[^53\] Narratives such as this one are reconstructed from my experiences and field notes at the gay and straight rodeos in Calgary.
The Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association’s very name identifies it as a ‘gay’ organization and differentiates it immediately from ‘straight’ rodeo organizations that, though they embody many assumptions, contain no overt allusions to sexuality or gender. The geographic location of the Canadian Rockies International Rodeo (CRIR), just outside the city limits, is a metaphorically accurate representation of ARGRA at the periphery of the public imagination. That the Stampede is held in downtown Calgary, amid broad fanfare, symbolically reinforces that the CRIR is not just at the periphery of the public imagination; it is also at the periphery of rodeo. This perceived ‘otherness’ is problematic for me as I do not want to reinforce it, and yet, I find myself making every observation about ARGRA in relation to straight rodeo. As a longtime consumer of these rodeos and a newcomer to gay rodeo, this is how my experience leads me to understand it. I hope that I can analyze gender and sexuality in a way that I can highlight differences without suggesting that one form of rodeo is a ‘truer’ form than the other.54

A second difficulty that I have encountered arises in trying to separate notions of gender from notions of sexuality. As an analytical strategy, I believe that this is a worthwhile separation in that the two categories are not treated in the same way within each of the two rodeo communities. However, an understanding of masculinities must recognize that constructions of gender do not exist independently of sexuality or, indeed, many other categories of analysis. Rather, they are composite and fluid constructs that incorporate many other elements including, but not limited to, ethnicity, class, and ability. Although I will allude to these categories in this work, to examine them at length is beyond the scope of this thesis and a more in-depth analysis of how they contribute to understandings of rodeo masculinities must be left for future work.

54 This is my particular intention in choosing to denote Stampede as a “straight” rodeo, rather than using normalizing terms like “mainstream” or “regular.” Obviously, to use such language would simply reemphasize its centrality which, while it exists in publicity and attendance, is not reflected in any sort of inherent qualities that make it more “genuine” or “authentic” than the CRIR.
In this chapter, I focus on some of the assumptions, messages and prescriptions about gender and sexuality, that are embedded in and communicated by the institutional bodies of ARGRA and the Stampede, and I examine the ways these bodies reproduce and/or resist hegemonic masculinity.

**Learning Your Role: Segregated Gender Roles At The Straight Rodeo**

One of the most powerful ways by which rodeo constructs ideas about men and women is through the roles that people are given to play at the rodeo. This is also one of the areas in which there is the greatest variation between gay and straight rodeo. The heavy gender segregation at the Stampede consistently reinforces ideas about women having a less active, less dangerous, and less important role to rodeo while toughness, ruggedness, and courage are key to the very central role that men play and the masculinity that they present. The gay rodeo, on the other hand, removes a good deal of the power that the man/woman divisions hold by defying the sex role prescriptions of straight rodeo.

At the Calgary Stampede, almost every role is segregated along a male/female binary. As I have already stated, every single event is ‘closed’ to women except for barrel racing and that event is ‘closed’ to men. I qualify the word ‘closed’ because, as I have already noted, there have been some exceptional instances in which female competitors have participated in some roughstock events in PRCA competition. The 2003 Calgary Stampede was not one of these instances. In fact, in its souvenir program, the Stampede works to reinforce the exclusivity of the disciplines. Each event is allocated a page or two of the program, upon which there is a description of the rules and a list of past winners. In every single one of the descriptions, gendered pronouns are used to describe the competitors; for every event male pronouns are used, except for barrel racing which uses female pronouns. This is not at all surprising considering
that barrel racing is often slated as “Ladies Barrel Racing,” as it is defined in the CPRA rulebook (2003: 34).

The real importance of this division between men and women lies in that which differentiates barrel racing from the other events. Specifically, it is the only event that does not involve a direct and physical confrontation between the competitor and an animal. By contrast, the roughstock events revolve around the mastery and control of a ‘wild’ animal through the ability to remain seated upon it for a specific amount of time. The other events demand that the cowboy master the animals through his ability to control and immobilize it by roping it and/or wrestling it to the ground. Conversely, barrels are about a competitor’s ability to work with an animal, to cooperate with her horse, as a team, to achieve the fastest time possible. And, while this teamwork is also a part of steer wrestling and tie-down roping, it is the backdrop to the more immediate task of controlling and dominating an animal.

This distinction is further made apparent by the bronze trophies that are presented to each of the event winners at the Stampede. The trophy for the Cow Milking depicts a cowboy on horseback with his lasso around a cow’s neck. The cow is pitched back on its hind feet and the cowboy’s horse is pitched away from the cow (Stampede program, 2003: 8). This image illustrates the adversarial nature of the sport. The identical esthetic is reproduced on the tie-down trophy, although this time it is a horse backing up against a struggling calf (10). Each of the other men’s trophies depicts an ‘in action’ scene of a cowboy riding a bucking animal or sliding over top of a steer, ready to dog it to the ground. Most strikingly, the trophy for the Horse Race shows three cowboys hanging onto a rope that is attached to a bucking horse (18). One of the cowboys is on his knees while the other two pull against the animal. By contrast, the Barrel Racing trophy shows a calm horse standing immobile next to a barrel (22). A

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55 This is particularly true of tie-down Roping. In this event, the horse plays an arguably more active role than does a barrel horse. Once the calf has been roped and the cowboy has dismounted, the horse must walk slowly backwards in order to keep the calf, that is attached by the lasso to the saddle, off balance and unable to struggle against the cowboy when he goes to flank it.
cowgirl has one hand on the horse’s bridle and the other is stroking the horse’s mane.

The connection to a hegemonic masculinity that privileges courage, strength, ruggedness, and physical domination is very present in this division of labour and the trophies that represent it. To ensure this connection, women are excluded from the events that emphasize these characteristics while men are excluded from the event that does not overtly embody these traits. Simultaneously, the reverse process is taking place vis-a-vis women. By excluding women from most of the events, these ‘masculine’ traits are denied to them and they, and their athletic abilities, are constructed as physically and psychologically unable to cope with the dynamic of the rougher events. In this way, masculinity and femininity are tied to the sex of the individual and constructed as diametrically opposite and mutually exclusive categories.

This is further seen in the role of the Pick-up Men and the rodeo queens/princesses that herd the animals out of the arena in the timed events. Creating the roles so that the men deal with the roughstock and the women deal with the calves and steers communicates several beliefs about gender. In the roughstock events the animals are much more active. The bucking horses will often move at a gallop and will continue to buck until the flank strap is removed, making this process fast-paced, exciting, and gives it the appearance of danger. This is emphasized by the Stampede in their description of the Pick-up Men.

They move swiftly and surely to get the cowboys safely to the ground after each eight second ride, all the while avoiding the flying hooves of the bronc ... Their tasks require teamwork, courage, excellent horsemanship skills and an unsurpassed knowledge of livestock.

(Calgary Stampede Souvenir Program, 2003: 48)

Interestingly, the notion of a “masculine” teamwork emerges within the context of taming a wild animal... a context that is deliberately constructed as dangerous.
Conversely, the parallel role played by members of the rodeo court is not mentioned in the program. Visually, the contrast is striking. The smaller animals neither buck, nor do they pose any real (or perceived) threat to the women that are herding them out of the arena. This allows the women to ride at a fairly leisurely pace as they are working; a stark contrast to the urgency with which the men deal with the bucking horses.

There are several ideas that can be drawn from this. These are given some weight as they act in tandem with the division of roles given to the competitors. First, there is a strengthening of the discourse about the suitability of men and women for roles that involve danger and thus, the qualities that men and women each 'possess.' This division contributes to the construction of men as powerful and courageous, while suggesting the fragility of women. It suggests that women should be protected from the perils of the roughstock and only asked to work in a situation that will not be as dangerous. Men, on the other hand, are expected to be in dangerous situations and to cope with injury. "Casts and bandages are the only things telling you if a rodeo cowboy is hurt. In rodeo, it’s simple - if a cowboy does not ride, he does not get paid. Cowboys will stoically endure all types of injuries to make that eternal eight second ride" (emphasis added, Stampede Program, 2003: 7).

Second, there is a statement about the relative importance and centrality of men and women to the sport of rodeo. Men and their roles that highlight masculinity are clearly showcased as more important. In addition to the mention of the Pick-up Men and the omission of women in the program, it is the men and ‘their’ events that dominate published images. Every year, the Stampede produces a poster for publicity. These posters consistently feature working and/or competing cowboys. The cover of the 2001 Stampede program features two images. The first is a working cowboy on the plains. Superimposed, above him, is a cowboy competing in the bareback competition amid fireworks and smiling faces. The 2003 program features three cowboys: one

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57 The 2000 Calgary Stampede poster did feature a female barrel racer in competition. Other than that, the posters have consistently had an androcentric focus.
bullrider, one bronc rider and one roper. In fact, the only images of barrel racers are on
the page describing the event (22) and the adjacent page (23) which is a full page ad for
the “Calgary Herald” (the event sponsor for Barrel Racing). The central role that men
play is extended further by the gendering of the rodeo arena.

Knowing Your Place: The Gendering Of The Straight Rodeo Arena

At the Calgary Stampede, the arena itself was made to be a very ‘male’ space.
That is to say that the arena was the place that men ‘belonged.’ The pick-up men, for
instance, did not leave the arena once during the competition. Even during the tie-down
roping and the steer wrestling, in which the women were working, the pick-up men
remained in the arena. The women, on the other hand, came into the arena for the
events that they worked and left promptly after the event was over. This was also true
of the barrel racers. They began their run from outside the arena, ran the barrels, and
exited at a gallop. In the timed events, all of the competing cowboys entered the arena
and were given time to linger before and after they competed. The roughstock
cowboys were also afforded some time in the arena, after their ride. Certainly, some of
this is due to the nature of the events. In the other events, with the exception of tie-
down roping, the cowboys do not finish on horseback and/or need to exit the arena
on their own power. This affords them time to celebrate their performance and/or
interact with the audience. Nonetheless, this does contribute to the overall sense that
men are ‘at home’ in the arena and that women are simply ‘guests’ riding in, riding out,
and remaining largely invisible to the audience.

The masculinization of the Stampede arena was furthered by the exclusive use of
men in the peripheral roles within the arena. The chute boss was a man. The rodeo
clowns were both men. The flag man was a man. The judges were all men. The

58 However the focus of this ad is not the cowgirl but the barrel that carries the newspaper’s name and logo.
In addition, this ad speaks to the newspaper’s coverage of the Stampede and makes no reference to the
paper’s support for the event.
barrelman was a man. And, the announcers were all men. In fact, apart from the singer of the national anthems, almost all of the voices that were heard at the Stampede were male voices. The only exceptions were brief interviews with a young girl who was participating in the Mutton Bustin' and a woman from the audience. It should also be noted that these roles, with the exception of the announcers, require that the individual be in the arena with the roughstock. Not only are there no women competing in the roughstock events; no women are even in the arena during these events. This observation was consistent with every straight rodeo that I have ever attended. In the time that I have been a spectator, I have never seen a woman fill any of the roles mentioned above. This process, in tandem with the emphasis on men in published material, ensures that the cowboy remains the focus at events such as the Stampede, and that the characteristics embedded in the Cowboy Code remain his and his alone.

Changing The Roles, Changing The Rules: The CRIR And The Concept Of Masculinity

The bull entered its spin before even leaving the gate. It turned left and the rider matched it with seeming ease. Unable to dislodge the rider, it broke out of its turn, bucked once, and turned back to the right, flattening out slightly but accelerating as it went. This was one that the bull would not win however. The crowd burst into applause and cheers as the whistle sounded, letting us know that we had seen a successful ride. The competitor untied, popped off the animal's back, and landed heavily on the ground. Indeed, while some rides are beautiful, there is still no graceful (or entirely safe) way of dismounting a bucking bull. When she got up, she brushed off the dust and removed her hat, saluting the cheering crowd... I'm sorry, did you say 'she'? I had never seen a female bull rider before attending the gay rodeo.

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At the Canadian Rockies International Rodeo (CRIR), a radically different

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59 Mutton Bustin' is an event for very young children. They ride sheep into the arena. There are no rules and no score is kept. It is simply a nice way of including children and it is entertaining for the audience members who get to watch.
approach was apparent. In fact, there was no evidence of any sort of role prescription and people were welcome to participate in all of the events regardless of whether they identified as male or female. Transgendered individuals are welcome to compete although I do not know whether or not any trans men or women were present when I was there. Where the Stampede’s format works to construct masculinity through acts of gender exclusion, the CRIR consistently removes those barriers. The result of this is that the meanings that are attached to bull riding, and the cowboy code in general, (ie. toughness) are still present but are no longer exclusively linked to men. Conversely, the meanings attached to barrel racing are not restricted to women. In fact, I found it quite difficult to discern any real difference between the ways that men and women are constructed by ARGRA. That sex categories are not built in direct opposition to one another makes it very difficult to discuss masculinity if it remains firmly attached to the sexed subject. When this arose in my analysis I first reacted by thinking that I would find something that would tie masculinity back to maleness; ARGRA could not have been as subversive as it appeared. However, I ultimately found that they had, in their published materials and in the structure of the rodeo, separated masculinity from male bodies, thereby opening this category up to women. This is the project that Judith Halberstam advocates in her book “Female Masculinity” (1998). This separation creates space in which female masculinities can be acknowledged.

The only aspect of the rodeo that reinforces common sense assumptions about men and women is the division of competitors into the categories of competition. Although men and women compete in the same events and play by the same rules, the CRIR continues to separate the competitors into male and female categories that do not compete against one another. This separation lends some weight to notions of naturalized difference in male/female sporting abilities, although it is clearly to a lesser degree than the straight rodeo that prevents participation based on sex. While this must be noted, the rationale for this division is never expressed in the ARGRA material that

The only exception is the camp events for which there is only a “team” category.
was available to me, and this appears to be an exception to a broader attempt to challenge hegemonic ideas about gender.

The desire to challenge naturalized gender differences is further evidenced by the running order of CRIR events. On Saturday, the men ride first and the women ride second. On Sunday, that order is reversed. Neither men nor women are privileged by having a monopoly on the day’s finale. Rather, each has their turn at opening the performance and each has their turn at closing it. As was the case with straight rodeo, the ethic that informs the roles in competition is further extended to the pick-up men. At the CRIR, a man and a woman were performing these duties together. As this is the only IGRA rodeo that I have attended, I do not know if men and women always share these duties as a matter of policy. Regardless, it is certainly evidence of an environment that questions the ideological assumptions that exist, and are perpetuated, in straight rodeo. Indeed, this ethic was also extended to other peripheral figures. At the CRIR, although the announcers were both male, the chute boss and assistant chute boss were both women.

This is not simply an exercise in ‘keeping score’ however. On balance there were more men in the arena. On balance, the voices in the arena remained heavily male. On balance, there was more advertising was directed to men and there were more men present at the rodeo. In these ways, more attention is paid to men than to women at the gay rodeo; however, what is more important here is that the CRIR provides a fissure in the monopoly that men hold on the rodeo arena at venues such as the Stampede. I may be accused of idealizing or romanticizing this event. And I may be accused of looking through male eyes and being willfully blind to a male-dominated space. However, it truly seemed that perceptions of differences between men and women were greatly reduced in the rodeo arena.

As another point of comparison, the event programs are consistently ambiguous about the figures that are depicted on the covers. In the early days of the gay rodeo

61 This is true of all IGRA-sanctioned rodeos
(1993 - 1995), the programs did not display any human figures at all. Instead they were adorned with images of longhorn skulls, buffalo, or other, more abstract references to the West. In 1997, the poster featured a bull rider whose face is obscured by shadow. In 1998, it is a cowboy hat that hides definitive clues about the sex of the person on horseback. One of these two strategies was also used in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2003 and, while some of the images may appear to be the figures of men, that is never made overtly apparent and must certainly not be assumed. Similarly, the language within the programs and within the newsletter ("ARGRAculture") is ungendered. Either neutral nouns such as 'competitor' or hybrid pronouns such as 's/he' are used to erase sex differences and any suggestion that men or women are better suited to a particular role or activity. This effort seems to be informed by an element of the organization's mission statement to "foster a sense of tolerance and togetherness within the community at large" (www.argra.org/culture.htm). Endeavoring to meet this goal has led to the destabilization of the oppositional construction of sex so that what ARGRA values about the athletes in the men's competitions, is also valued in the female athletes. Although the conceptualization of gender projected by the rodeo association is not shared by all of the participants, as shall be seen in the next chapter, the outcome is that gender categories are indeed separated from the sexed subject.

The gay rodeo can thus be understood as hosting expressions of "female masculinity" (Halberstam, 1998). While women have access to masculinity via identity (eg. butch) and/or physical acts associated with 'masculinity' (eg. bull riding) and men are able to participate in events that have usually been the domain of women, masculinity remains a more privileged category as the rodeo remains focused on masculine expressions to define it. In the photos of the CRIR committee members, most of the women are wearing wranglers, work shirts and western hats, although one of the women sitting in front wears a long red skirt, an ornately decorated western jacket, a blouse and make-up, indicating a more conventionally feminized gender. Several

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62 The 2002 edition was the lone exception, showing a series of photos from different events.

other women are attired somewhere in the middle. They wear make-up with their work clothes or a tassled shirt instead of a work shirt (CRIR Souvenir Program, 2003: 19). The men in the photo uniformly wear jeans, boots, work shirts and, in all but one case, a cowboy hat. This suggests that this style of dress, associated with masculinity, is accessible to everyone, whether or not they choose to adopt it. When women do, their attire stands in sharp contrast to most of the women that appear in the Stampede’s program, dressed in distinctly ‘women’s’ clothing.

Masculinity is also captured in the spirit of the images on the gay rodeo programs, which is very similar to that used to promote the Stampede. That is to say that the images of the roughstock events are emphasized most heavily. In each of those posters the animal is completely on its front legs, capturing the excitement and struggle that defines the event. That struggle or confrontation between animal and competitor is still very present in gay rodeo and a competitor is still rewarded for the ‘masculine’ trait of being able to master the animals in the roughstock and timed events, whatever the sex of the competitor.

However, there are some important differences between the events at the two rodeos. At the CRIR, these differences de-emphasize the notion of mastery over an animal, though it is by no means eliminated. For instance, the tie-down roping of the Stampede is essentially replaced by break-away roping at the CRIR. The snapping back of the calf’s neck as it runs out of slack rope, the abrupt flanking of the calf, and the ultimate tying of the calf are all removed at the CRIR, thereby focusing the event on a competitor’s skill with a rope rather than the immobilization of a calf. Similarly, the chute dogging is a much more gentle form of steer wrestling. Without the momentum of a horse and the downward pressure of a cowboy sliding from the saddle, the event at the CRIR removes a great deal of the force that is present in the Stampede’s event. Certainly, chute dogging is still about rewarding displays of masculinity through the wrestling of a steer to the ground but the optics of the event are not as violent as those
in straight rodeo. While they do not discuss the optics of the event, the IGRA is explicit about their concern for the welfare of the animals and contestants. “Although consisting of traditional rodeo events, gay rodeo activities purposefully have been tailored to provide the animal and human participants with the safest environment possible, while still demonstrating the skill of the contestant” (www.igra.com/welfare.html, 2003). In fact, the treatment of animals is important in all rodeo as the rodeos rely on stock contractors to supply them with animals for the events. If the animals were poorly treated, the stock contractors might find that raising rodeo stock was no longer cost effective. However, the IGRA guidelines appear to go further than those used at other rodeos by emphasizing human safety as well. While this contravenes the aspect of the cowboy code that prizes courage over caution, there are still far more similarities between the roughstock and timed event at gay and straight rodeos, than there are differences. That is to say that the focus of the events, while altered, remains fairly consistent. As such, the emphasis on toughness and domination, though mediated and shared at the CRIR, are still very present.

However, given that men are also able to compete in the barrel racing (not to mention the flag racing and pole bending), one must consider what kind of latitude that creates for men within the category of masculinity. The horse events do not emphasize courage, domination, power, or any such traditional characteristic of the cowboy and yet men compete in them regularly. And, while they still compete in roughstock and timed events, so do the competitors who do not identify as men. How then can one try to understand the notion of a hegemonic masculinity? If we imagine gender as separable from a sexed subject, does ‘masculinity’ simply come to represent the traits that are elsewhere commonly associated with men? Does femininity do the same with women? Are these terms even still useful once they are removed from the context in which they emerged? As they have cultural significance, and as they are still identified with men and women, they can help us understand power in society, I believe that they
are. These categories still have an enormous amount of currency in society and it is not insignificant that the ARGRA productions of gender create a great deal of latitude within the hegemonic, and very powerful, rodeo masculinity. As an institution, ARGRA is far less prescriptive than the Stampede, in terms of dictating what characteristics make a man a 'man.'

While ARGRA challenges the very basis of the masculine/feminine binary, other aspects of hegemonic masculinity are less critically examined. The one aspect where this is most apparent is that of ethnicity. As in the case with straight rodeo, the CRIR remains a very white organization. Images of the Stampede are overwhelmingly of white competitors, spectators, and other white people connected to the rodeo. For instance, between the most recent poster and program, precisely three figures appear to be of a visible minority. These representations include a "Cinch" clothing advertisement that depicts Fred Whitfield with six other cowboys (Stampede Program, 2003: 33). Whitfield is a champion tie-down roper from Texas and one of the very few highly successful professional black athletes in rodeo. Apart from this photo, there are two images of members of the First Nations. The first - which is a painting of a man with a feather in his long hair - is used to promote the Western Art Show (Stampede Program, 2003: 42). The second is a small image of a hoop dancer on the souvenir poster (2003). Both of these images could be discussed as neocolonial images that exoticize the 'Indian,' market him/her to the 'tourist gaze,' and allude to the historical/mythical west (Johnson and Underiner, 2001: 45). They might be seen as reminders of the romanticized struggle between 'Cowboys and Indians,' an image that many will be familiar with. For my purposes, it is enough to say that they play a marginalized role in the rodeo and in its publicity. They are a foil to the 'white cowboy' who we see glorified in photo after photo.

The privileging of 'whiteness' at ARGRA is done not only through juxtaposition

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63 For more of a discussion on the commodification and representation of the 'Indian', see Daniel Francis (1992) and the books edited by Meyer and Royer (2001) and Bataille (2001).
but through omission. As mentioned earlier, some of the images obscure the competitor's face; however, the unambiguous images that are presented are images of whiteness. From the photos on the website to the make-up of the rodeo committee and board of directors - none of whom appears to be a member of an ethnic minority - ARGRA remains an organization that still presents the cowboy as a figure of European descent.64

Another element of hegemonic rodeo masculinity that should be considered is that of Christianity. In fact, neither the Stampede nor the ARGRA events that I attended emphasized religion too heavily. The Stampede has even removed the opening prayer, or invocation, that is such a common part of rodeo. I could not find any mention or rationale for this decision. Regardless, the most overt reference to Christianity so often associated with the cowboy has been removed from the Stampede. Interestingly, the CRIR has not removed the opening prayer.65 While there was not enough data to make any broad claims about religion, it was interesting to hear the words used to introduce the "cowboy's prayer." Kelly Poorman, who led the prayer, began by saying, "Would those that are able, please bow your heads?" (Field Notes, June 29, 2003). For me, this was interpreted as another attempt at creating latitude for those in attendance. By saying this he provided verbal 'permission' to either participate or not. However, it remains true that the opening prayer works to normalize Christianity within the world of rodeo. While these words give 'permission' for 'others' to be there, they still do mark the event as a Christian event.

64 It is not a surprise that there are “Black Rodeos” (www.billpickettrodeo.com) and “Indian Rodeos” (http://indianrodeonews.com) in North America. Although I know very little about them, I assume that they were created, at least partly, due to the heavy emphasis on "whiteness" that exists at places such as the Stampede and the CRIR.

65 "The Cowboy's Prayer" is said before many rodeo performances. Although it can be found all over the internet and many rodeo goers can recite it by heart, I could not find any citation for this prayer. "Our Heavenly Father, we pause at this time, mindful of the many blessings you have bestowed upon us. We ask, Lord, that you will be with us in the arena of life. We as cowboys do not ask for special favours. We don't ask to draw around the chute fighting horse, the steer that won't lay or to never break a barrier. We don't even ask for all daylight runs. We do ask Lord, that you will help us live our lives here on earth as cowboys, in such a manner, that when we make that last inevitable ride, to the country up there, where the grass grows lush, green, and stirrup high, and the water runs cool, clear and deep, that you'll take us by the hand and say, 'Welcome to Heaven cowboy, your entry fees are paid'."

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This Christian element of the rodeo may be especially important in terms of
gender and sexuality as religion plays a large role in shaping people’s ideas about these
two elements of human life. It is also true that some Christian circles/groups, such as
the Promise Keepers, promote essentialist visions of gender that see ‘masculinity’ and
‘femininity’ as static and mutually exclusive categories (Bartkowski,, 2002: 259). As such,
this might heavily influence how rodeo insiders view these two social categories. I
believe that a more in-depth study would reveal that religion plays a very prominent
role, but that must be left for another project. In closing this chapter, I will now turn to
the latter of the two categories and examine how sexuality is presented by ARGRA and
the Stampede.

**Dressing Goats and Drag Queens: Queering Rodeo**

That straight rodeo is a largely heterosexist environment is clearly evident when
it is examined with a critical eye. That is to say that heterosexuality is naturalized
through a constant and consistent stream of cultural practices and messages, much in
the same way that it has been in the broader society. One instance in which the
heterosexism of the site was made very apparent was at the awards ceremony at
Saturday’s performance. The presenters were escorted to the stage by a member of the
rodeo court. This ceremony quickly became a steady stream of middle-aged white men
in suits and cowboy hats escorted by young white women. The importance of
maintaining an environment of heterosexuality became most apparent when the next
presenter was a woman. Rather than being escorted by a member of the rodeo court
(as was every other presenter that afternoon), she was escorted by a member of the
rodeo committee; a man dressed in a suit and a cowboy hat.

Another striking example of heterosexism and homophobia was in an ad that
the Stampede used in washrooms around the city of Calgary. I found this ad while at a
gas station on the way into town and, later, found a newspaper article that addressed it and the conflict that it had created (Van Rassel, 2003). The ad suggests to the reader that if he turns his head to read it, and the person next to him thinks that the reader is looking at his penis, that the reader risks being punched in the head. The prevailing homophobia tells us that this is a perfectly natural response to having another man look at your penis. The ad goes on to say that if you imagine that pain multiplied by ten, you might know how a cowboy feels when a bull is stepping on him. However, if the man next to the reader does not get angry about being watched, the ad concludes, “He’s probably sweet on you. Sorry about that” (Field Notes, July 2003). Though there was at least one official complaint, the Stampede did not pull the ad but promised to consider the complaints when future material was developed (Van Rassel, 2003:1). It does not even seem to occur to the Stampede that anyone connected to the rodeo (sponsors, patrons, etc) could be anything but strictly heterosexual. Not only is it imperative that he be ‘straight,’ it is incomprehensible that a cowboy could be gay. As such, it is not difficult to understand why someone might feel unwelcome in an environment such as this, if they did not conform to the compulsory heterosexuality of the hegemonic rodeo masculinity present at the Stampede.

To mention that ARGRA challenges this aspect of this construction of masculinity is an exercise in stating the obvious. That men who do not identify as ‘straight’ are riding bulls and roping calves immediately challenges the notion that gay men are ‘effeminate,’ and weaker or less athletic than the heterosexual cowboy from straight rodeo-stereotypes such as those present in the Stampede ad that suggest that the guy next to you might be “sweet on you.” That very language can be understood as an attempt to emasculate the man who is attracted to other men. The simple act of creating an environment in which ‘out’ men ride bulls removes the essentializing power that those stereotypes contain.

This seems to be the most powerful element of the camp events as well.
Comprised of steer decorating, goat dressing, and wild drag racing, the camp events are open to everyone and offer a fun and entertaining element to the rodeo while simultaneously making a political statement. Rather than overtly challenging the stereotypes, the camp events embrace and exaggerate those very stereotypes. While camp resists definition (Cleto, 1999: 3), this exaggeration seems to be its very core. The camp events do not only exaggerate; through a threefold process, the camp events juxtapose the mocking characterizations with some of the core values of straight rodeo masculinity.

First, there is the act of taking the stereotypes to a level of near-absurdity. The decorating of the steer and the dressing of the goat take the notions that gay men are obsessed with esthetics and fashion, and embellishing them excessively. The ‘gay man’ who is concerned with matching his drapes and his furniture is now concerned with tying a bow onto a steer’s tail. Fashion remains so important that ‘he’ insists on dressing the livestock and dressing up in a flashy outfit, even though the environment is dirty and dusty and completely unsuited to the chosen attire.

Second, the camp events themselves are closely related to events at straight rodeo. Wild Cow Milking and Wild Horse Racing are rarely spoken of or depicted by the material published by the straight rodeo associations, and yet these events epitomize many of the values of hegemonic rodeo masculinity. They have the potential to be dangerous and they call for the mastering and immobilizing of an animal through strength and courage. However, like the camp events, they play themselves out somewhat absurdly and become a caricature of the straight rodeo. It seems that the camp events are a fairly direct imitation of these events. The Wild Cow Milking and the Steer Decorating are very similar events; the only difference being what one does once one has the animal stilled. Similarly, the Wild Drag Race and the Wild Horse Race are very similar to one another.

Third, the parts of the ‘straight camp events’ that support the hegemonic straight
rodeo masculinity are not lost in the translation to the camp events at the CRIR. Apart from goat dressing, which is fairly benign, the events showcase cowboys (and indeed cowgirls also) being dragged through the arena dirt as they attempt to control an animal. With the steer kicking and jumping, the competitors risk injury in a potentially dangerous situation. The result of this is that the image is both that of the exaggerated 'gay' stereotype and the exaggerated 'straight' stereotype. The CRIR camp events juxtapose both constructs and thus destabilize the division or distinction that rests between them. How can it be that a 'gay man' is riding a steer? How can it be that the 'cowboy' is gay?

The CRIR queers rodeo in more overt ways as well. This is seen in the advertisers that promote their products through the rodeo. “Elbow Grease” lube, a GLBTQ travel agency, and most of the local ‘gay bars’ advertise at the rodeo and/or in the program. Even mainstream advertisers such as “Bud Light” run a ‘queer’ ad that features a group of people drinking together. While acknowledging same-sex relations through the portrayal of a gay male couple and a lesbian couple, the ad goes further by placing a single man in conversation with each of the couples. This suggests the possibility of a both homo- and bisexual polyamory. The ad for the DC cowboys, a men’s dance group from the United States, also queers the rodeo through an image of a white cowboy tied to a fence while a black man holds onto the ropes. This reference to bondage and dominance/submission in sex, in an interracial context, further extends sexuality from the realm of heteronormativity.

Interestingly, it seems that the CRIR sets limitations to what can be expressed in their publications. I suggest this because, while many of the ads in the program were overtly sexual, they pale in comparison to the ads published in “Outlooks: Canada’s Gay Community Magazine”. One such ad in the June 2003 edition shows a man with semen on his cheek, neck, and chest. The caption for this “AIDS Calgary” ad reads, “Enjoy a Good Licking” (37). Another ad, published more recently shows a man in a

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66 However, it should be noted that one competitor was kicked by a goat at the CRIR

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shower singing into the shower head with one hand and masturbating with his other (June 2004: 6). I question whether ARGRA limits the extent to which sexuality can be centred at the rodeo due to a sense of ‘propriety’ that would be informed by, though not conforming to, straight rodeo culture. This was also noticeable on the promotional poster which avoids all mention of ‘queerness’ other than the sponsors, such as Pridevision, who have their logos along the bottom of it.

Regardless, (queer) sexuality does take a central role at the rodeo. The cruising scene is obvious to anybody who walks through the campsite or goes to the social events in the evenings. Sex is readily available most of the day and night. Queerness is also centred through simple acts such as two men or women two-stepping together and the open displays of homoerotic affection that would be scandalous at the Stampede, but are very common at the CRIR. It should be noted that there were also examples of men dancing with women and, I am certain, sexual encounters between them as well.

The result of this is that the CRIR does not prescribe a narrow male sexuality for its participants and observers. Indeed, while there is diversity within the category of queer, there was no sense that ‘straight-acting’ or ‘queer-looking’ men enjoyed a place of privilege relative to one another. While items such as the poster erase the queer nature of the event, the camp events are as central a part of the day as is the bull riding. The CRIR is an example of the creation of latitude, of opening up space within the category of masculinity in which men can be cowboys, regardless of their sexual practices. And, it is well known that there are individuals at the CRIR who identify as straight. The rodeo clown, for instance, was a known straight man who participated in both the rodeo as well as some of the social activities over the course of the weekend. Personally, I felt that the latitude that I sensed was liberating for me as much as it might have been for other men at the event. Heterosexuality simply becomes one of many identities that a man might adopt. This was made explicit in an ad for a dance
competition in which, “Couples can be made up of two men, two women, or one man and one woman” (ARGRAculture, April 2004: 2). I would speculate, fairly safely, that this sort of option would never be made available at straight rodeo.

Ultimately, this notion of latitude is consistently present in the way that ARGRA constructs notions of masculinity. Where the Stampede works through sexual exclusion to shore up and naturalize the differences between men and women, ARGRA seeks to destabilize that process. By erasing the sex roles that are present at the Stampede, men are given latitude to be rugged and courageous bull riders or skilled riders who can work with their horse to maneuver through a set of obstacles as quickly as possible. If they so choose, they can even do both. As men and women are not constructed in binary opposition to one another, women are also afforded this opportunity, thereby making masculinity, which remains prized in the rodeo arena, accessible to everyone. In addition, ARGRA creates a space in which the arena of sexuality is opened up to the queer possibilities that the Calgary Stampede denies through a series of heterosexist and homophobic practices. The visibility of these queer practices at the CRIR further destabilizes the strength of hegemonic rodeo masculinity. Combined with the removal of masculinity from the male body, the queering of rodeo opens up the possibility that anyone can be a ‘cowboy’ whether they are a man or not, whether they are straight or queer. This latitude is liberating for anybody who attends the rodeo as they are no longer excluded by the hegemonic rodeo masculinity that is in operation at places like the Calgary Stampede.

Some people however, do not value this latitude to the same degree that I do. In the following chapter, I examine how some individuals approach gender and sexuality in gay rodeo. In this endeavor, we get a glimpse of the diversity of opinion that exists within this community.
Chapter VI
PERSONAL (RE)PRODUCTIONS: Hegemonic Masculinity in the Lives of IGRA Insiders

Having examined the ways that the rodeo organizations produce gender and sexuality, I now want to turn to the individual. I was curious about the ways that individuals within the rodeo communities understand and express ideas about masculinity and sexual identity. This is a slightly daunting task considering that interviews were not a part of my research methodology. Even so, in addition to my observations, there are sources such as books (Poorman, 2000), newspaper articles (including, Sloan, 1999; Jaremko, 1994; Cordon, 1994, McGovern, 1994; Laird, 2003), a journal article that also appeared in Toronto’s “Now” magazine (Rubenstein, 2000) and personal websites (including Mcintry, Brake and Bidstrup) that illuminate, to a degree, the various understandings and attitudes that exist within the world of gay rodeo. 67 Not surprisingly, even from a fairly brief survey of these texts, I was able to find a very diverse set of discourses that run through the ideas expressed by some of the people connected to the IGRA.

The “Very Straight” Gay Cowboys: Individual Reproductions of Hegemonic Masculinity

I followed him from the bar to a corner where three of his friends stood talking. The dance was going on in the room above and we could hear the beat of the music as well as that of the feet moving on the floor above. The five of us stood in our wranglers, boots and hats. They all wore long sleeve button-up shirts. I wore a t-shirt. Each had a moustache and a tin of chew in their back pockets. They were all big guys too... not fat but well muscled from hard work. They were cattle ranchers from another part of the province and they had been raised on rodeo. Several 67 I chose to examine productions of gender and sexuality at the gay rodeo exclusively, as my research focuses on alternative sporting venues. While I do not expect that I would find universally held views in straight rodeo either, those views are not the focus of this work. They are however, certainly an interesting area of inquiry and a future project might seek out the individual acts of resistance in the world of straight rodeo.

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times, they made it clear to me that they were “real cowboys;” they were “real men.”

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While gender norms are challenged by gay rodeos such as the Canadian Rockies International Rodeo, hegemonic notions of masculinity are still fairly prevalent in parts of the gay rodeo community. Some of the cowboys will spend a great deal of energy emphasizing their ‘masculinity’, a concept that some seem to understand in the relatively restricted way in which it is portrayed in straight rodeo. One could hypothesize any number of psychological or sociological reasons for this but what is certain is that there are some for whom the assimilation of these characteristics is very important. Many of these men seem to fit rather well into Connell’s notion of the “Very Straight Gay” (1995). For example there are personal websites that are created and maintained by gay rodeo enthusiasts that link to places such as www.straightacting.com and the “Straight Gay Guy Webring.” Some even refuse to identify as ‘gay’ as they feel that this term is too loaded with feminizing connotations.

The word “gay” has come to mean something very negative and disreputable in my opinion, something I am not about, and cannot/will not relate to, or be part of. I am a man who happens to dig other guys, it’s as simple as that.

(Micntry, Reasons for this Website, para 1)

While this is certainly an extreme illustration of strict adherence to hegemonic rodeo masculinity, it is indicative of an identifiable pattern that culminates in the rejection of a ‘gay’ identity and a subscription to many of the commonly-held beliefs about gender.

One of the best examples of this pattern is found in the novel “Roman and Jules”

68 A website that focuses heavily on “masculinity” and is directed at men who are attracted to other men.
(Poorman, 2000). This novel was written by a CRIR insider and tells the tale of a ‘gay’ bull rider (Jules) who falls in love with a ‘straight’ stock contractor (Roman) and the very close relationship that develops between them. As a representation of life in gay rodeo, this book offers a perspective that I could not have accessed anywhere else. While this book emphasizes many of the more subversive elements of gay rodeo, and in some places is overtly political, one can see where Poorman remains committed to the project of reproducing hegemonic rodeo masculinity. For instance, some of the antagonists in the story are a group of men who participate in the barrel racing and pole bending (traditionally ‘feminine’ sports). Jules continuously refers to them as the “Pretty Horse People.” This term, which is always said in a condescending and demeaning tone, reflects the feminization of certain events and transfers it to the male competitors who participate in them. This is set up in stark contrast to the hero Jules who participates in the most ‘masculine’ of events: bull riding.

Jules is created to embody many of the qualities of the ‘cowboy code.’ After their first meeting, Roman says that he recognizes that Jules is a gentleman (27) for showing modesty and consideration. Jules takes physical risks by engaging in a sport like bull riding and the risk of the sport is emphasized for the reader (2). By winning most events in which he competes, he demonstrates ability and success. This success is extended into his professional life in which he owns a software company. While computers may not be the most intuitive fit for a ‘cowboy,’ his success is consistent with the notions of hard work and domination and gives him a modern dimension. Further, Jules shows courage, domination, and strength by being a strong fighter and engaging in a fist fight even when the odds are overwhelmingly against him (62). His body is muscular and lean (xv) and he is highly desirable sexually (19). Finally, it is made very clear that Jules is a “top” and only plays that sexual role (5). The dominant role, that of the penetrator, is reserved for the man who can dominate a bull in the arena or another

Kelly Poorman is the Arena Crew Director at the CRIR and many other IGRA rodeos. In conversation, he told me that “Roman and Jules” is not just a work of fiction. It is also a reflection on his experiences with the rodeo.
man in a fight. So, while there are deviations (ie. computers), the cowboy code remains strongly embedded in his character.

This is extended into the ways that individuals see gay rodeo or, at the very least, the way that many present it publicly. Pronger’s (2000) discussion of the politics of inclusion is something to consider here. Pronger argues that gay sports tend to seek legitimization through the use of the same rules used by mainstream sport and that, while this furthers the cause of acceptance, it may inhibit the project of ‘gay liberation’. While he is referring solely to the structure of gay sports being congruent with the structure of the mainstream versions, one can see that this notion informs the way that some present gay rodeo. That is to say that gay rodeo is often presented by IGRA insiders as ‘the same’ as straight rodeo in all ways other than the openness about sexuality. It might be thought that such a presentation would be more palatable to ‘straight’ readers of mainstream media, from which many of my sources are taken. However, the transferring of hegemonic rodeo masculinity onto gay rodeo exists in “Roman and Jules” and on several personal websites of gay rodeo competitors/enthusiasts writing for their peers.

The similarities to straight rodeo are regularly emphasized by people connected to gay rodeo. After asserting that the livestock used in gay rodeo is the same as that used in straight rodeo, one man continues, “It’s just as dangerous. We’re gay, not the animals” (in Jaremko, 1994: 2). While adding the self-deprecating and humorous reference to the notion that gay men are not as tough as straight men, he does attempt to establish the legitimacy of gay rodeo by comparing the level of danger and quality of stock to those of straight rodeo. A similar assessment is made in another article.

But overall, with bucking half-ton bulls to be conquered, events are challenging enough for professionals. “It’s not a sissy rodeo”, says Robert (not his real name), a gay rodeo regular who was raised on a farm north of Calgary. “You’ve got to be tough. You’re working with
real live animals. There’s danger in it - I’ve seen quite a few people get injured and packed out.”

(in Rubinstein, 2000: 135)

This emphasis on similarity was also extended to men’s self-image. It seems that there is an importance placed on erasing the aspect of sexuality that marks him as ‘other’ in the world of rodeo.

For some men, there is an importance in remaining as close to the hegemonic straight rodeo masculinity as possible. This, again, appears in an emphasis on similarity and downplaying difference. On his personal website, one cowboy says, “I just consider myself a proud American Man, that just happens to be gay” (Brake, para. 3). This is taken furthest on another, already mentioned website.

Guys who would otherwise be maybe decent, buying into the idea that because they’re into guys, that they have to act like a female, and the worst of female behavior to boot! I just can’t stand that. Let it be said: I am a Man. I love Masculinity. Masculinity & Men are what turns my head, raises my libido, nothing else does that... We’re not gay. We’re guys, just like the next one, and we like it.

(Micntry, Stuff I’m Thinking’, para.1)

Again, the emphasis is on the downplaying of any real or perceived difference between him and ‘regular guys’. In this case, there is an attempt to disassociate from what Micntry perceives as the mainstream gay culture and identity. In doing so, he calls upon the essentializing binaries of man/woman and gay/straight. Identifying his ideal masculinity with straight men, Micntry emasculates the men who participate in mainstream gay culture and removes himself from the category of ‘gay’. The pejorative feminization of the ‘gay man’ is connected to the sexism that he demonstrates in his
characterization of women. This sexism as well as his internalized homophobia are consistent with the hegemonic masculinity that runs so deep in rodeo circles.

Of course, the individuals did not have to be outspoken about some of the attachments to the dominant cowboy masculinity. Walking onto the gay rodeo grounds for the first time, I noted that there were plenty of symbols that resonated with it. Most men were dressed in traditional cowboy attire: boots, wranglers, trophy buckles, collared shirts, and cowboy hats. The mandatory Bud Light and Budweiser were being drunk (not daiquiris with little paper umbrellas in them). There was smoking, and swearing, and spitting, and most of the other activities/traits that are so familiar in straight rodeo. “It’s a real leveler. Once you get into Stampede gear, everybody’s a cowboy. There’s no telling gay or straight... Well, I might wear Prada sunglasses, sure, but I’m still a cowboy” (in Whyte, 2001: 3). Again, while this seems to accept certain ideas about gender and sexual difference, the underlying message is that whatever their sexuality, cowboys are cowboys. “It’s a chance for society at large to see us as a normal group of people” (in McGovern, 1994: 2).

This is certainly consistent with Allen’s concept of the “Rainbow Rider” or the “Archetypal Anti-archetype” who, as radical a potential as s/he may have, ultimately adopts a “traditional culture-based” persona (1998: 161). In this case, even some of the homophobia, or at least the outright rejection of a perceived ‘gay culture and identity,’ is adopted by participants in gay rodeo.

One obvious explanation for this is that this is a defense against the overt homophobia of straight rodeo culture. Speaking of the gay rodeo, one cowboy on the professional circuit said, “Probably what I got to say you wouldn’t want to print in your magazine. I think it’s a pile of bullshit. I’ve rodeo-ed for 25 years and I don’t think I’ve ever come across a queer cowboy at a real rodeo” (Craig Butterfield in McGovern, 1994: 2). Another pro rodeo staff member answered a question about the CRIR by saying “I wouldn’t dignify that event by even commenting on it” and hanging up
(Cordon, 1994: 2). Battling this sort of prejudice, one can understand why one would attempt to distance one’s self from stereotypes about gay men. I am not suggesting that there is some sort of naturalized ‘gay’ personality that is being rejected. I am simply noting the vehemence with which some reject different queer masculinities.

It is equally possible that the homophobia expressed by some of the people who participate in gay rodeo is a result of being socialized in a sexist and homophobic society. Connell’s notion of the “moment of engagement” describes the time in a man’s life during which he makes the embodiment of the hegemonic masculinity his primary task. The attitudes that are internalized in that period can stay with someone for a long time, even if they identify themselves as a queer man later in life.

This should certainly not be read as an apolitical stance either. Every statement can be political even if it serves solely to reinforce the status quo. However, each of these examples does work to challenge one aspect of gender; the notion that a man who has sexual relations with other men, no matter how he identifies himself, cannot possess the same traits that are routinely reserved for those who follow the heteronormative prescriptions of hegemonic straight rodeo masculinity. However, there was also a parallel, but opposite, trend towards an overt challenging of traditional and naturalized ideas about gender.

Radical Rodeo: Gay Rodeo As A Site Of Subversion

The horse was led around the arena by two people holding their cowboy hats over their hearts. This was my first day at the gay rodeo and I was intrigued by what I saw. The horse was equipped with a saddle, bridle, and reins. In addition, there was a cowboy boot placed backwards in each stirrup and a cowboy hat resting on the horn of the saddle. Across the horse’s flanks was a green and silver blanket decorated with a red ribbon on one side and a pink ribbon on the other. The ceremony of the Riderless Horse is a tradition from the American calvary that has been adopted by gay rodeo to remember those who have died of AIDS and breast cancer. On this day, with the fall of the American sodomy laws\textsuperscript{70} and same-sex marriage becoming a reality, the ceremony also remembered the activists that have gone before, whose work was still bearing fruit.\textsuperscript{70} Goodspeed, 2003 or see chapter 5.
Diamond Rio's song “I Believe” played over the loud speaker and every person watching, stood up and removed their hat.

Every now and then, soft as breath upon my skin,
I feel you come back again,
And it's like you haven't been gone a moment from my side,
Like the tears were never cried...

(Bonnie, 2000)

Tears flowed from the eyes of the butchest men and women, from the smallest and slightest, and from my own eyes. In this place, real men could cry.... and did.

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The major points that I have brought to this work have been noted before. That is, many people involved in gay rodeo understand and acknowledge, the potential that it has as a site to contest the ideas about gender and sexuality that are present in straight rodeo.

In “Roman and Jules”, while there is much in the character of Jules that does little to challenge dominant constructions of masculinity, the novel itself is quite explicit in challenging ideas about gender. Poorman introduces a female bull rider who is challenged by some men unwilling to accept this transgression of traditional rodeo sex roles. Ultimately however, she proves herself to be a better bull rider than any of them (95). This was familiar to me as, at the CRIR in 2003, the only person to cover (successfully for 6 seconds) their bull was a woman. Furthermore, as it was at the CRIR, the chute boss in the novel is a woman. This is not an accident and Poorman is quite explicit about this at the end of the novel. He introduces a journalist to the story and uses his ongoing newspaper reports to make observations about the rodeo. In one such report, he writes, “No matter if you are a man or a woman, if you are willing to train for a job in the rodeo, they will put you in that job” (Poorman, 2000: 139).

This aspect of gay rodeo was very striking and important to me and to many
others who have been spectators or participants in gay rodeo (Sloan, 1999: 1; Holsworth, 2003: 12). One participant, who noted the inclusiveness of the event said, “When I was growing up, I always wanted to barrel race. But we couldn’t because it was just a girl’s thing” (in Laird, 2003: F5). The fact that each event is open to both men and women is not just a political statement on the part of the rodeo association; it is a part of the physical breaking down of walls, thereby allowing individuals to participate in events that have simply always been closed to them; to do things that their society has told them they are not supposed to do because of their particular physiology.

Another key aspect comes with the participation in the camp events. While there is the element of gay rodeo that very nearly replicates straight rodeo, and while straight rodeo certainly has its similar events, the camp events do set gay rodeo somewhat apart. In terms of individual expressions, gender is challenged through the use of drag. While a standard drag act may work to reproduce many aspects of dominant perceptions of gender, at the rodeo there is an added element. That is, it can be argued that by acting out traditional gender roles, drag queens actually do more to reproduce gender norms than to challenge them. However, at the gay rodeo, the drag queens perform traditionally ‘male’ roles in drag. They put on the outer appearance of ‘femininity’ but perform ‘masculine’ roles. In this act, the masculine/feminine binary is blurred.

While I was aware of several drag queens (including one with a moustache) over the course of the weekend, I did not notice any female performances of masculinity by way of drag. However, while I did not see any drag kings, there were many and various embodiments of female masculinity. Women, regardless of their sexual preference, transcended gender norms and adopted what is denied by the dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity. In terms of dress, many women wore the same work clothes that cowboys have traditionally worn. Short hair, an absence of make-up, and a tendency to spit and swear were further rejections of traditional

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71 As noted in chapter 5, wild cow milking and wild horse racing are very similar to the camp events.
‘femininity’ in favour of a female masculinity. Further signs of female embodiments of masculinity were evident in the simple participation in events such as chute dogging and bull riding. In a conversation with Anne-Marie Champagne,\(^{72}\) she emphasized the amount of ‘cowshit’ that her boots had been exposed to (Field notes, 2003). In doing this, she laid claim to the farm work that has usually been publicly reserved for the ‘cowboy’. This is only a part of an ethos that challenges the gender norms of straight rodeo.

Another very apparent example of this was the acceptance of men crying. When the ceremony of the Riderless Horse began on the first day, I did not know what to expect. It was very moving and I would be lying if I said that I did not cry throughout the entire thing. Initially, I caught myself. That is, I was aware that I was crying and felt that I ‘shouldn’t’ be, especially at a rodeo. However, out of the corner of my eye, I saw that the man next to me was also crying, as were many of the people. Having the permission to be emotionally ‘vulnerable’ in public was a unique experience for me. Darrell Yates Rist observed this also in his odyssey across ‘Gay America.’ At the IGRA rodeo in Denver, Rist observes an injured cowboy crying after his ride (Rist, 1992: 115). A man’s ‘ability’ to cry is also prevalent in “Roman and Jules”. In fact, Poorman explicitly emphasizes men’s tears no less than six times throughout the novel (2000: 17, 18, 29, 30, 37, 46). One of these moments has Roman (the straight stock contractor) crying for the first time in years. “He was moved. The tears welled up in his eyes. That was no small feat for a man who hadn’t cried at his wife’s funeral until he was safely locked in his bedroom to grieve alone” (Poorman, 2000: 17). This is not insignificant.

Masculinities that privilege ruggedness and toughness do not allow men to cry. An action that is so often associated with women is seen as emasculating when it is performed by men. The repression of such an emotional release is identified by Michael Kaufman as a form of internalized violence.

\(^{72}\) The stage name of a female bull rider.
The denial and blocking of a whole range of human emotions and capacities are compounded by the blocking of avenues of discharge. The discharge of fear, hurt and sadness, for example (through crying or trembling), is necessary because these painful emotions linger on even if they are not felt. (1987: 22)

Considering the taboo on male tears, there are such feminizing schoolyard taunts as 'crybaby,' 'momma's boy,' and 'pussy' (Kaufman, 1987: 18). However, by other accounts and by my own observation, men are more open about crying at IGRA rodeos than at straight ones, whether it be out of happiness, sadness, or pain. While undoubtedly there are men in gay rodeo who frown upon such behaviour, it seems that it is largely accepted, and acceptable. In my mind, this is a very liberating point and one that is very important and emblematic, in terms of discussing the destabilizing of hegemonic rodeo masculinity.

As discussed in chapter 5, the gay rodeo is also a place that creates latitude for men in terms of sexuality. Men were able to express sexuality in ways that are inaccessible in straight rodeo. One volunteer enthusiastically frisked all of the men who came through the entrance to the bar. Another traded in his work shirt for a studded leather outfit, much to the delight of some men in the crowd. I have to admit to being slightly surprised by the degree to which it was 'acceptable' to fondle and kiss men that were no more than recently made acquaintances. While there were some moments in which I was a little uncomfortable, I also reveled in the openness and freedom from the constrictions of straight rodeo masculinity. In fact, every simple act of homo-flirtation, intimacy, or sex was a testament to the space that the gay rodeo creates within rodeo masculinities. The rodeo's role as a site for sexual activity is made clear in several personal websites. "Thank God for my discovering Gay Rodeo and a whole host of other places on the net, to finally realize that guys like I like, and like I am, even existed" (Mcntry).
I wrote this chapter in an effort to contrast individual productions of gender and sexuality from those at the institutional level. What is seen in this brief examination of individual productions is that notions about 'masculinity' are diverse and vary greatly from one person to the next. However, hegemonic rodeo masculinity remains the reference point for each of these constructions. For some, they remain as close to that norm as possible, allowing only the object of sexual/romantic desire to have changed. They reject anything that might identify them as 'gay.' Others remove themselves even further from any hegemonic notions utilizing the accepting atmosphere to exhibit aspects of their masculinity and sexuality that they would not exhibit at a straight rodeo. I had to think back to the Riderless Horse and I know that I would not react the same way at the Stampede as I did at the gay rodeo. Where I would have felt bound to keep my tears to myself, I felt free to express that element of my masculinity at the CRIR. I suppose that the point here is that the latitude that is created at the CRIR is not simply space that can be occupied by men with an established queer sexual identity. I too found that space and was able to use it. It is possible that the project of opening up masculinity is a project that has the capacity to benefit everyone.
Chapter VII

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

When I began this project, I thought that I would be writing a fairly different thesis than what I have produced. At times, I was afraid that I had too many preconceived notions and that I would be limited by them. This did not turn out to be the case. As I started to sift through the programs, newspaper articles, transcripts of field notes, and other data, I found that there was a distinct split between the ways that gender and sexuality were negotiated by the two institutional bodies of rodeo\textsuperscript{73} and the ways that they were addressed by the individuals.

The Calgary Stampede proved to be a place in which hegemonic notions of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality were adopted and reproduced in a seemingly uncritical way. Particularly through the segregation of men and women into specific and value-laden roles, and through publicity images, the Stampede limits what people can do and what they can express.

The Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association (ARGRA) has a very different message. Whether they are using posters, programs, newsletters, or the very structure of the rodeo, ARGRA consistently sends a message of gender and sexual equality. In doing so, they blur many of the distinctions between men and women and, other than the separation of men and women into different categories of competition, reject any sort of role prescription that reflects essentializing notions of difference. In doing so, they create a site that suggests that there is nothing inherently ‘male’ about ‘masculinity’; that gender does not need to be tied to a sexed subject. In addition, ARGRA overtly adds elements of queer sexualities which further destabilize the hegemonic construct of the ‘cowboy.’ As such, the characteristics that are usually attributed to participation in a certain event are available to everyone, and one’s access to them is no longer predicated on biology. This is not to suggest that men and women

\textsuperscript{73} The Calgary Stampede and the Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association.
are equally represented at the gay rodeo. Men still dominate the events in terms of participation and attendance. However, I argue that ARGRA has created an environment that suggests to me that the reasons for this imbalance lie outside of the institutional structure of gay rodeo (ie. socialization). The latitude created by ARGRA’s consistency poses an enormous challenge to hegemonic straight rodeo masculinity that depends on oppositional constructions of men and women in order to define itself.

However, one can see far more diversity in the individuals who participate in gay rodeo. While some overtly and deliberately challenge mainstream notions of masculinity and sexuality, others embody and comply almost completely with the prescriptions therein. In addition, ‘masculinity’ is adopted by many of the women at the gay rodeo. Thus, the competitors in ARGRA demonstrate some of the variation that exists within the category of ‘masculinities,’ both challenging and reproducing elements of hegemonic rodeo masculinity.

While racism (Eurocentrism) and several other elements of the dominant straight rodeo masculinity are perpetuated in gay rodeo, many aspects are successfully challenged. I do not see the presence of those who reject the ‘campier’ elements of gay rodeo as a sign of a failure to create latitude but rather a sign of success. ARGRA does not prescribe a ‘gay masculinity’ to which everyone must conform. Rather, it creates space that allows men (and women) to express their masculinity in whatever way they choose. This latitude is, in my mind, the greatest contribution that gay rodeo could make to the world of rodeo and to its enthusiasts.

This work has made a contribution to several bodies of literature. Through it, I have extended the work of critical masculinities and queer theorists who have developed ideas such as “Hegemonic Masculinity” and “Female Masculinity.” I have also contributed to the critical sociology of sport by activating ‘sexuality’ alongside gender as a category of analysis within a (pro)feminist/queer(-positive) piece of research. In doing so, I have also explored some of the methodological and theoretical
questions that emerge from the possibility of men contributing to feminist literature and ‘straight’ men contributing to queer theory. Finally, I have begun to fill a major gap in the study of rodeos and cowboys by addressing the ‘queer cowboy’ and by examining gay rodeo.

This project however, has serious limitations. There are many facets of rodeo masculinities that I caught a glimpse of, but did not feel that I had sufficient data to incorporate into my analysis. Perhaps a longer term of observation or a different methodology would have been able to illuminate these aspects to the point that they could have been incorporated. At times in my analysis, I felt hamstrung or found myself trying to make claims that were without adequate basis. Similarly to my question about how a First Nations researcher might have seen/experienced ‘race’ at the rodeo, this raises the possibilities that might arise out of doing collaborative work with a ‘gay’ researcher. More data, better data and/or more experience would add a great deal to the work that I have presented here. Though this may seem to be a blatantly obvious statement, as I look back on this work, it stands out as a glaring truth. Some of the shortcomings of this work are addressed in my ideas for future research in this field.

Looking Ahead: Future Research In Rodeo Masculinities And Gender

The work that I have done has been enjoyable and interesting to me. And yet, I feel as though I have not even scraped the surface of a very important and rich site of inquiry for the critical study of masculinities. As such, there are many directions in which research could go from here.

First of all, I think that the work that I have done must be continued through an interview project. The words that I have taken are highly mediated words. They have been published and, as such, served the interest of the person who published them. An
interview project would allow a much more intimate account of what importance
individuals place on certain aspects of the rodeo and the notion of masculinity. It would
allow some insight into why people make the decisions that they do vis-a-vis the way in
which they identify. This would also be a wonderful way of further exploring the very
interesting notion of “female masculinity.” I have felt uncomfortable addressing some
of the questions about identity because I have not wanted to impose my own
assumptions on the people whose words I have used. A more personal project would
give the insight required.

Second, I think that an interesting and important project would focus on
individuals that attend the gay rodeo but identify as ‘straight’ or some close
approximation thereof. How does their identity shift at the gay rodeo? What do they
find appealing about the rodeo? How do they imagine masculinity? These are all
questions that I have considered about myself over the course of this project and I think
that problematizing the notion of the ‘straight’ man is a task that deserves some
attention. While I made assumptions about the sexuality of almost every person that I
met, I realized that they were doing the same thing to me. Yet, anecdotally, there are a
good number of ‘straight’ individuals and competitors in the IGRA and I believe that
they have a lot to reveal.

Third, someone must undertake the project of exploring queer masculinities in
straight rodeo. I have come across several references to gay cowboys competing on the
professional circuit and this must be explored. How do they negotiate what is, by all
accounts, a homophobic and hostile environment? In the same vein, a project might
examine the attitudes and understandings held by the PRCA population in general. Is
there latitude being created there? Are there men who accept multiple masculinities as
being ‘valid?’ Are they outspoken about their beliefs or are they also silenced by the
environment?

Finally, with the fissures that are being created in straight rodeo, the role of
female competitors must be examined again. Who are the women that are competing in the roughstock events in PRCA competition? How are they being received? Is this seen as a positive or negative step? When I saw Kaila Mussil ride in Cloverdale, the announcer did not mention that we were witnessing an historical event. I imagined this as the announcer resisting change and refusing to acknowledge it. Drawing attention to Mussil's ride might give all the 'little girls' in the audience the 'wrong' idea about what they should imagine for themselves in the future. They could dream of being rodeo princesses.... but not roughstock cowgirls. Am I mistaken? Are the few women that are competing with the men being received well? What can we learn here about the exclusivity of masculinity in straight rodeo? Is it being problematized or challenged more widely within the rodeo community?

Happy Trails: Closing Thoughts

This has been a very interesting experience for me. On an academic level, I find myself with as many questions now as I had at the beginning. I believe that my greatest contribution here, has been simply the illumination of a very rich site that has been untouched by sociological inquiry. The obvious challenge that the 'gay cowboy' poses to hegemonic rodeo masculinity was complemented by an organization that seeks to create latitude within the category of masculinity and some evidence of people utilizing that space. In this sense, I have to disagree with Pronger's notion that the politics of inclusion cannot bring about transformative change in society. While this project was not detailed enough to make any grand claims about this, my sense is that, in this particular case, inclusion does go a long way in challenging stereotypes and, if the space that is created does not close up it could ultimately go a long way in destabilizing the gay/straight binary. When someone like me who, by most people's definition should consider himself 'straight,' is trying on a 'queer' identity, the confinement of the binary
is challenged. When others, who exclusively are romantically/sexually involved with men, refuse to identify as ‘gay,’ that binary is challenged again. And, while these decisions did not occur solely because of the gay rodeo, the rodeo does provide an arena in which this blurring of lines is accepted.

Therefore, and on a more personal level, I was very happy to use that latitude and find a place that satisfies both my love of rodeo and my political/social beliefs. While I tried to remain critical of ARGRA and to actively search out any sign of progressive thinking at the Stampede, there remained a very clear and very large distinction between them. The degree to which I enjoyed seeing Anne-Marie Champagne ride bulls, the boys weaving effortlessly through the pole bending course, and the sight of a man in a “Martha Stewart in Jail” drag outfit, clinging desperately to a steer as it made it across the line, was only matched by the openness and acceptance that I witnessed. This is not meant to be a grander statement than it is. There are most certainly very progressive-thinking people in straight rodeo and there are certainly levels of sexism and racism in gay rodeo. However, the general feelings, as I experienced them, are vastly different.

I believe that broadening the latitude at ARGRA to the rest of society is one of the greatest challenges that our society faces. I believe that, if we are successful in doing this, if dominant ideas about gender and sexuality are made more porous or more flexible, that we will live in a society that is healthier and safer for everyone.


