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ANXIOUS IDENTIFICATION IN 'THE SOPRANOS' AND SPORT:
PSYCHOANALYTIC AND QUEER THEORIES OF EMBODIMENT

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Abstract

The paper uses an episode from the ‘The Sopranos’ television series to illustrate how embodied experiences of sporting practices such as high school football involve both conscious and unconscious dynamics. I outline how cultural practices, such as masculinist sport, are psychically incorporated into the body through various mechanisms of identification. The paper reviews Freud’s notion of the bodily ego, particularly his distinction between instinct and drive, to clarify how phantasy and representation are involved in the formation of embodied subjectivity. Contemporary queer theories about identification provide insights into how psychic dynamics both reinforce and undermine the illusory cultural promise of heteronormative whiteness offered by high school sport and physical education.

Keywords

Sport, embodiment, identification, psychoanalysis, queer theory.

ANXIOUS IDENTIFICATION IN '*THE SOPRANOS*' AND SPORT:
PSYCHOANALYTIC AND QUEER THEORIES OF EMBODIMENT

Most of us are both consciously and unconsciously engaged in strategies that provide protection against the putative dangers of encroachment that other bodies seem to pose (Shildrick, 2005:1).

Using an illustration from 'The Sopranos' this paper contends that unconscious processes are central to, and complicate, our embodied experiences of sport. 'The Sopranos' is a popular North American television series about a depressed Mafia mob boss called Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini). Popularity of the series arises from the cultural fascination with how the central character Tony copes with his literalized need to kill alongside his search for intimacy.

Reluctantly and secretively the Mafia boss undergoes psychotherapy to figure out why, in middle-age, he has started to pass out during anxiety attacks. Throughout the series Tony's anxieties are linked to his malevolent Mother, who attempted to kill him by authorizing a 'hit' on him, primal scenes of his father's gangster violence and betrayals by his Mafia blood-brothers. One episode (The Fortunate Son: III, 3) about his son, Anthony Junior (Robert Iler), playing high school football reveals much about how psychic aspects of embodiment operate in everyday cultural practices such as sport.

Anthony Junior is uncertain about what football has to offer him and he by no means shares his father's enthusiasm about the sport. He sits most of the game on the bench, tentatively running onto the field for a few plays during the dying minutes of the game. The father, Tony Soprano, is shown bellowing like a bull from the bleachers when his son runs onto the field. Anthony Junior falls to the grass beneath a pile of players and, to his surprise, surfaces with the ball in his hands. This turns out to be a key moment in the game – known as a fumble recovery - which catapults Anthony Junior onto a fast track towards football prowess and the promise of normative masculinity that goes along with it. The next week at practice, the football coach singles out Anthony Junior to praise his perseverance and commitment to the team. At this point Anthony Junior is still uncertain about whether he wants to be initiated into male football culture. His uncertainty turns into anxiety when the Coach then names him as Defensive Captain. Something in the coaches words induced panic in Anthony Junior's body. Worry spreads across Anthony Junior's face, he reaches a hand to feel the panic tightening his chest beneath the armored

football gear and within seconds falls heavily onto the turf. Anthony Junior fell to ground under the weight of worry that was brought on by a few words from his coach. How can we interpret Anthony's fall from grace? How can we interpret the television narrative in which Anthony falls to the ground due to anxiety in the same way his father falls to the ground? Why are audiences fascinated with a gangster television series that portrays the violent father as a masculine subject in psychological crisis who keeps falling down? What can an examination of anxiety reveal about embodiment, about gender identification, about sport?

The power of this episode comes from unconscious anxieties that surfaced in a somatic form. When words fail us or the body fails, process of embodied subjectivity is starkly illustrated. When Anthony Junior falls down the temporary failure of his embodiment becomes evident and what Drew Leder (1990) called the absent body becomes available to perception. This momentary change in embodiment points towards the more mundane, everyday performativity that constitutes embodiment. Attempts to explain the mechanisms by which cultural representations, unconscious phantasy and corporeal sensation coalesce have, to say the least, intriguing genealogies. In the first section of the paper I review how Freudian psychoanalytic theory offers one explanation how cultural representations of, and phantasies about, in this case sport, become embodied. In the latter section, I suggest how contemporary queer theorists offer new insights into anxious identifications at play in seemingly mundane, everyday activities such as high school football.

EMBODIED SUBJECTIVITY AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

Embodiment involves Phantasy

Reducing an experience of the body to the body itself eclipses the subject of desire (Elliot, 2001: 312).

In this section I outline the psychoanalytic premise that embodiment involves unconscious psychic dynamics. Many of the terms have different meanings in common usage than within psychoanalytic theory, so I will start with a few notes about the general meanings of key terms. Embodiment refers to a "certain mode of being in one's body and of living that body" (Benhabib, 1992) while embodied subjectivity refers to biological, social and psychic processes

(Weiss, 1999). Body image is another important concept that traverses the binary between mind and body, between psyche and soma. Body image is commonly used to refer to a person's feeling about their body although it has specific meanings within neurology (Head, 1920; Schilder, 1950), phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), psychoanalysis (Freud, 1914, 1923; Lacan, 1977) and contemporary feminist body studies (Grosz, 1994; Weiss, 1999). In *Body Images* feminist philosopher Gail Weissⁱ (1999) summarized how many accounts of body image have built on the dualistic notion that an individual's conscious body image is *distinct* from a pre-reflective awareness of one's body or one's corporeal schema.ⁱⁱ This dualism is evident in sport studies discourses of motor skill development or self-help discourses of self-esteem, positive self-image. The key notion missing from these discourses in sport and physical education is that the body image is psychically invested. But just what does it mean, this phrase "psychically invested"? It means that in addition to conscious perception and knowledge, unconscious fantasies and dynamics are also involved. Or as Grosz (1994) explained, while biological and neurophysiological inputs are crucial to understanding psychology, these very biological and neurological processes are dependent on psychical processes.ⁱⁱⁱ Identification is a pivotal mechanism which links phantasy and representation with the somatic. It is the main psychic mechanism through which bodily sensations and symbolic representations coalesce to form the body image. Primary identification is central to the formation of the ego, or the differentiation of the embodied subject. Freud declared in *The Ego and the Id* that primary identification brings the subject, or the ego, into being and these early identifications are bodily sensations. "The ego is, first and foremost, a bodily ego: it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself a projection of a surface" (Freud, 1923). I will review the emergence of Freud's bodily ego through his early neurological work on hysteria to his later work on sexual difference. Secondary identifications are the ongoing unconscious processes that consolidate, or fragment, the subject within the social world. In the final section of the paper I consider a series of queer theorists who have revised ways of thinking about identification to rework the confines of sexual and racial difference arising from the colonialist Oedipal myth (Campbell, 2000). Embodied aspects of identification have been engaged by queer and gender theorists such as Judith Butler (1993, 1997), Kaja Silverman (1996), David Eng (2001) and Jay Prosser (1998). The latter part of this paper outlines how these contemporary theorists have reworked Freud's work about identification to take into account the complex intersectionality of racialized sex/gender and

other social relations. Throughout these sections I offer several different readings of Anthony Junior's anxious identifications to illustrate each advance in the theorization of identification.

From Neurological Stimulus to the Unconscious

Freud was extremely concerned with the relation between mind and body. One of his early key questions was how the quantitative stimuli from neurons get translated into qualitative thought. As Elizabeth Grosz noted, the "achievement of some kind of unity and identity over and above the mere momentary impingements of stimuli is one of the guiding themes in Freud's theorization of the ego" (Grosz, 1994: 31). Freud proposed that two systems mediated the signals from neurons en route to conscious thought – the unconscious and the preconscious - which are, in turn, divided by a barrier of censorship. He claimed that the transformation of quantitative to qualitative excitations occurs before conscious registration of a perception. It occurs in the translation of terms between the neuron and the unconscious - and it is within the unconscious where perceptions strive for conscious expression, i.e. as wishes.

Contemporary neurologists and sleep researchers continue attempts to locate biological functioning of such unconscious processes within the brain.^{iv} However, Freud came to reject such attempts to locate unconscious functioning within brain anatomy and physiology (Silverstein, 1985). In his biography of Freud, Ernest Jones (1953), details how Freud challenged the prevailing neurological theory that various aphasia (disturbances in speech and writing) were solely caused by localized lesions in specific areas of brain anatomy, and that ideas and memories are attached to particular brain cells. Freud also challenged the idea that various body parts have direct, continuous neurological links to specific areas in the brain cortex. Freud demonstrated that, since the nerve fibers entering the spinal cord are more numerous than those entering the brain cortex, there can be no direct, continuous link. Instead, Freud claimed there is only a projection of, rather than continuous link between, stimuli from body parts into the cortex. Later in his life, he proclaimed:

The medulla oblongata is a wondrous and beautiful object; I well remember how much time and labor I devoted to the study of it years ago. But to-day I must say I know of nothing less important for the psychological comprehension of anxiety than a knowledge of the nerve-paths by which excitations travel (Freud, 1924).

Historians of psychoanalysis have been divided about whether, after his self-analysis in 1885, Freud freed himself from a need to ‘neurologize’ his insights or whether neurological concepts were influential, if hidden, throughout his later work. But undoubtedly, it was by grappling with the mind-body dualism that he came up with the notion of the ‘unconscious’, or more precisely, his metapsychology^v. Freud came to believe that psychic functioning originates in the interior of the body, or as Barry Silverstein (1985) put it, “demands upon mental life originate at the frontier between mental and the physical as psychical representations of stimulation” (p. 219).

Instinct as Innate, Drive as Representational

Freud then took up the biological metaphors of ‘instincts’ and ‘drives’. The distinction Freud made between these concepts is helpful in understanding what we mean by the claim that body image is ‘psychically invested’ or that embodiment involves phantasy. And it is certainly key to understanding why Freud believed that the body was integral to this notion of the “ego”.

Here I’m drawing heavily on Grosz’ (1994) erudite summary in *Volatile Bodies*. Freud believed that the fundamental function of the nervous system was to rid itself of excitations. These neurological excitations came from outside and inside the body. It was the excitations that came from inside the body that Freud termed ‘instincts’. Instincts, such as the reflex, hunger, thirst, defecation, are necessary for the maintenance of life, and unlike external stimuli of the senses, they are constant rather than momentary, and require an object of satisfaction. For example, the hunger instinct requires food for it’s satisfaction or to be rid of it’s excitations. In the next step, Freud distinguished between instincts and drives.

The drive, however, deviates from the instinct in so far as it takes for itself not a real object – food – but a phantasmic object, an object defined primarily through the lack or absence of a real object (p. 53).

Thus thumb-sucking emerges out of the hunger instinct. As a drive, it is satisfied not by milk but by the pleasure of sucking movements in the absence of food.^{vi} Drives borrow the aims and bodily sites of instincts, yet insert new fantasy objects in place of the real object.^{vii} Freud went on to derive his theory of infantile sexuality from the phantasies associations with the oral, anal

and genital bodily zones. In *Vital Signs*, Charles Shepherdson (2000) explicates how the link between the drive and representation is what separates human sexuality from the natural instinct – not only in the occasional or ‘perverse’ instance but in its very constitution. In psychoanalysis sexuality is not governed by the laws of nature or reducible to instinct; rather sexuality departs from nature because it is subject to representation through ‘displacement’, ‘condensation’ and ‘substitution’. So, psychoanalysis can provide us with a “theory of the particular intersection between the organism and language” (p. 5) perhaps explaining how the natural substratum of the body can fall prey to the work of representation.

So, I hope I have laid out what is behind the general claim that the body, and embodied subjectivity, is psychically invested. We arrived at the juncture between the imaginary and the symbolic, between perception and fantasy representation. The football scene and the prospect of becoming Captain generate a psychic difficulty for Anthony Junior. Yet it is far from obvious why being named as Captain puts Anthony Junior into crisis. Moreover this concealed difficulty causes his body to close down. How does this psychic crisis spread throughout Anthony Junior’s body? Why did Anthony Junior faint rather than blush, feel his chest tighten rather than raise an arm to high-five? The mechanism by which psychic conflicts are expressed as somatic symptoms is intriguing, opaque and convoluted. It is a mechanism that in psychoanalytic terms involves identification.

FREUD’S THEORIES OF IDENTIFICATION

Identification def: Psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973: 205).

Identification is the key mechanism which links embodiment and phantasy. As such, it is a crucial psychic process in the formation of embodied subjectivity. Identification refers to “how we make ourselves through and against others” (Luhman, 1998:153) and how we relate to others on the basis of our psychic histories and social locations. It is a complex concept with a convoluted history, beginning with Freud’s thinking about hysteria and infantile sexuality at the

start of the twentieth century. Freud's ideas about identification evolved throughout his lifetime (LaPlanche and Pontalis, 1973). He proposed three sources of identification. First identification is the original form of emotional ties to an object, such as the breast or touch; secondly; identification substitutes fantasy objects inside the ego when these infantile objects have to be given up; and thirdly, identifications may arise due to new perceptions of common qualities with other people (Rothgeb, 1973). The next section of the paper traces the emergence of this concept of identification in Freud's early studies of hysteria, his principle of a 'bodily' ego, and his theory of sexual difference arising from Oedipal gender identifications.

Hysterical Contagion as Shared Identification

It is possible to construe Anthony Junior's falling down in terms of hysteria; that is, a psychic conflict being expressed through somatic symptoms (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). In the early stages of his work, Freud referred to hysteria as a "malady through representation" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973: 195) and he hinted that hysterical contagion involved an identificatory process in a "different psychic region" that he would later come to name 'the unconscious'. Anthony Junior didn't respond to being promoted to Captain as one might expect. His response was clearly unusual, something was amiss, the news touched something 'inside' Anthony Junior that led him to close down and fall out of the situation. But Anthony Junior is not suffering alone. He is not the only tough guy prone to fainting and falling over. Anthony Junior and his father suffer from similar hysterical symptoms in their panic attacks – loss of vision, chest tightening and fainting. Indeed, Anthony Junior's collapse at the end of this episode only has meaning in relation to his father's panic attacks which are an overarching premise for the television series. Is Anthony Junior suffering from a case of what used to be called 'mental contagion'? Is there a psychic conflict common to father and son being expressed through the same physical symptoms? In his early work, Freud proposed that there were common unconscious factors between some of his hysterical patients and this gave rise to the mechanism of identification.

Let us imagine that this patient had an attack on a particular day; the others will quickly discover that it was caused by a letter from home, the revival of some unhappy love affair or some such thing. Their sympathy is aroused and they draw the following

inference, I may have the same kind of attack since I have the same grounds for having it (Freud cited in Fuss, 1995: 113).

We know that Anthony Junior has seen his father collapse a few times recently, although he is not consciously aware of the reasons for his father's panic. Equally his father is not consciously aware why he suffers anxiety attacks, although they are somehow linked via images of 'ducks' and 'raw meat' to his father's physical violence and his mother's maliciousness. Perhaps Anthony Junior has the "same kind of attack" (p. 113) because the football incident represents a critical moment when he is invited to become (like) his father. On some level, Anthony Junior registers the parallel between being promoted to Captain by his football coach and being promoted to Capo by his Mafioso father. American football represents the Mafioso, promotion means indebtedness and lost innocence wrapped up in a macho toughguy adult masculinity. Freud points out that in hysterical contagion, similar symptoms do not occur through simple imitation or sympathy; rather, similar symptoms are derived from "an inference made in a different psychical region" (p.113). The symptom is derived from a common element that remains in the unconscious, the common element being phantasy. (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Maybe, just maybe, Anthony Junior identifies with his father's anxiety about being/becoming a Mafioso.

Bodily Ego and Phantasy Identifications

Freud first used the term identification in relation to the sexual development of infants. An infant's first identifications are made with the boundaries of the body or "a sack of skin" (Laplanche cited in Silverman, 1996: 81). Kaja Silverman (1996) explains how, in the earliest stages of human life, orifices play a major role in the transmission and reception of information from inside to outside and outside to inside the body. Bodily openings are where the subject comes in to closest contact with the world and therefore become powerful zones of physical desire. The child's own corporeal sensations are supplemented by the activities of those who care for the infant. Thus bodily openings are vital sites where fantasy is introduced to the child through parental touch and parental desire. This is the known as the process of 'primary identification' - the process of sewing together the infant's inchoate sensations to create (the phantasy of) a coherent embodied self. For Freud, primary identification gives rise to the bodily

ego through the ‘projection of a surface’. Indeed, body images are constructed through identifications with our own bodies, others bodies and a series of dis-identifications (Eng, 2001; Fuss, 1995; Weiss, 1999). There is, as Paul Schilder (1950) revealed, a libidinal, psychic investment in the body image.

Freud (1917) referred to identification as a preliminary stage of object choice “...the first way in which the ego picks out an object” (p. 258). In other words, identification is a way of unconsciously coping with the loss of something or someone loved: “when it happens that person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his [sic] ego which can only be described as setting up the object inside the ego” (Freud, 1923: 368). However, letting a loved object go is not to abandon it or completely break one’s attachment to it, leave it behind and move on. Rather, identification transfers the status of the object from external to internal, such that “melancholic identification permits the loss of the object in the external world precisely because it provides a way to *preserve* the object as part of the ego and, hence, to avert the loss as a complete loss” (Butler, 1997: 134). Hence, identifications still contain what, to all external appearances, has been given up or refused. This means that embodied subjectivity contains traces of earlier childhood desires even though they are not apparent from the outside or even to the conscious subject. These early, unconscious identifications may form an important part in Anthony Junior’s surprisingly anxious response to being declared captain of the football team.

Oedipal Identifications and Sexual Difference

Freud later used identification in relation to sexual difference. For Freud, the infantile bodily ego progresses through the pre-Oedipal (oral and anal) stages into the Oedipal (genital) stage of development en route to becoming a social subject located within, and consciously aware of, sexual difference. Jan Campbell (2000) explains how Freud’s explanation of sexual difference is crucial to understanding his notion of the unconscious:

early polymorphous desires towards the mother’s body, which are bisexual and contain multiple identifications, become repressed through the Oedipal interdict to construct an unconscious repository of what society refuses (p. 55).

In The Ego and The Id, Freud (1923) sketched how a male child must give up incestuous sexual desire (specifically called object-cathexis) for his mother. The incest taboo, symbolically introduced by the phallic cultural figure of the Father, is backed up with the threat of castrating the boy's penis. If the boy relinquishes his desire for the Mother and identifies with the Father he emerges from the Oedipal conflict well on the road toward heteronormative masculinity. The classical Oedipal drama between father and son featured in several narratives in 'The Fortunate Son' episode. Tony Soprano acts as the phallic Father in several ways. Tony, the Godfather, promotes his nephew Christopher to 'made Man' status and as his newest son within the Soprano mob family. Tony, the Family Man, also intervenes to keep an adopted son of his deceased best friend out of the Mafia life. Tony, the Football Dad, cheers his biological son's football game from the bleachers. Then the episode flashes back to Tony's childhood, when he was the son of his father, Johnny Boy. Traumatic scenes of his boyhood culminate with the young Tony experiencing his first panic attack and falling down unconscious. Later in a therapy session Tony's psychotherapist, Melfi (Lorraine Bracco), suggests the following Oedipal interpretation of Tony's anxiety:

witnessing not only [his] mother and father's sexuality but also the violence and blood connected to the food he consumed as a child, Melfi in fact concludes her analysis of Tony's vivid, reverie-rich recollections by patiently explaining to him - not without wit - that behind them lies the very real dread that one day he might be called upon, 'like [his] father', to 'bring home the bacon' (Miklitsch, 2004: 188).

Similarly Anthony Junior's anxiety about football could be interpreted in classical Oedipal terms. Playing football and being offered the job of Defensive Captain represent a powerful cultural demand to identify with normative masculinity. It is a common North American phallic imperative manifest throughout highschool sport. His Coach directs a phallic call towards Anthony Junior to give up his pre-Oedipal desire for the feminine and cut loose from his mother's apronstrings. The cultural threat of castration looms large if Anthony Junior refuses to become Captain, doesn't choose to play football or opts out of the hetero masculinity on offer. In contemporary highschool culture, this would mean his masculine gender and heterosexuality would be explicitly, if not violently, questioned. Under such cultural pressure, Anthony Junior

could resolve his Oedipal complex by accepting the call, learning the game and using sport to consolidate his embodiment of normative heterosexual masculinity. However, Anthony Junior was troubled by this prospect. The threat of castration loomed large for Anthony Junior. The last shot of the episode leaves Anthony Junior facedown on the football turf which in turn leaves viewers in suspense about how Anthony Junior will ultimately negotiate his future involvement in football and his Oedipal conflict.

However Freud also posited that, based on infant's universal bisexuality, the way children identify with their parents is deeply ambivalent.^{viii} Thus, giving up sexual desire for the Mother may result in his identification with the mother or an increase in identification with his father. Conversely, for a girl, Freud supposed she must replace her love for the mother by identifying with her. These identifications were by no means the only ones male and female children could form as they developed their character (read ego) by separating from their parents. Indeed, Freud used the idea of a universal bisexuality in both sexes to permit girls to identify with their fathers and boys to identify with their mothers according to "the relative strength of the masculine and feminine sexual dispositions" (Freud, 1923: 372).

QUEER THEORIES OF IDENTIFICATION

The precarious rather than ontological status of gender identifications has attracted some queer theorists to re-read Freud. As Rosaria Champagne (1998) argued, "just as queer does not refer to a stable, conscious sexuality, gender or history, the unconscious does not and cannot inscribe gender or sexuality" (p. 290-291). Shepherdson (2000) stresses how "sexual difference and the very concept of 'embodiment' are understood by psychoanalysis to entail a confrontation with the imaginary and the symbolic" (p. 101).^{ix} It is a confrontation which recent psychoanalytically informed queer theories have attempted to interrupt and realign.

Melancholic Gender Identifications

Several contemporary gender theorists have reworked Freud's Oedipal gender narrative, one of the most influential being feminist philosopher Judith Butler. Butler (1997) argues that contemporary heteronormative culture is based on widespread refusal — or disavowal — of identifications with homosexuality. Following Freud closely, Butler initially^x argues that gender

is acquired, at least in part, by repudiating homosexual attachments. “Heterosexuality is cultivated through prohibitions, and these prohibitions take as one of their objects homosexual attachments, thereby forcing the loss of those attachments” (p. 136-7). Thus, in the case of a girl acquiring heterosexuality, she must give up her homosexual desire for her mother — this is done through a melancholic identification. This identification then contains, but hides, the prohibited girl/mother, female/female or homosexual desire. She cannot transfer her desire onto another feminine object but must refuse homosexual attachments — at least, according to the logic of heterosexist culture. The woman might then claim, “I never loved her and I never lost her” (p. 138). For the man who insists on his heterosexuality, Butler also predicts that he will also claim, “he never loved another man, hence and never lost another man” (p. 139). Hence Butler suggested how refused identifications or “this ‘never-never’ thus founds the heterosexual subject, as it were; it is an identity based on the refusal to avow an attachment and, hence, a refusal to grieve” (p. 140).

Gender identifications contain the echoes and traces of desirous gender attachments that the self, the family and culture have prohibited. This differs greatly from the notion of socially constructed gender and sexual identities that express, or indeed constitute, a sense of self — even when these identities are constructed in relation to an ‘other’ social identity through discursive and material ways. “In opposition to a conception of sexuality which is said to “express” gender, gender itself is here understood to be composed of precisely what remains inarticulate in sexuality” (Butler, 1997: 140). The difference between identity and identification lies in the incorporation of the other — in this case, loved gender objects – into the psyche. Thus identifications contain, yet hide, how the other has been incorporated into the inaccessible unconscious.

Racial Identifications

Freud’s singular focus on sexuality — a singular Other — has been determinedly opened onto a “social terrain marked not by singular differences but by multiple differences” by queer theorist David Eng (2001). Eng reveals how Freud’s apparent lack of attention to race was not merely an omission. Rather, he shows how race has been “systematically encoded as a question of sexual development” (p. 6) in psychoanalysis.^{xi} Freud based his formation of a heterosexual identity on the premise that homosexuality was a “stalled and pathological” (p. 10) psychic stage in

development. Eng identified how Freud's belief that proper heterosexual development required a stalled homosexuality was based, in part, on his observations about the "narcissistic, stalled mental life of savages" (p. 12). Crucially though, the figure of the 'primitive' disappeared from Freud's theory, leaving only the figure of the homosexual. Thus Eng shows how the figure of the primitive provides the external prehistory to Freud's fantasy of European colonialist civilization. The homosexual remains, partially visible as pathological, while racialized other has been more deeply sublimated beneath the persistent focus on sexuality in psychoanalysis. Eng concludes that:

it is through this management and erasure of racial difference that sexuality – specifically, a system of *compulsory heterosexuality* – gains its hold within psychoanalytic theory as a universal and ahistorical principle. Resisting this universalizing impulse, we must recognize that any discussion of sexuality within psychoanalytic theory not only signifies sexuality per se but necessarily accounts for racial difference as well (p. 13).

Racial anxiety and racism within the Soprano's family is explicitly written into The Fortunate Son episode in several ways. In his interpretation of how race is performed in The Sopranos, Robert Miklitsch (2004) suggests Tony unconsciously makes a deep libidinal connection between maternity and black masculinity. But he goes on to separate Tony's racialized gender identification into the 'external' difference between, say, blacks and whites and the 'internal' psychic difference between masculinity and femininity that haunt Tony Soprano. Eng's queer theory allows a more shrewd analysis of racial identification.

Following Eng, I suggest that becoming Defensive Captain of the football team offers Anthony Junior a powerful identification with normative and violent whiteness of athletic masculinity. Football offers Anthony Junior a form of white masculinity that explicitly repudiates male homosexuality which, in turn, relies on the deeper sublimation of racialized otherness. Earlier in the Fortunate Son episode, Anthony Junior interrupts the televised football game he was watching with Tony to accompany his mother on a visit to see his sister at college in the city. Anthony Junior deserts his father and footballer's masculinity for the feminized spheres of his mother, sister and intellectual life. Tony is incredulous: 'We're watching the game' to which Anthony Junior bravely responds: 'But I like going to the city'. This exchange reverberates with

the phallic demand of the Father: 'We're men' and the Son's brave retort: 'But I like being a girl'. Anthony Junior's momentary incursion into the feminized space of his sister's college campus turns out to be an anxious encounter with racialized otherness. Anthony Junior is banished from the dorm room while his sister, Meadow, confronts his mother, Carmilla, about Tony's racist bullying of her Jewish African-American boyfriend Noah Tannenbaum (Patrick Sully) – presumably to protect from him the overt reality of his father's racism. But he finds himself on the front steps of the college, looking out at an unfamiliar feminized intellectual world. The camera, assuming Anthony Junior's perspective, pans across the bucolic campus lawn resting briefly upon four women: a white woman with dreadlocks reading Hegel to two male friends; a Muslim women in hijab carrying an armful of books; and a woman in kameez and salwars hugging another Asian-American woman. Returning home Anthony Junior announces at the dinner table that the people at his sister's college "are all freaks" and that he will not be going to college (definitely not the military school WestPoint as Tony suggests) because, he adds, defensively "he is not bright enough". On some level Anthony Junior registered the threat of castration presented by the feminized college space to his taken-for-granted whiteness. These racial anxieties interlock with the Oedipal gender conflicts played out within the masculinist space of men's football.

Returning to scenes of Anthony's school football team, the male players and coach are visually portrayed as racially homogenous. This parallels references to the imagined purity of Italian-American mafia families in the Sopranos. Not playing football or following his father's wishes, threatens something more than his masculinity. It threatens Anthony Junior's sense of racial coherence. Part of the lure of playing on his high school team is to identify with racial sameness, which would shore up his identification as Sicilian-American. In becoming less manly, Anthony Junior is faced with become more gay, and perhaps more fundamentally, less Sicilian. Thus we can read Anthony Junior's psychic difficulty as ambivalence towards taking up a violent masculinity if he plays football and sacrificing his hitherto pleasurable racial identification with a particular form of whiteness.

Tactile Identifications

[Identification] invites us to wonder what we use other people for and how other they are (Phillips, 1997: 152).

Touch also forms part of the psychic circuit of identifications. Lately queer, postmodern theories of the body are exploring the question of touch to rethink the visual economy of images in the formation of our sense of subjectivity (Schildrick, 2002). Tactile and kinesthetic perceptions, according to psychotherapist Maggie Turp (2000), mingle with visual perceptions to produce phantasy representations that coalesce to form the body image and sense of embodied subjectivity. Touch and movement co-occur within the womb, infancy, childhood and later life.^{xii} Competitive sport is often regarded as the peak of the body's performance, the highpoint in an athlete's lifespan and accorded disproportionate social and personal value compared to other, less productive states of embodiment. Sport is, by definition, heavily invested in training, controlling and displaying the highest strata of skilled human movement. Yet given that the embodied subjectivities are filtered through our identifications, the psychic histories and phantasies derived from tactile and kinesthetic sensations complicate the taken-for-granted meanings culture typically attributed to the skilled movements of sport.

Touch and movement both involve receptors in the skin and within muscle which respond to external pressure and movement. For instance swimming, being example *par excellence* of an activity which confounds the distinction between touch and movement, may solicit:

memories-in-feeling of being bathed and attended to in infancy. Earlier still are unconscious memories of floating and tumbling in amniotic fluid inside the womb. The rhythmic kicking involved in swimming may also serve to remind the swimmer of the feeling of kicking as a baby and perhaps of the responses evoked by his or her movements (p. 485-486).

Mainstream sports, such as football within Anthony Junior's high school, function in normative ways by helping the bodily ego to make familiar identifications. These identifications "devour bodily otherness" (Silverman, 1996: p.24) by assimilating or incorporating similar elements of the other into its own body ego. Any elements of other corporealities cannot be assimilated or swallowed are repudiated. Silverman calls this the refusal to live in and through alien

corporealities. Yet alternative bodily imaginaries constantly threaten to reveal the fragile rather than ontological status of hegemonic sporting embodiment.

Feeling rather than vision is central to many narratives of transsexual embodiment, underpinning the powerful leitmotif of ‘being born in the wrong body’; that is, the feeling of owning one’s body and body parts is taken to be more foundational than the visual body image. This can explain, Jay Prosser (1998) suggests, why transsexual gender identity can be so deeply felt in the face of opposition from the visual self. He writes, “the transsexual doesn’t necessarily *look* differently gendered but by definition *feels* differently gendered from her or his birth-assigned sex” (p. 43). Indeed it is the difference between proprioceptive and visual body images that can produce a deep alienation from the body for transsexuals, such that sex transitioning is a vital means to attain a feeling bodily coherence and integrity.

Yet even tactile perceptions and feelings are mediated by conscious processes and unconscious desires (Elliot, 2001). Hence all routes to embodiment, whether hegemonic able-bodied athleticism or radical alienation of transsexuality, laminate tactile and kinesthetic perceptions onto visual images via psychic identifications. Marginalized subjects, such as transsexual or disabled individuals, do not experience joyful self-recognition or self-sameness in the absence of social validation that smoothly laminates a normative visual image or tactile imprint onto their bodily experience.^{xiii}

Without widespread social validation, the concomitant mapping of bodily ego and imago that produces a feeling of self-sameness cannot be sustained. Psychic ‘presence’ is forfeited; jubilant identification is impossible, and the subject is left with a profound sense of fragmentation, disunity and loss (Eng, 2001: p. 14).

So, laminated on to visual representations are psychic representations of tactile and kinesthetic perceptions. If we return to the scene of Anthony Soprano’s football game, alongside the swirling visual spectacle of the football gridiron, the terrifying offensive line, his bull-like father bellowing in the bleachers are all sorts of tactile psychic stories prompted by being smothered by his teammates bodies into the flat, green dampness of the turf as his hand reluctantly learns to grip the fake pigskin of a fraternal football, instead of his familial Nintendo joystick. All these tactile and visual sensations contribute to the vast economy of perceptions that press against

Freud's barrier of repression, some of which enters the young Soprano's consciousness in facsimile form.

In/Conclusion

Anthony is caught in the supposedly educational moment of becoming an athlete, recovering the fumble under pressure, under bodies, under the spotlight. For this he is symbolically rewarded with the upward mobility of being Defensive Captain. Sports, according to Dan Dervin (1985), reveal "prior states of helplessness... within which we began as an internalized condition... out of which grows a sense of mastery" (p. 164). The training involved in playing a sport is immense. Training is an explicit acknowledgment of athletic embodiment as an achievement. Training is what sets apart athletic embodiment from mundane, infantile or geriatric embodiment. Dervin suggests training directs an enormous amount of aggression towards the self, "measurable in muscles, coordination, speed, stamina, and the rest of the equipment" (p. 290). So we can think of athletic training as culturally validated sublimation of aggression into determination to train and succeed. But we can also be alerted to the ambivalent aspects of such determination, or the aggression driving athletic mastery. In the Soprano clip, Anthony Junior is unclear about what aggression in training and mastery in football means to him, to his sense of career path which equates Captain with Capo, team leadership with Mafioso boss even in the midst of lavish praise from his coach. Postmodernist Margrit Schilrick (2002), writing about the Western desire to eliminate vulnerability and exclude the monstrous, suggested that:

If the price of a unified self-image, illusory as it may be, is repression, then the subject must be in a relationship with mastery over all that is alien to the clean and proper self (Schilrick, 2002: 107).

It seems that young Anthony just couldn't adjudicate between the demands of identifying with hegemonic high school football, which tapped into anxious phantasies associated with his murderous Father, and rejecting masculinist sport for a feminizing intellectual life, which threatened his illusory sense of coherent whiteness.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Gail Weiss discussed two strands of queer theory, namely Butler's morphological fantasy and the notion of abjection.

ⁱⁱ Weiss suggests that, while Merleau-Ponty rejected such a distinction, for him consciously focusing on the body *presupposed* a prereflective experience of the body. She contrasts this phenomenological stance with Michel Foucault's radical social constructionist claim that bodies are disciplinary effects of power regimes, a claim that rejects an individualist, physiologically mediated relation with one's body.

ⁱⁱⁱ Weiss suggests Elizabeth Grosz (1994) the concept of body image bridges the operation of both mind and body, and has been used by psychoanalytic theorists to link the working of the psyche to bodily motility and conscious behavior - Freud through the idea of a cortical homunculus and body ego, Lacan through the imaginary anatomy and Butler through the lesbian phallus.

^{iv} According to Elizabeth Grosz (1994) the concept of body image bridges the operation of both mind and body, and has been used by psychoanalytic theorists to link the working of the psyche to bodily motility and conscious behavior - Freud through the idea of a cortical homunculus and body ego, Lacan through the imaginary anatomy and Butler through the lesbian phallus.

^v For instance, neuroscientist Johnathon Winson (1985) derived a concept of the unconscious from brain function.

^{vi} Metapsychology was Freud's term for a psychological model that related consciousness to unobservable, unconscious psychical processes and that rooted psychical functioning to an organic base in sexual physiology (Silverstein, 1985).

^{vii} It's important to mention at this point the importance of sexuality in Freud's framework. Drawing again on Barry Silverstein's (1985) historical summary, sexuality was the organic foundation of Freud's psychology. He argued that "sexuality was related to the coupling of mind and body because sexuality was manifest in the psychic realm, in the form of affectively charged sexual ideas (memories-intentions), and somatically, in the form of a variable excitation within the nervous system" (p. 215).

^{viii} Both Freud and Lacan linked the development of fantasy objects, or desire, to the human infant's prematurity. A human child is unable to satisfy its own instinctual needs and is dependent for its survival on m/others. That is, the instincts fail to serve the purposes of survival and this lack, Grosz (1994) beautifully explains, at the level of instincts distinguishes human desire from animal need. "When the child is unable for many years to fend for and to take care of itself, it is able to supplement its needs, indeed to replace them or cover them up, with its capacity for representation" (p. 55).

^{viii} For a full discussion of ambivalent identifications resulting from early bisexuality, see Freud's (1923) The Ego and The Id.

^{ix} Shepherdson (2000) posits that efforts to resolve debates between 'natural' biological explanations of consciousness and sexuality and the 'cultural' construction of subjectivity have distorted how psychoanalytic theory has been understood. He argues that trying to understand the 'body' or 'drive' or 'sexual difference' within the parameters of biological essentialism or historical construction abandons the basic premises of psychoanalysis, drawing it back into the very framework it was meant to contest.

^x Butler (1997) is careful to acknowledge the rigid heterosexual matrix created by her argument about melancholic gender in The Psychic Life of Power, and that there are many ways of experiencing gender and sexuality outside this bifurcated framework. Later in the chapter, she illustrates how gay identity also based on melancholic identifications and ultimately asks the question why, perhaps if, sexual difference is the primary loss in subject formation. She presented her main argument — that heterosexuality is based on repudiation of homosexuality — because contemporary culture can only avow or grieve homosexual attachments with great difficulty.

^{xi} Eng (2001) applies this idea of racial displacement in psychoanalysis to Asian American masculinity, building on previous displaced racialization of Jewishness and femininity in psychoanalysis by Daniel Boyrian, Sander Gilman, Ann Pellegrini and Mary Ann Doan (p.230).

^{xii} Exercise narratives, as Turp has documented, may fit a range of psychoanalytic perspectives about the use and abuse of physical activity, leisure and sport. She distinguished three psychoanalytic broad perspectives about people's use of exercise. The prevailing view being to outline the obsessive and narcissistic tendencies underpinning leisure rituals. The second approach characterizes exercise as an appropriate, healthy response to a sedentary lifestyle by strengthening the psyche-soma integration. Finally, a third reading idealizes exercise as a road to 'perfect health' where the subject is immune to suffering.

^{xiii} For visual identification, Eng used Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, the look, screen and gaze. For bodily identification, Eng calls on Silverman's theory of the self-same body. The self-same body, suggests Silverman (1996), is possible when the visual ego, instituted when Lacan's infant looks in the mirror, is layered or 'laminated' onto a bodily ego. To gain a sense of the 'self-same body', the external imago must be successfully coated onto the corporeal co-ordinates. Eng emphasized the how social difference and power relations permeate these early identifications.