

## The Sochi Olympics, celebration capitalism and homonationalist pride<sup>1</sup>

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In July 2013 the Russian government passed two anti-LGBT laws that drew international criticism. Russia's impending hosting of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games inspired more sustained international attention to these laws than might have otherwise been the case. In this article, we apply the mutually supporting frameworks of queer/trans necropolitics and celebration capitalism to a content analysis of coverage of the Sochi Olympics in the *Advocate* and *Xtra*, the leading LGBT publications in the United States and Canada respectively. We contend that the *Advocate* and *Xtra* participated in a homonationalist process of manufacturing consent as the USA, Canada, the West in general and the Olympic Games were glorified while issues relating to racism and colonialism in Russia, the USA and Canada were ignored and these geopolitical formations in general were falsely generalized as safe havens for LGBT people. This conclusion is based on two key observations. First, we noted complete silence about racist and ethnic violence in Russia and in the specific site of Sochi in the *Advocate* and only one (unelaborated) acknowledgement of Sochi as a historical site of ethnic cleansing in *Xtra*. Second, in spite of the recent expansion of formal citizenship rights for LGBT people, more uniformly in Canada than in the USA, *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage failed to acknowledge the dissonance between American and Canadian governments positioning themselves as LGBT and human rights leaders and the harm these National Security States continue to deliver to racialized, impoverished and gender and sexual minority populations.

In July 2013 the Russian government passed two anti-LGBT laws that drew international criticism. The first law did not criminalize same-sex relations, per se, but banned “gay propaganda,” meaning that presenting LGBT people and relationships in a positive light – ‘promoting homosexuality as a behavioural norm’ – in any setting where minors are present became illegal, with penalties ranging from fines to jail time. This national law was a follow-up to many local prohibitions relating to LGBT visibility. The second law banned the adoption of Russian orphans not only by LGBT people in Russia and throughout the world but also by citizens of any nation that

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permits same-sex marriage. Russia's impending hosting of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games inspired more sustained international attention to these laws than might have otherwise been the case.

We conclude that the leading North American LGBT publications in their respective countries, the *Advocate* in the USA and *Xtra* in Canada, participated in a homonationalist process of manufacturing consent (Chomsky, 2002) via the glorification of the Olympic Games and the unwarranted celebration of the USA, Canada and the West in general as human rights leaders and safe havens for LGBT people. At the same time, issues relating to racism and colonialism in Russia were ignored. Our conclusion is based on two key observations. First, we noted complete silence about racist and ethnic violence in Russia and in the specific site of Sochi in the *Advocate* and only one (unelaborated) acknowledgement of Sochi as an historical site of ethnic cleansing in *Xtra*. Second, in spite of the recent expansion of formal citizenship rights for LGBT people, more uniformly in Canada than in the USA, *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage failed to acknowledge the dissonance between American and Canadian governments positioning themselves as LGBT and human rights leaders and the harm these National Security States continue to deliver to racialized, impoverished, undocumented and gender and sexual minority populations as well as to populations occupied by American and Canadian military forces.

Our employment of the mutually supporting frameworks of queer/trans necropolitics (Haritaworn et al, 2014; Puar, 2007; Snorton & Haritaworn, 2013) and "celebration capitalism" (Boykoff, 2013) enables us to draw out the conservative centrality of the West, whiteness, wealth, binary normativity and sexual monogamy in *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics. While certain kinds of LGBT organizing have been successful in persuading many Western governments to bring privileged gays and lesbians out of queer exile or 'social death' into 'respectable' society (Puar, 2007), trans and queer scholars of colour (Gosset, 2013; Haritaworn, 2008; Haritaworn et al, 2013; Kumashiro, 2004; Puar, 2007, 2012; Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013)

and anti-racist, anti-poverty allies (Noble, 2006, 2011, 2013; Spade, 2011; Stryker, 2008) are critical of the white, middle class “homonormative” (Duggan, 2004) and “transnormative” (Stryker, 2014) reference point for such inclusion. Duggan defines homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency, and a gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (2004, p. 50). According to this logic of LGBT assimilation, visible white and/or ‘respectable’ queer and transgender subjects who conform to middle class monogamy and binary sex and gender norms receive rights/experience a measure of inclusion without unsettling other structures of social inequality (Ng, 2013).

In his theory of necropolitics (2003), Mbembe defines sovereignty as the power of the state “to dictate who may live and who must die” (p. 10): some people are awarded with life and life sustaining resources while others are killed outright, condemned to ‘slow death’ (Berlant, 2007) by virtue of being starved for resources, treated to ‘social death,’ and/or violated in the mundane details of day-to-day living. Puar (2007) subsequently developed the framework of “queer necropolitics” as a radical critique of the rights-oriented campaigns by which some LGBT folk are granted respectability or ‘folded into life’ at the expense of racialized/impooverished LGBT and non-LGBT people. While Mbembe focuses explicitly on state atrocities on a large scale, queer and trans necropolitics (Haritaworn et al, 2014; Puar, 2007, 2008, 2012; Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013) identifies systemic racism, classism and institutionalized state violence as axes of harm and precarity that shape which categories of queer and transgender members of the social body are awarded recognition and life and which either die or are politically, socially, culturally and economically abandoned. This homonormative nationalism or “homonationalism” (Puar, 2007) features a profoundly modernist western discourse of LGBT rights within a decontextualized ‘global gay rights

movement' (Adler, 2009; Altman, 2004; Massad, 2013) that, its critics claim, colludes with western neoliberal ideologies of consumer-based citizenship and security.

Queer and trans necropolitics emphasizes the mundane, day to day experiences of racism and poverty experienced by queer and trans people of colour via the modern National Security State (Mohanty, 2012), including the prison industrial complex and racist and classist systems of policing and social control. Bannerjee's (2008) conception of "necrocapitalism" complements queer/trans necropolitics by drawing attention to the mutually constitutive relationships between state and capitalist "necropower" (Lamble, 2013: 242). From this perspective, we see incidents of state violence not as aberrations but instead as foundational to the logic/constitution of the state and the operation of the global economy.

The Olympic Games have necropolitical and necrocapitalist footprints in that they create a state of exception in terms of normal legal provisions in the host city/region/nation (Guilianotti & Klauser, 2010; Lenskyj, 2014; Perry & Kang, 2012; Shaw, 2008; Sykes, 2016) that Boykoff (2013) describes in terms of "celebration capitalism." Celebration capitalism diverts public money into private hands while legitimating and enabling the growth of state security apparatuses. This state of exception is normalized in hegemonic discourse about the Olympics, as evidenced by the production of three relatively stable narratives produced by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), its host nations and global sport media. These are, first, that sport transcends politics; second, that the Olympics are egalitarian and democratic; and finally, that the Olympics promote global peace and goodwill.

Critical scholarship on the Olympics and similar mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup (Cornelissen, 2009; Jennings, 2011; Lenskyj, 2014) reveals the fraudulent nature of all three of these narratives. The Olympics are fundamentally a business subject to, it seems, no oversight, and play a role in promoting capitalism as a norm more broadly along with neoliberal and racist hetero-

patriarchal constructions of identity. Far from being a force for world peace as the IOC claims, the Olympics normalize sex segregation, whiteness, capitalist systems of wealth extraction and inequality, displacement of vulnerable populations and colonial land grabs (Boykoff 2013; Boykoff & Yasuoka, 2014; King, 2007; Manzenreiter, 2010; Perry & Kang, 2012; Shaw, 2008; Sykes, 2014; Sykes, 2016; Travers, 2011; Zirin, 2007, 2010).

## Methods

We examined coverage of the Sochi Olympics by the leading North American LGBT publications in their respective countries, the *Advocate* in the USA and *Xtra* in Canada. As mainstream sport and sport media function symbiotically to inculcate social values through a process of mediatisation (Cornelissen, 2009), we focused on these prominent mainstream LGBT media sources to identify the social values promoted in their coverage of the Sochi Olympics. We did this by applying the method of “reading sport critically” (Macdonald & Birrell, 1999) to view the North American media storm concerning the anti-gay backdrop of the Sochi Olympics as a cultural text that generated narratives/controlling images about Russia, the United States, Canada and the West, the global LGBT community and the Olympic Games.

Our data consists of all of the substantive pieces of writing published by the *Advocate* (219) and *Xtra* (203), rather than letters to the editor or comments, up until May 1, 2014, that came up when we entered “Sochi Olympics” as a search term in each medium’s online archive. In general, we found that the *Advocate* and *Xtra* covered the Sochi Olympics in terms of a) the opportunity for the international community to apply pressure on Russia to change anti-gay laws; b) concerns about the safety of LGBT athletes and visitors; and c) the refusal of the Russian government to allow the establishment of a *Pride House* for LGBT athletes and visitors. We used framing theory to examine *how* readers were encouraged to think about these issues (Boykoff and Yasuoka, 2014), particularly in

terms of race, gender, sexuality and nationality (Atkinson and Herro, 2010, p. 90-91). ‘Line-by-line open coding’ (Neumann, 2010) of the relevant *Advocate* and *Xtra* articles generated close to 50 descriptive codes from which we developed 3 frames:

1. Celebration of the Olympics (but not the IOC)
2. The othering of Russia
3. Imagining the Nation/West

### **Celebration of the Olympics (but not the IOC)**

*Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics contested the sports and politics don’t mix narrative but left uncontested the message that the Olympics are egalitarian, democratic and promote global peace and goodwill. In debates about the value of a boycott and complaints about the IOC’s failure to ensure that “Olympic values” and “Principal 6” were upheld, both media contested the apolitical nature of the Olympics by insisting that Russia abolish its anti-gay legislation. This is the exception, however, as the *Advocate* and *Xtra* were otherwise consistent with Boykoff & Yasuoka’s (2014) description of “Olympic boosters.”

The Olympic Games and the athletes who participate in them were consistently valorized – for example, in the *Advocate* a photo of the Olympic flame is described as a “globally recognized symbol of humanitarian ideals” (Grindley, 2013). In a manner consistent with celebration capitalism, controlling images of the Olympic Games centred on the celebration of peak human achievement and international cooperation, not their role in normalizing and furthering neoliberal globalization. But the IOC was on the receiving end of stinging criticism for its failure to a) forbid host nations from discriminating against LGBT people; or at least b) ensure that LGBT athletes and visitors would be immune from criminalization and gay bashing. The seeming dissonance between the glory of the Olympic movement and the IOC as its governors was resolved via demands for better leadership rather than any critical analysis of the social

justice and environmental impacts of global sport mega-events. While multiple critical narratives were put forward about the IOC there was not one moment in *Advocate* or *Xtra* coverage where the *Olympics* per se were criticized, although a minority narrative in both media questioned whether the Games were more important than the human rights violations of host countries. This objection had xenophobic overtones, however, as it referenced human rights abuses by China (2008) and Russia (2014) but not those of Canada (2010) or Great Britain (2012).

*Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage encouraged athletes and spectators to resist Russia's anti-gay laws by making themselves visible – by wearing rainbow pins or holding hands. An *Xtra* news item about the IOC's refusal to go after a Russian state TV station for broadcasting an anti-LGBT program while featuring the Olympic logo included this observation: "the IOC has guarded its brand and associated symbols but does not seem to be adopting the same level of scrutiny in this case" (Barsotti, 2013d, para. 9). This is the closest either *Xtra* or the *Advocate* ever gets to framing the IOC and the Olympics as a corporate/commercial entity. The harshest criticism of the IOC came in the form of a blog published by *Xtra*, whereby its author described the IOC as "a bunch of spineless jag-offs" (2013, para. 2) for failing to insist that Russia abandon its anti-gay laws as a condition of hosting the *Games*.

### **The Othering of Russia**

A central frame in *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage focused on Russia as an anti-gay and hence uncivilized place (in opposition to the West). Both media were relatively uniform in utilizing an anti-Russian frame in peppering readership with reports of hardship faced by LGBT people as a result of the recent passage of anti-gay laws. For example, Garcia (2014b) reported that

It's now illegal to mention anything pro-gay while in the presence of minors, or face the wrath of Vladimir Putin's bigotry. On top of that, countless reports of attacks on LGBT

Russians (with little being done by law enforcement to stop it) makes the climate there frightening (para. 1).

In “A timeline – because it’s so bad in Russia it’s hard to remember everything,” Reynolds (2014) claimed to “trace the hate at its origins” (para. 1). In a more contextually nuanced discussion, Russian artist Slava Mogutin was quoted as explaining that the “gruesome injustice that is happening in my tortured homeland” is the result of Putin using Russian homophobia to secure his own popularity (Abadsidis, 2013, para. 5).

As a reflection of the lingering influence of a Cold War lens in the West that positioned the USSR as the axis of evil, *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage consistently cast a sinister shadow over Russia. Two *Advocate* articles referenced the harsh treatment of homosexuals under the previous era of Soviet rule. For example, in “Who can force Russia to change its ways?” Garcia (2013a) stated that

Russia’s already antigay atmosphere seems to be worsening, citing recent polling that reports a vast majority of Russians opposed to gay pride celebrations. LGBT residents of Sochi, a city of 343,000 people in western Russia, are living in a state of constant defense. They can’t be too loud, openly socialize with each other, educate each other about LGBT issues, or engage in any sort of gay rights activism without the risk of being severely fined, or even jailed (para. 17).

In the lengthiest article in the *Advocate* to cover the “Sochi Olympics,” “Why the end of communism didn’t end antigay hate in Russia,” Regula (2014) looked back on the 1977 *Advocate* interview with the late gay intellectual Gennady Smakuv who sought asylum in the United States in 1975. The article detailed the oppressive history of the Soviet Union towards gay people under communist rule “that outlawed homosexuality and often punished it with life in prison, or even death” (para. 8). Regula claimed that in current times, it is not the government but the sexually

conservative people of Russia who are the driving force behind the new antigay laws but that the Putin regime is capitalizing on this homophobia to “capture and retain power. Classifying homosexuals as a direct threat to the family and the survival of the state is a popular political platform for the Kremlin, State Duma, and the increasingly powerful Russian Orthodox Church” (para. 44). With Putin at the helm of contemporary Russia, amid corruption, accusations of electoral fraud and authoritarian policies and practices of crushing dissent and independent journalism, Regula went on to say that, “a new flock of Russians are now fleeing a desperate situation” due to “the recent rise in state-sanctioned LGBT persecution and the unchecked, hate-fueled violence surging in the former Soviet Union” (para. 7). While extremely vocal about violence against LGBT people, both the *Advocate* and *Xtra* were silent about racism and ethnic violence in Russia. Olympic scholar Hellen Lensky observed that, in one of the disturbing images circulating on the Internet featuring assaults against gay men in Russia perpetrated and broadcast by anti-gay Russians under the banner of *Occupy Pedophilia*, “attackers forced a watermelon onto a young Black man’s head” (2014, p. 89). This image clearly demonstrated that racism and homophobia are mutually at play but the topic of racism in contemporary Russia was completely absent in all *Advocate* and the vast majority of *Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics.

*Xtra* catalogued a roll call of injustice and violence against LGBT Russians and visitors. According to Houston (2013a), “Boris Dittrich, LGBT advocacy director for Human Rights Watch (HRW), says no one who supports LGBT equality and freedom is safe in Russia right now” (para. 28). Matheson (2013) announced that “Three Dutch citizens have been detained by police in Russia on charges of gay-propaganda” (para. 1) and Bell (2013a) described “egregious violence against Russian gay people” (para. 3). Readers were informed that “LGBT Russians are under attack” (Houston, 2013b, para. 13). Incidents of Russian state and non-state violence against LGBT people and protestors were recounted: for example, “Video allegedly shows beating of trans woman in

Russian park," (Barsotti, 2013a). Russia's "crackdown on human rights" (Ascah, 2013) was reported along with attacks on a Moscow gay club (Barsotti, 2013e), a bomb threat at a St. Petersburg LGBT film festival (Barsotti, 2013d) and assaults on LGBT protestors (Barsotti, 2014).

The controlling images of Russia in the *Advocate* and *Xtra* emphasized state persecution, authoritarianism, backwardness, violence, and a mostly invisible and frightened LGBT population. There was one exception to this dominant framing. The *Advocate's* "If you ask these queens, Sochi's scene is no drag," was the only article that substantially addressed life for LGBT people in the city of Sochi, beyond the staging of the Olympics. In this article Howe's sources assured him that the antigay laws are "overlooked in Sochi" (para. 4). Andrei Tanichev, a co-owner of "one of the few 'out of the closet' gay bars in Russia," was quoted as saying that "Sochi is just like all other parts of the world...We have gay people here, and we are not hiding...Sochi is a very open-minded city; it's very multicultural and young and forward-thinking" (para. 5). In this article, having a gay bar with drag queens was presented as an indicator of LGBT quality of life. The drag queens Howe interviewed claimed to be very popular and able to make a living from their performances.

In sharp contrast to the image of the USA and the West as progressive and democratic as we outline below, *Advocate* coverage positioned Russia and Russians as fundamentally less civilized. For example, in a long *Advocate* article entitled "22 Russians who we won't let Vladimir Putin forget were LGBT," Harrity (2013) introduces the reader to LGBT Russian people who have been/are leading figures in arts and culture (music, dance, film, literature). Even while celebrated in the context of this article, Russians are presented as more primitive whites, by virtue of being promiscuous/artistic/decadent/Bohemian. About Sophia Parnok, for example, a Russian, lesbian poet, Harrity said: "there were a few affairs of course; after all, she was a Russian, lesbian poet"; Russian born French artist and designer, Erte (RT) had a "hallucinatory and decadent

imagination,”; and actress Alla Nazimova “converted her West Hollywood compound into a playground for the rich, famous, and sexually promiscuous” (Harrity, 2013, para. 11). The relationship between Russia and the West is full of tension in this article, paralleling as it does western ambivalence about the Arts in general and Cold War antagonism: Russia has supplied the West with many artistic leaders but they are tortured/decadent/ unstable, ergo not as western/rational as “we” are.

While the controlling images of Russia in *Xtra* are similar to that of the *Advocate*, *Xtra* momentarily breaks from the single-issue framing of LGBT Rights evident in the bulk of its coverage with an article entitled "European Parliament to debate Russia's homophobia and xenophobia." In this article Barsotti (2013c) reported that the “European Parliament’s LGBT intergroup says the legal and social environment for NGOs supporting ethnic minorities, migrants and LGBT people [in Russia] has “sharply deteriorated” with the passage of the federal anti-gay gag law in June and the foreign agents law last year whereby groups receiving funding from outside Russia are now required to register as foreign agents” (para. 7). The focus on LGBT issues in isolation, however, is persistent, and renders invisible what a queer/trans necropolitical lens brings into sharp relief: racist, sexist and classist state violence interacting in concert with homophobia. Even when the *Advocate* and *Xtra* covered the imprisonment, release and subsequent police assault against and arrest of members of Pussy Riot - a Russian feminist punk rock activist group – there was no meaningful engagement with the feminist agenda of the group or issues relating to systemic inequality in Russia (Gessen, 2014). Both the *Advocate* and *Xtra* mobilized LGBT issues in a homonationalist way via their singular focus on LGBT issues and their portrayal of Russia as uncivilized and therefore profoundly inferior to the nations of the U.S., Canada and the West in general. The way in which Russia is deployed to imagine these nations in particular and the West in general as democratic and progressive is taken up in the following frame.

### Imagining the Nation/West

Our analysis of *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics revealed dominant narratives of the USA, Canada and the West in general as ‘progressive’ nations in opposition to Russia and other ‘less civilized’ countries (Uganda and Zimbabwe are also referenced in both media). Imagining the West as democratic and progressive requires a foil and the portrayal of certain countries as uncivilized plays an important role in legitimating the actions and potential actions of U.S. led globalized military and security regimes (Forte, 2014). Russia’s occupation of the Crimea region of the Ukraine in the face of western opposition shortly after the Sochi Olympics is one obvious indication of post-Cold war territorial conflicts between Russia and the NATO-bloc that simmered in the background in the lead-up to the Games. This narrative both obscures and justifies western military incursions while rendering invisible racialized (and gendered) violence within and at the borders of these nations, the ongoing structuring forces of white, hetero-patriarchy and the uneven and inadequate conditions of security for LGBT people in the West. We observed that *Advocate* and *Xtra* articles beyond our search terms of “Sochi Olympics” did criticize domestic circumstances for LGBT people and therefore imagined the nation and the West somewhat less favourably, at least in this regard. Nonetheless, this dissonance speaks to the validity of Boykoff’s claim about the power of the Olympics, as an exemplar of celebration capitalism, to foreclose critical analysis.

Indeed, *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage framed the United States, Canada and the West in general as free and democratic countries where LGBT people enjoy relative safety and security and where rolling waves of racial and gender justice movements have been successful. For example, in the *Advocate*, Peeples stated that,

In Western countries such as the States and in Europe gay people are seen as a normal part of society, just as the difference of white and black, man and woman, Christian and Muslim.

Although there are problems, the gay community is visible and is trying to make changes (2014, para. 10).

Key elements of this frame included a culturally evolutionist narrative of western liberation (Forte, 2014) in contrast to backward and uncivilized countries such as Russia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

*Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage exalted western leaders who announced their plans to forgo the Sochi Olympics as an explicit or implicit response to Russian anti-gay laws. In the *Advocate*, for example, much was made of Obama's decision not to attend and the composition of the U.S. delegation to include three gay and lesbian former Olympians: "Before announcing the U.S. delegation, Pres. Obama said he wanted LGBT athletes to come out and win some gold medals in the face of the law" (Garcia, 2014c, para. 5). News item titles provided a roll call of similar denunciations of Russian anti-gay laws by western heads of state and government representatives.

There are two pieces that most powerfully exemplify the tone of *Advocate* coverage of the Sochi Olympics as far as the imagined nation (Anderson, 2006; Newman & Giardina, 2011) of the USA is concerned. In an article entitled "Who can force Russia to change its ways?" Obama was quoted directly as saying "nobody is more offended than me by some of the anti-gay and lesbian legislation that you've been seeing in Russia" (Garcia, 2013a, para. 28). Perhaps the best example is to be found in an Op Ed dated August 7, 2013:

Can Russia really arrest gay athletes with the entire world literally watching? Go ahead, Russia, just try to lay a finger on our athletes. *We are Americans* [our italics]; we revel in the weepy, horn-backed, sob stories of poor athletes who've trained each day since fetus-hood, and the mom who woke up at 5 AM to drive their kid to practice every morning uphill in the snow both ways, just for a single Olympic moment. You don't mess with our athletes. We will be up Russia's ass faster than Bob Costas can flip his bangs" (Garcia, 2013b, para. 9).

The USA and the West were almost uniformly represented as progressive in *Advocate* coverage of the Sochi Olympics, often via descriptions of incoming or would-be “gay refugees.”

A minority narrative within this frame, however, does trouble the image of the USA as a safe haven for LGBT people. In a rare critical statement by an athlete, Elana Meyers (bobsledding, USA) has this to say:

I love this country. I love being a citizen. I believe we are the greatest country in the world. But we do have a lot of problems with [the lack of rights for] our gay and lesbian community and transgender community...There are certain states in this country that don't have laws against discrimination of the gay and transgender athletes, or gay and transgender people in general. There are still states in this country where they can't get married...I think as a country we really need to focus on where we stand on gay, lesbian and transgender issues, and then whatever Russia decides to do as an afterthought” (Garcia 2014d, para. 23).

This minority narrative of the USA's failure to eliminate homophobia and transphobia within its borders is echoed in an *Advocate* Op-ed by Eliza Byard, Executive Director of the U.S. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN):

The reality is that the United States has some laws that are eerily similar to the Russian ban on homosexual propaganda which is the legislative provision that has been most loudly denounced during the Olympics. For example, Utah prohibits “the advocacy of homosexuality.” Arizona prohibits portrayals of homosexuality as a “positive alternative lifestyle” and has legislatively determined that it is inappropriate to suggest to children that there are “safe methods of homosexual sex.” Alabama mandates that sex education classes emphasize that homosexuality is “not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public” and, alarmingly, that children be taught that “homosexual conduct is a criminal offence” even though criminalizing private, consensual homosexual conduct has been unconstitutional for over a decade” (Byard, 2014, para. 6)

This narrative, however, fails to adequately trouble homonationalism in that it is restricted to a single issue focus on conditions relating to LGBT people's safety and security in the USA. Never once were other forms of inequality within the nation relating to race, gender, class, immigration status or the harms resulting from U.S. military operations abroad ever acknowledged: these structural dynamics of inequality and oppression remained outside the frame. The 'greatness' of the USA, it seems, is not marred by the necropolitics of racial inequality, increasing poverty, gun violence, the ever-expanding carceral state, securitization of borders or military aggression.

*Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics imagines Canada as a nation in a more nuanced way in that it included questions about whether the Canadian government was doing enough to assist LGBT refugees and to oppose Russian laws against LGBT people. For example, one news item adopted a tone of disbelief "Our government insists it's leading the way in helping persecuted queer people" (Glenwright, 2013, para. 5). And the byline under a news article entitled "Russia's powerful anti-gay movement" was "Why won't Canada denounce Russia's human rights abuses?" Speaking to the fear that Canadian LGBT citizens would be arrested if they attended the Games, it stated "Canada must step in. It's our duty to protect our citizens" (Houston, 2012, para. 23). The article went on to say that "many of us have joined a growing global chorus singing a punk prayer with the women of Pussy Riot, three brave artists who are following in the footsteps of punk legends like the Sex Pistols and the Clash, using music to fight political oppression and religious tyranny" (Houston, 2012, para. 16). Houston failed to mention, however, that Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols stabbed Nancy Spungen, his girlfriend at the time, to death. Pussy Riot's feminist agenda includes resistance to such murderous violence against women and the necropolitics of patriarchy and misogyny more broadly, but this agenda was invisible in *Xtra* and *Advocate* coverage of the Sochi Olympics.

Canada was championed, for the most part, as a defender of LGBT rights by *Xtra*. In spite of the then ruling political party's history of opposition to LGBT rights, the foreign minister actually

appeared to be taken seriously when he positioned the Canadian government as a defender of gay rights: in “Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird called Russia’s anti-gay laws ‘hateful’ and ‘mean-spirited,’” Baird was quoted as stating that he does not believe Canada should boycott the Sochi Games, rather, it should use the opportunity to pressure Russia into greater tolerance for gay people (Bell, 2013b). But the Canadian government was sharply criticized in a subsequent piece with Bell retorting: “Stage them elsewhere, in Utah, Lillehammer, anywhere you like. At all costs Putin cannot be seen to have the approval of the *civilized* [our italics] world” (Bell, 2013c, para. 4). It is ironic – but unacknowledged - that Utah did not permit same-sex marriage until October 2014, long after the Sochi Olympics were over. In “Vancouver’s queer community rallies for Russia,” protest organizer Jennifer Breakspear was quoted as saying that the least Canadians can “do in our privilege is stand up and speak out...We have our rights enshrined. We have our rights upheld and respected” (Hainsworth, 2013b, para. 7). This assumption is extended to the West in general on August 13, 2013, when Perelle claimed “the West rises up in shocked outrage” at anti-gay laws in Russia (para. 12). A minority narrative in *Xtra* acknowledged that homophobia persists in Canada, although it is somewhat exceptionalized by being associated with a former mayor of Toronto (Rob Ford) who was consistently mocked by mainstream Canadian and LGBT media for his stupidity, boorishness and challenges with drug and alcohol addiction (*Xtra* Editor, 2014).

Our analysis of *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics in terms of the frames of Olympic celebration, the othering of Russia and the imagined nation/west, demonstrates that LGBT politics can only be adequately understood via shrewd attention to assemblages of racialization, nationalism and global capital. In the following section we build on this analysis to expose the necropolitical footprint of the ‘we in LGBT.’

### Who is the “we” in LGBT? Homonationalism and Representation

Key tensions between mainstream and radical queer/trans politics include differing perspectives on marriage equality as a cornerstone of liberation; the value of mobilizing for LGBT ‘rights’ in general; and the morality and efficacy of turning to state violence as an antidote to homophobic and transphobic violence. With regard to the latter, for example, while many mainstream LGBT organizations celebrate government policies such as hate crime laws as responses to homophobic violence, queer/trans necropolitics brings to light a different reality. First, it draws our attention to the disproportionate criminalization of marginalized persons for hate crimes against LGBT persons (Spade, 2011), thus perpetuating structural racism and classism and reinforcing the very state violence that until very recently had been used against queer populations in general in the USA and Canada. Second, it fails to protect LGBT people from harm by individualizing homophobic and transphobic violence instead of attending to the structural forces of heteronormativity and patriarchal binary gender norms (Meiners, 2011). From this perspective, rights are representative of elite LGBT interests, reinforce the security apparatuses of the carceral state, and, therefore, increase rather than decrease the harms inflicted upon vulnerable populations, LGBT people among them.

But in their coverage of the Sochi Olympics, the *Advocate* and *Xtra* generated a normative LGBT population that corresponds to a homonationalist social change agenda. This “we” was reflected in key silences relating to the intersection of gender, race, class and sexuality in the ‘progressive West’ and Russia and the neoliberal capitalist backdrop of the Olympics. We identified this imagined LGBT community by asking: Who are *we*? What do “*we*” want? And, how do *we* get it?

#### Who are we?

*Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage centred *us* as lesbian, gay, bisexual and occasionally even transgender citizen/consumers from the ‘free world’ (the West) and others with intelligible (Eurocentric) LGBT

identities who have escaped anti-LGBT persecution in non-western countries. This formulation of LGBT identity is compellingly communicated in an *Advocate* article:

have you seen those pictures of LGBT Russians getting punched, kicked, and spat on? If so, did you notice how many of them were good-looking? Many of those poor kids, with blood running down tattoos and sleeveless tops, look like they stepped off the platform at the Bedford subway stop in Williamsburg. These camera ready young folk have no doubt helped many gays here turn their attention to Russia (Broverman, 2013, para. 1)

In this piece, however, the author critically troubles the familiarity that whiteness brings by going on to encourage readers to support ‘other’ “gays” who are persecuted in their home countries:

while gay Russians unquestionably need our help now there are other LGBT people around the world – where cell phone cameras aren’t as common and *faces don’t look as familiar* [our italics]– facing conditions just as frightening as those in Russia. Take for instance, the gays of Zimbabwe... It wouldn’t hurt to email your Sen. and urge a harsh stance on Zimbabwe’s homophobia; *no rights, no money* [our italics]. Or how about staging a protest? The Zimbabwe Embassy in DC is on New Hampshire Ave., a nine minute walk from Rhode Island Ave., and the headquarters of the Human Rights Campaign” (Broverman, 2013 para. 2)

The author invokes whiteness as ‘familiar’ in this article and the power of the West to enforce conformity by withholding aid speaks volumes about the way the “we in LGBT” is defined in accordance with “others.”

#### Pride House as a signifier of LGBT inclusion

Who the “we” are in LGBT is powerfully evoked by *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of Russia’s refusal to allow a *Pride House* in Sochi. The first *Pride House* was included in the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver and continued at the 2012 Games in London. *Pride House* was consistently celebrated and its absence in Sochi lamented unproblematically in *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage; it was taken for

granted that *Pride House* represents a positive development in the history of the Olympics and the global LGBT movement and Russia's refusal to include it in Sochi is a sore point. In *Xtra*, Dean Nelson, CEO of *Gay Whistler*, an annual event for a relatively wealthy gay and lesbian ski clientele held on unceded Lil'wat indigenous land in British Columbia, was lauded for helping to create *Pride House* (Houston, 2013c, para. 11). *Pride Houses* were credited with having "provided safe spaces for LGBT people and their allies at both the Vancouver and London Olympic games" (Houston, 2013c, para. 10). The *Advocate* lamented that

even after the two previous Olympic Games, in London and Vancouver had included it, as had other sporting events, such as the 2012 Euro Cup...the Russian government said the Pride House was rejected because it would have violated Sochi's own "homosexual propaganda" law, which was already established before the nationwide ban was approved this summer. Now the Federation of Gay Games and other international sporting groups are looking for other ways to create safe spaces for LGBT athletes and attendees within the Olympic village" (Garcia, 2013a, para. 19)

*Xtra* reported that a "coalition of International LGBT sports organizations... [that] includes Gay Whistler, the European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation, the Federation of Gay Games, Pride Sports UK and United for Equality in Sports and Entertainment, and others" was seeking to ensure that a Pride House will be included at all future Olympics (Houston, 2013c, para. 9). Lenskyj documents the conservative/corporate orientation of the international LGBT sport movement by quoting Tom Waddell, the founder of the Gay Games, explaining the meaning of the Gay Games:

this event is becoming an important opportunity for gay men and women all over the world to demonstrate that our character has a wide and varied range... It is an opportunity to expand beyond a falsely tainted image. It is an opportunity to show that gay men and women, like all other responsible citizens of the United States, participate in the same ideal (2014, 77).

Fully in keeping with this homonationalist ethos, Sykes (2016) documented the ways in which the inaugural *Pride House* at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics ignored indigenous-led protests against ‘No Olympics on stolen land’ and positioned itself and Canada as safe havens for LGBT people, in spite of the harsh barriers established by the Canadian government for all refugee seekers and the troublesome requirements that queer asylum-seekers adhere to Western narratives about sexuality and gender (Keung, 2015).

*Xtra* and *Advocate* coverage harshly criticized the Russian state for its homophobic and transphobic prohibition of a *Pride House* at the Sochi Games but other aspects of the troubling nature of the Sochi context remained invisible. First, the 2014 Games were staged at a time when the Putin government was not only outlawing LGBT “propaganda” but cracking down harshly on all forms of dissent as evidenced by the 2012 arrests and trial of three members of Pussy Riot. While this crackdown on dissent was criticized in general terms – notably, without any acknowledgement of recent Canadian state violence against anti-Olympic domestic protesters<sup>2</sup> – neither the *Advocate* nor *Xtra* drew attention to Russia as the dangerous place for people of colour that we know it to be. In 2006, *Amnesty International* published a damning report on racist violence against visible minorities and indigenous people in Russia, determining that such violence was pervasive and occurring with state impunity. Second, there was no acknowledgement of the specific colonial history of the site of Sochi. Sochi was the site of the genocide of Circassian people by Tsarist militia on May 21, 1864 (Boykoff & Yasuoka, 2014). Here, 150 years prior to the Sochi Olympics, Russian forces killed or forcibly deported one and a half million Circassians. A social protest campaign called “No Sochi”

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<sup>2</sup> Critics observe that the arrest and imprisonment and of native elder Harriet Nahanee (who died from pneumonia shortly after her release as a result of harsh prison conditions) and others for protesting the expansion of the Sea to Sky Highway for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics undermines the good versus evil narration relating to Western versus Russian government treatment of dissent.

opposed the selection of the site and when this opposition failed, changed to “Know Sochi” as a call for the international community to *know* and acknowledge the site’s genocidal history (Sykes, 2014).

*Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the exclusion of Pride House from the Sochi Olympics neglected many issues that queer/trans necropolitics and celebration capitalism bring to the fore: concerns about the intersecting oppressions LGBT people experience; the climate of violence for ethnic and racial minorities in the host nations of Canada (2010), the United Kingdom (2012) or Russia (2014); and the upper class, colonial and misogynist origin of modern sport and its ongoing ideological role in normalizing gender inequality, homophobia and transphobia. Sykes (2014) characterizes the *Pride House* movement as being part of the settler colonialist and roving capitalist logic of the Olympic Games itself. In this way, Pride House represents, at least in part, the agenda of LGBT elites striving to cash in on the celebration capitalism of the Olympics. Our analysis demonstrates that the *Advocate* and *Xtra* cooperate in this endeavour by ignoring the broader necropolitics of location.

Instead of including such critical coverage, the *Advocate* and *Xtra* centred a collective list of western LGBT insiders and allies that included celebrities (Dan Savage, Madonna, Cher, Lady Gaga, Elton John, Jennifer Lopez and Harvey Fierstein among others), politicians (Western heads of state at the time that included Obama, Harper, Cameron, Hollande, U.S. senators, then Canadian Foreign Minister, John Baird and Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson), gay business owners and corporations with pro-LGBT market share, Pride organizations in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, and international gay organizations and gay sport organizations. We were encouraged to identify with LGBT athletes and to take courage from LGBT celebrities and celebrity allies. Tellingly, Pussy Riot was a common touchstone in media portrayals of life on the ground in Russia but, as mentioned above, coverage of the group’s critical agenda was selective.

Where the *Advocate* and *Xtra* do differ slightly in portraying the “we” in LGBT concerns *Xtra*’s presentation of a slightly edgier and less homonormative version of sexuality than the *Advocate*, sometimes including elements of LGBT relationships that go beyond the wholesome image of a monogamous, well-dressed gay couple holding hands and vying for marriage rights. For example, *Xtra* extensively covered a kiss-in held in Vancouver accompanied by a large photo of the organizers locking lips. This article also noted that similar protests worldwide were being planned for an upcoming “Coming Out Day” (Hainsworth, 2013b, para. 10). *Xtra* again reported on the Vancouver event accompanied with another photo of the organizer smiling in a partially open-mouthed kiss. Eleven further articles from *Xtra* featured coverage of porn performer Michael Lucas's reaction to Russia's laws and his strong (femme-phobic) criticism of Johnny Weir's decision to go to Sochi as a media correspondent: "Russia loves flamboyant clowns" (Prendergast, 2014, para. 3). We note *Xtra*’s failure to counter this misogynist discourse whereby feminine queer men and women are looked down upon by a masculinist lesbian and gay mainstream. The *Advocate* did not cover the conflict between Lucas and Weir, even though Lucas was at one time a columnist for the *Advocate*, penning a commentary entitled "The Problem with Putin" in 2010. One of the final *Xtra* articles covering Sochi took great pleasure in sharing the news that there is now a butt plug made in Vladimir Putin's image, "Yup. A buttplug shaped like Vladimir Putin. \*Blows a kiss\* Goodnight, everybody!" (Feist, 2014, para. 1). Despite the opening line and photo that are implied to speak for themselves, Feist goes on to describe the product as the "biggest, gayest slap in the face possible", engaging directly with gay sexuality in a way that was not featured in any of the *Advocate* coverage related to the Sochi Olympics (2014, para. 2).

In the coverage of both media we find that the LGBT subjects who are ‘folded back into life’ or respectable citizenship are:

- Marriage-minded lesbians and gays

- LGBT celebrities
- middle and upper class lesbian and gay consumers
- mostly white, nationalist LGBT Americans and Canadians
- ‘others’ from ‘other’ places with intelligible (i.e., Western) LGBT identities
- LGBT Olympic “boosters”
- LGBT elite athletes
- LGBT entrepreneurs/capitalists

Who we are not/‘others’ who are not retrieved from ignominy include:

- victims of the Circassian genocide
- People of colour and indigenous people in Russia
- racialized and impoverished minorities/so-called ‘illegals’/indigenous people in Canada and the United States, some of whom are non-normative in terms of gender and sexuality
- Women, except in Islamic countries who therefore need to be rescued
- Western movements against environmental degradation/globalization/militarism/Olympics
- Really Queer people – binary gender nonconformers, sex radicals, polyamorous people (Ng, 2013)
- Followers of Islam.

### **What do we want?**

The goal of LGBT communities and efforts aimed at social change to reduce/eliminate homophobia are presented consistently in the *Advocate* and *Xtra* as a discourse of LGBT human rights to prevent and punish discrimination. This *we* in LGBT want:

- Safety to be visible

- human rights and legal protection provided by the state to ensure freedom from discrimination and equal opportunity, with the level of inclusion and protection provided by the West serving as the appropriate global standard.
- marriage rights as a primary measure of LGBT rights
- legal change as an end goal and reliance on state agencies for protection and security.

The focus on legal and policy change as the driver of social change is a hallmark of Western and global LGBT rights agendas (Adler, 2009). Critics working within a queer/trans necropolitical framework note that structural conditions that marginalize racialized and impoverished communities remain relatively untouched by legal change and that the concordant expansion of police and security forces increases the state violence experienced by vulnerable populations.

### **How do we get it? LGBT social movement strategies**

*Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage presented a range of possible strategies or actions in the service of LGBT rights in Russia. These included: LGBT and ally visibility, letter writing campaigns, petitions, peaceful protests, consumer boycotts, western government pressure on other governments – including the withholding of foreign aid –and a boycott of the Sochi Olympics.

#### Visibility/Coming out

Visibility – via wearing rainbow pins or pride colours, carrying rainbow flags or holding hands – at the Sochi games was repeatedly referenced by both the *Advocate* and *Xtra* as not only a key indicator of LGBT inclusion but as an effective strategy or component of a broader strategy to bring about LGBT rights in Russia. In a particularly long *Advocate* article – 25 printed pages off the web – Garcia invited readers to “meet the LGBT allies headed to Sochi.” 25 allies are listed, 11 of whom are hockey players who signed on to the anti-homophobia program of “*You can play.*” Canadian hockey sensation Sidney Crosby is quoted as saying Russia’s anti-gay laws are “not necessarily...something that I agree with personally...for me growing up in Canada, my view has

always been that way” (2014d, para. 13). This is not a strong or explicit endorsement of LGBT inclusion but it is allowed to stand without query. Ashley Wagner, an American figure skater who has spoken publicly about her opposition to the law in Russia was quoted as stating that “my life is really surrounded by the LGBT community” (2014d, para. 3). Canadian biathlete Rosanna Crawford and snowboarder Alex Duckworth were identified as “one of the several dozen athletes who signed a letter urging the International Olympic Committee to ensure that LGBT athletes and spectators will be protected from discrimination at the games by updating Principle 6 of the *Olympic Charter*” (2014d, para. 5). German skier Felix Neureuther, took a more critical line and a broader perspective on human rights, stating that “it is not right that the Games should go to places with the most money...the priority should go to the sport and to the emotion spectators feel when they attend the Olympic Games. To have the Olympics in Sochi or Pyongyang or the soccer World Cup in Qatar is not good for sport. They should definitely go in other directions in the future” (2014d, para. 9). The Australian bobsled team signed the *Principle 6* petition - referencing the non-discrimination clause of the *Olympic Charter* - with the captain saying “they supported us, so it would be hypocritical of us not to support them. All of us bobsledders are the biggest, strongest, the fastest athletes in the Winter Olympics. And there’s two or four of us jammed into a sled. If we can support gay rights, why can’t everybody else? We’re proud to have the principle six badge on our sleds” (2014d, para. 26). In this and other coverage, LGBT and ally visibility is the mantra: “we need even more athletes to come out... to hold Pres. Putin and the Russian Duma’s feet to the fire” (Garcia, 2013b, para. 9). The clear message in this coverage is that increasing LGBT and ally visibility in sport is a sign of progress towards eradicating homophobia in sport and beyond.

The North American context of white settler colonialism is erased via the constructed silence of “white settler homonationalism” (Morgensen, 2010) in *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics. In a particularly telling example. Garcia applauds Duncan Keith, who “plays for the

Chicago *Blackhawks*” [our italics] because “after his team won the Stanley Cup in 2010, they marched with the trophy alongside the Chicago Gay Hockey Association and Chicago’s annual LGBT Pride parade” (2014d, para. 12). Given ongoing controversy about sports teams that appropriate indigenous names or employ racialized/colonial references to indigenous communities, (Major League Baseball’s Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians and the National Football League’s Washington Redskins), we note a ringing silence with regard to the name of this National Hockey League team.. This is in spite of the team’s employment of an “Indian head logo,” i.e., a profile of a colourfully feathered indigenous person wearing ‘war paint’, that players sport on the front of their jerseys.

Former U.S. Olympic figure skater, Johnny Weir “and lover of all things Russian, including his husband” (Garcia, 2013c, para. 9), became something of a lightning rod in both presses when he spoke out against a boycott of the Games *and* LGBT visibility in Sochi. Married to a Russian man at the time, Weir entreated westerners to come to Sochi but to refrain from wearing a pride flag. He was vilified for this, and for his decision to work as a broadcaster during the Olympics – in contrast to athletes who were wholeheartedly supported in their decision to attend and to other television network hosts and commentators.

While coverage in both the *Advocate* and *Xtra* consistently celebrated the visibility of openly lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes, transgender athletes were outside the frame. This is at least in part a reflection of the fact that there were no openly transgender athletes participating in the Sochi Games, nor in fact, had there ever been in any Games during the time frame of our study, although two transgender women competed for Great Britain in Rio 2016 (the subject of a subsequent study). But the role of sport in normalizing the gender binary and hence gender inequality, homophobia and transphobia (Kane, 1995; Love; Sykes, 2006) via sex segregation (Travers, 2008, 2013) and gender

verification testing for women athletes<sup>3</sup> remained entirely outside the frame as did the extent to which elite sport has become a profit-driven industry via neoliberal globalization and celebration capitalism. Never once was the elitism of Olympic participation in the Games, not to mention the costs involved in spectator attendance, ever problematized.

### The boycott debate

Both media addressed debates relating to a boycott of the Sochi games. Well-respected U.S. film director and actor Harvey Fierstein played a key role in advocating for a boycott and his voice was featured in both media. Fierstein compared Sochi 2014 with Berlin in 1936 under the Nazis and an *Advocate* editorial echoed his call for a boycott of the Games:

Adolf Hitler could have been alone in his new Olympic Stadium in 1936. It might've made for a more appropriate image of the regime than the photos of adulation and good will that the Berlin Olympic Games eventually provided him with. The IOC could have taken the steps to make that happen. But it chose not to. And its inaction haunts us to this day.”

(Schick, 2013, para. 24).

The *Advocate* challenged the IOC's “sport and politics don't mix” frame most strongly in its coverage of the boycott debate. In an article detailing “The long history of Olympic boycotts, protests and demonstrations,” Garcia referenced the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany that were boycotted by a number of Jewish athletes, the black power protest at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico (but not the state violence that killed more than 200 students just prior to those Games (Zirin, 2007), the

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<sup>3</sup> Mandatory sex testing for women athletes in international competitions was introduced in 1966 at the European Athletics Championships. The IOC and its affiliates finally discontinued the long-reviled, scientifically unfounded practice of sex verification testing for *all* women competitors prior to the 2000 Olympic selective sex testing of women athletes continues. This was most dramatically evident in the recent case of the gender-troubling figure of South African runner Castor Semenya after she won the 800m World Championship in 2009 in Berlin and the more recent case of Indian sprinter Dutee Chand who failed a sex test and took her case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). The Court ruled suspended the rules relating to “hyperandrogenism” - higher than ‘normal’ levels of testosterone in a woman's body - for two years. In order to be reinstated, the IAAF must submit compelling evidence demonstrating that higher natural levels of testosterone in a woman athlete actually translates into an athletic advantage. If this compelling evidence is not supplied, the rules relating to hyperandrogenism will be voided (Travers, forthcoming).

banning of the South African apartheid regime from international athletic competitions, the U.S. boycott of the Moscow Games in 1980 and the Soviet bloc boycott of the 1984 Games in Los Angeles. In this piece, Garcia complained that Rule 50 of the *Olympic Charter* saw Tommy Smith and John Carlos stripped of their medals by the U.S. Olympic Committee in 1968 for their black power protest: “they were taking a stand for being able to represent their country at the Olympic Games [and yet] being unable to be treated like full citizens in their home country because of their race” (Garcia, 2014e, para. 9). We note, however, that racism is never taken up as a current problem. In both the *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the boycott debate, oppression is consistently portrayed as a single issue, i.e., anti-Semitism in 1936, racism against African Americans in 1968, and discrimination against LGBT people in 2014.

Both *Advocate* and *Xtra* reported a lack of unity concerning the Sochi Olympics among Russian LGBT people and their allies, for example: “Pussy Riot band member, Yekaterina Samutsevich, said she was in support of a boycott of the Games as there was “no other way” to bring about change in a social and legislative environment that was proving increasingly hostile to civil liberties” (Barsotti, 2014, para. 4). Others are quoted as being opposed to a boycott.

But the pro-boycott position – that human rights are more important than the Olympics – operated in both media as a minority narrative. In an opinion piece, *Xtra* featured an explanation by Spencer Chandra Herbert, a member of British Columbia’s legislative assembly, about his decision to forgo attending the Olympics: “What if we replaced Russia's attack on LGBT people, and the IOC's tacit support, with a government that said the Olympics could be hosted, but only if women were not allowed or another religious or cultural group was banned?” (Herbert, 2014, para. 5). In an *Advocate* article, USA snowboarder Hannah Teter talked about her intention to compete at the Olympics but acknowledged that “to support Russia by going to the Olympics is kind of hard because of their views on the subject... I think almost in a way, it should be boycotted.... Going to

the biggest event in the world if you're going to have these laws in place when we get there, that are totally wrong. I mean, it would be hard to organize something like that so late, but if somebody did I would definitely be a part of it" (Garcia, 2014d, para. 11).

We note that no other athlete in *Advocate* or *Xtra* coverage was quoted as being in support of a boycott of the Sochi Olympics. Instead, reasons reported for opposing a boycott of the Games constitute majority narratives and include claims that Russian LGBT people themselves oppose a boycott, a boycott would not be fair to athletes who have trained SO hard, and the argument that boycotts fail to work anyway. In *Xtra*, for example, Salerno quotes New Democratic Party member Paul Dewar: "the grassroots activists on the ground in Russia have been saying please don't call for a boycott because we want this to be about LGBT rights not about the Olympics" (Salerno, 2013, para. 5). In an *Advocate* article, Obama is quoted as stating that "I want to just make very clear right now I do not think it's appropriate to boycott the Olympics" (Garcia, 2013a, para. 28). In *Xtra*, Bell announces that Canada's Foreign Minister "Baird doesn't believe that Canada should boycott the Sochi Winter Games, rather, it should use the opportunity to pressure Russia into greater tolerance for gay people" (2013d, para. 2). Although a boycott would have cost the IOC and corporations billions of dollars, this was never explicitly referenced. This speaks to the invisibility and ubiquity of celebration capitalism and the success of Western states in presenting the conditions for corporate profit-making as being in the common interest.

### Social change via consumer power

Dominant narratives centred LGBT power in terms of consumption rather than protest beyond visibility tactics such as holding hands or wearing a rainbow pin while at the Olympics. This is consistent with Mohanty's (2012) observation that the new basis for citizenship in the U.S. and other western National Security States is the ability to consume. LGBT rights movements have been successful in leveraging the buying power of their base to achieve legal provisions; the *we* in LGBT is

assimilationist and homonormative (Ng, 2013: 260). For example, in a lengthy *Xtra* article exploring how best to support LGBT Russians, the through-line dismissed a boycott of the Olympics in favour of political and consumer pressure. Cruickshank quoted Jeremy Dias, founder and director of the Canadian LGBT youth organization, *Jer's Vision*<sup>4</sup>, as categorically pronouncing that “Boycotting doesn’t help. Donating helps...Where you invest your money speaks volumes, so investing in companies that are LGBT-friendly and supportive makes a difference” (2014, para. 6). Capital investment as a mechanism for social change reflects homonormative conceptions of an LGBT *we* with disposable income, a willingness to derive profit from the extraction of surplus labour, and an understanding of power as operating best via practices of consumption.

LGBT consumer power is centred as a source for social change, whether boycotting Russian products or sponsors (Houston, 2013c, para. 18). *Xtra* reported on the extent to which a boycott of Russian vodka, sparked by North American gay media columnist Dan Savage, had been taken up by various bars and LGBT event companies. For example, “Vancouver gay party promoters Big Roger Events have likewise decided to boycott Russian products. “Our community has the power to take a stand and make a difference. Big Rogers Events is proud to say that at our request our Pride venues will not be serving any Russian-made products from their bars on the nights of our parties to demonstrate support for our Russian comrades” (Bell, 2013c, para. 7). The initial uptake of the vodka boycott was championed in both the *Advocate* and *Xtra*, but then followed by more subdued admissions that the boycott was ill-conceived (as it became evident that Stolli vodka has a pro-LGBT record *and* is bottled outside of Russia).

Homonationalism and celebration capitalism came to the fore in our analysis of *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics by virtue of their emphasis on LGBT visibility via “coming out,” marriage rights as a primary measure of LGBT rights, legal change as an end goal and reliance on

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<sup>4</sup> As of 2015 the organization is known as the Canadian Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity.

state agencies for protection and security, LGBT consumer power as a bargaining chip and the taken for granted view of the Olympics as a progressive international movement. We determined that the key silences around sex segregation, whiteness and wealth that Travers (2011) observed in the legal challenge by women ski jumpers excluded from the 2010 Vancouver Olympics were just as deafening in *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics.

It is no surprise that the *Advocate* and *Xtra* failed to criticize the Olympic Games in general or Pride house in particular because the corporate backing via the purchase of advertising space they require to operate is inconsistent with such dissent. Mainstream LGBT movements and news media take capitalism for granted as a given and target a relatively privileged readership. No critical discussion of neoliberal globalization as a backdrop to the Olympics or complicity by LGBT positive corporations or gay businesses ever occurs. Instead, we are urged to celebrate the fact that LGBT activist groups and Western governments achieved some success in persuading the IOC to change Principal 6 of the *Olympic Charter* to include sexual orientation as an unacceptable basis for discrimination for all future Games (Lewis, 2014).

**Like shooting homonationalist fish in a barrel: the *Advocate*, *Xtra*, celebration capitalism and homonationalist pride**

Our analysis of *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage through the lenses of queer/trans necropolitics and celebration capitalism reveals the ways in which these media inaccurately glorify the USA, Canada and the West in general as progressive non-homophobic/transphobic havens and the Olympic Games as fundamentally egalitarian and uncoupled from corporate gain.

Both the *Advocate* and *Xtra* correspond to what Chomsky and Herman (2002) term the “propaganda model” for media in the service of western political/economic regimes. Western protests of Russian anti-gay laws occurred in a vacuum as far as acknowledging the Circassian genocide, the climate of violence against people of colour in Russia and social inequality within/and

state violence by the United States and Canada (Bell 2014). Through it all, the *Advocate* and *Xtra* provided a platform for representatives of the United States and Canada to pound their chests about the outrageous treatment of LGBT people by the Russian state. This was in spite of the significant and increasing extent of social inequality in each country, the fact that the United States is a carceral state that imprisons more people per capita than Russia does by a third (a disproportionate number of whom are African and Native American), racism in Canada and the ongoing, colonizing relationship with indigenous peoples and the military presence of both countries in faraway lands.

With the exception of identifying it as a characteristic of the past in the USA, the *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage relating to the Sochi Olympics was completely silent with regard to racism - - in spite of the fact that visible minorities in Russia, including an indigenous population in Siberia, are far more likely to be victims of violence (with police complicity) than are white LGBT Russians (Amnesty International, 2006). While there was a high level of concern expressed in *Advocate* and *Xtra* about the impact of anti-gay legislation and violence on LGBT athletes and spectators at the Sochi Games, nothing was said about the dangers for athletes or spectators of colour.

While our content analysis does not establish anything empirical about received meaning, we are able to make inferences based on Cornellsen's (2009) definition of mediatisation whereby the power of global sports media plays a key role in establishing social values. Our critical unpacking of *Advocate* and *Xtra* coverage of the Sochi Olympics via queer/trans necropolitics and celebration capitalism indicates that mainstream LGBT media play a similar role in North American markets by normalizing and reinforcing ongoing white supremacist/colonial/capitalist projects. We emphasize that attention to this coverage particularly matters because of the illusion of critical engagement these media provide as they take on issues relating to homophobia and transphobia.

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