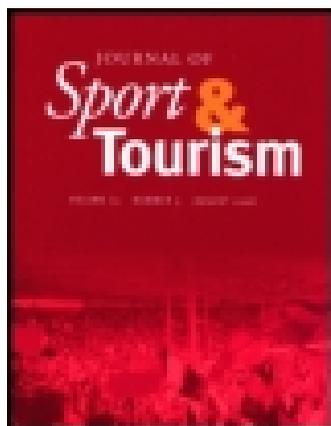


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A skunk at the garden party: the Sochi Olympics, state-sponsored homophobia and prospects for human rights through mega sporting events

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Mega sporting events, such as the Olympics, are sites of political struggle. Situating mega sporting events within the context of critical social theory, this article examines the potential of modern sport to serve as a vehicle for foreign policy and the promotion of international human rights. This article examines the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games in light of Russian legislation that bans 'propaganda of non-traditional relations', resulting in what many have described as state-sponsored homophobia. Highlighting the international community's response to this legislation, such as threatened boycotts, political statements and symbolic gestures of protest, the implications of the Sochi case study reveal the potential of mega sporting events to advance human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens in Russia and perhaps elsewhere. As human rights are historically and culturally contested, this article discusses the role of identity politics and liberal internationalism within the realm of global sport diplomacy. Finally, the Sochi case study contributes to future discussions concerning efforts at balancing hosting rights, human rights and the social responsibilities associated with mega sporting events. Specific recommendations are provided.

Keywords: Sochi Olympics; mega sporting events; state-sponsored homophobia; social sustainability; human rights; LGBT rights

Mega sporting events, such as the Olympics, represent metaphoric garden parties, staged and well-orchestrated events celebrating elite athletics and international competition. Beyond celebrating the athletic ideals of *Citius*, *Altius* and *Fortius*, the Olympic Charter promotes fundamental principles of fair play, non-discrimination and human dignity. Within the context of these goals and ideals, mega sporting events reveal the social and political identity of host cities and nations and their place within the larger global community at a given historical moment.

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At the 2014 Olympic garden party, held in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, Russia, several skunks lurked in the shadows, threatening to spoil the event and embarrass the host country. In addition to a lack of snow (and the implications of global climate change) and fears of terrorism, Russia's anti-gay legislation passed in June 2013 represented a powerfully potent skunk.¹ Just over six months prior to the Opening Ceremonies of the Winter Olympic Games, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed into law Federal code 6.21, an amendment that bans 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations'. The law prohibits public demonstrations in favor of gay rights, making it a criminal act to speak in defense of, distribute material related to or to claim that gay relationships are equal to heterosexual relationships. Soon thereafter, the Russian parliament or Duma also passed legislation restricting adoptions of Russian children by citizens in countries that allow same-sex marriage. Russian leaders portrayed these legislative mandates as a necessary protection of children; critics viewed this protective rhetoric as deliberately anti-gay (Alpert, 2013; Dorf, 2013) and evidence of state-sponsored homophobia (Higgins, 2013).

Thus, Russian anti-gay propaganda laws, and the international community's response to these laws, had the potential to disrupt or even spoil the Sochi Games, just as a skunk might spoil the proverbial garden party. The inconvenient presence of what critics called human rights violations surrounding the 2014 Winter Olympics revitalized the idea that modern sport might serve as a vehicle for foreign policy. Specifically, the Sochi Games represented the first mega sporting event that has generated the level of international attention on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights as human rights in a host country.²

Despite this watershed moment and the underlying principles of the Olympic Charter, Sochi may also highlight the limited importance of human rights relative to more pressing priorities associated with mega sporting events, such as economic and environmental concerns. Further complicating this process of prioritization are the political struggles associated with who gets to define human rights and who bears the social responsibility for protecting these rights globally.

The article begins by providing a conceptual framework and defining mega sporting events as sites of political struggle. As events likewise promoted within a global tourism industry, key stakeholders – host countries, international organizations and corporate sponsors – seek to leverage positive outcomes while mitigating negative consequences. The second section of this article discusses the moral obligations of sustainable development and the perceived social responsibilities of the international community to support human rights while simultaneously attempting to include all countries in the Games regardless of their human rights records. This apparent contradiction highlights the inherently political process of defining human rights globally. The third section of this article examines this conundrum more fully. What some states

consider liberal interventionism based upon identity politics, others see as moral imperatives to protect fellow human beings. The final section of this article presents the case study of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, highlighting the chronology of the build-up to the Games, the mega event itself and its subsequent aftermath. This article concludes with lessons learned from Sochi and recommendations for the potential promotion of human rights connected to future mega sporting events.

The garden party: mega sporting events as sites of political struggle

For the purpose of this article, I situate mega sporting events within the context of critical social theory. As such, modern sports are socially and historically constructed; sports are contested popular cultural practices defined by political and ideological struggle. This critical perspective examines the ways in which dominant forms of sporting practices often reproduce dominant cultural ideologies, supporting social divisions inherent to reigning race, class and gender relations (Carrington & MacDonald, 2009; Van Rheenen, 2013). These sporting practices are likewise grounded and contoured by the dominant interests of the wider community. Simultaneously, because ideological hegemony is never secure, popular culture practices are contested, providing the potential for resistance and counterhegemonic expression (Fairclough, 1989; Whannel, 2008).

While modern sport embodies this ideological struggle broadly, mega sporting events often heighten these geopolitical struggles in a particular place in time. This temporal and spatial specificity often uncovers extenuating social issues, connected to, but also distinct from, economic and environmental interests and implications. Strategic efforts at striking a balance between these competing interests or triple-bottom line evaluations of major sporting events (Jago, 2005; Weed, 2009) provoke political negotiation, particularly when these negotiations include a perceived social responsibility for protecting human rights. Adopting this critical theoretical perspective, then, mega sporting events can be defined as sites of political struggle.

Despite superficial efforts at separating sport from politics, few would dispute the symbiotic relationship between these two social spheres of influence. While sport has been described as an autonomous social field, with a relatively autonomous history (Bourdieu, 1978; Foley, 2001), the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed an increasing politicization of sport and a 'sportization' of politics (DeFrance & Chamot, 2008). If one accepts the proposition that modern sport has the potential to be used as an instrument of foreign policy, it follows that, at a minimum, sport can be political. As my working definition of sport attests, however, sport is, and always has been, an object of political struggle. In particular, this modern case study reveals the increasing role of identity politics within international sport diplomacy, making modern sport ever more political. This political process has led states to respond to

accusations of human rights abuses in host countries with claims of liberal interventionism or even cultural imperialism. The ideological differences inherent to these geopolitical struggles often result, perhaps predictably, in calls to separate politics from mega sporting events, despite the obvious presence of oppositional worldviews.

Regardless of one's political position or ideology, nation-states and international governing bodies use sport as a foreign policy tool. In this capacity, sport tourism has evolved within a global market to help 'brand' cities and nations just as multinational corporations sell commodities tied to the concomitant consumption of sporting events. As a result, global sport tourism serves as an important marketing vehicle for both cities and nations aspiring to world-class status (Whitson & Macintosh, 1996). The pursuit of mega sporting events to enhance global prestige and competitive advantage has, therefore, become a strategic mechanism for nation building and increased market share (Cornelissen & Swart, 2006; Gillis, Oliver, & Briggs, 2007). International sport is likewise an effective means of stimulating capital accumulation in the global market and 'lubricating the international political economy' (Sage, 1998).

While sport unites a nation around a common purpose of real and symbolic success, enhancing a collective identity and national pride, so too does sport divide and accentuate cultural differences. These processes of national identification through sport are inherently political. According to Jackson and Haigh (2008, p. 351),

modern sport has long been used to demonstrate the ideological superiority of a particular system or state. As Allison notes, 'All kinds of governments, representing every type of political ideology, have endorsed international sporting competition as a testing ground for the nation or for a political 'system'. German Nazis, Italian Fascists, Soviet and Cuban Communists, Chinese Maoists, western capitalist democracies, Latin American juntas –all have played the game and believed in it.

Social sustainability through sport: hosting rights tied to human rights

As the global sport tourism phenomenon has developed, so too have the moral obligations connected to sustainable development. These perceived obligations are often framed as social responsibilities expected of host countries, international governing bodies and commercial sponsors. Key indicators of sustainable development include economic efficiency, environmental integrity and social sustainability. According to Smith (2010), however, social sustainability remains the least explored element of sustainable development.

Social sustainability refers broadly to equity, ethics and human rights. Equity denotes fairness and equal access to opportunities, while ethics refer to the actions required to promote human welfare (Donnelly, 2013; Kidd & Donnelly, 2000). According to Barnes (1996, p. 47), 'human rights are moral

or legal entitlement[s] that others are duty-bound to respect'. These rights, historically and culturally contested, are inherently political, 'their articulation, acceptance and realization involves complex, ongoing processes of assertion, struggle and negotiation between competing interests in the context of changing social, economic, political and ideological circumstances' (Kidd & Donnelly, 2000, p. 133).

As part of mega sporting events, these social responsibilities may not be achieved simultaneously, if it all. While equity, in the form of equal access to sports participation may be heralded as an indicator of positive development, social discrimination and human rights violations more broadly may be ignored beyond the confined context of the mega event itself. Thus, Principle 4 of the Olympic Charter, stating that 'the practice of sport is a human right', may be honored, while Principle 6 of the Charter, that discrimination in any form is incompatible with the Olympic Movement, may remain an ideal unfulfilled (International Olympic Committee [IOC], 2013).

In advance of the Sochi Olympic Games, both Russia and the IOC, responding to the negative press revolving around the 2013 anti-gay amendments, emphatically stated, 'the legislation will not affect those attending or taking part in the Games' (Whiteside, 2013; Zaccardi, 2013). This limited focus on the 'active' participants of this mega sporting event marginalizes members of the host country and international community actively participating in this larger discourse, as well as those individuals whose rights are in question but who are not directly participating in the Games.³

The HRC, a leading US gay-rights organization, argued that the IOC 'should be advocating for the safety of all LGBT people in Russia, not simply those visiting for the Olympics' (Crary & Leff, 2013). Similarly, in a letter to the IOC, Boris O. Dittrich, Advocacy Director of the LGBT Rights Program at Human Rights Watch, stated '[our] long-standing position is that there cannot be a successful Olympics where there is discrimination or human rights abuses'. Dittrich recommended 'the IOC establish a standing mechanism to establish human rights benchmarks among Olympic host countries and monitor human rights in the preparation for and during the Olympic Games' (Wong, 2013).

Such recommendations suggest that social responsibility through sport might include preventing nations with poor human rights records from hosting, or even participating in, mega sporting events. For example, international political campaigns through sport were successful in contributing to the fall of apartheid in South Africa and its long-standing system of legalized racism. The isolation of pro-apartheid sports federations through boycotts and the refusal to play against national teams in any major sport provided a strong symbolic condemnation (Kidd & Donnelly, 2000; Lapchick, 1975). Awarding South Africa hosting rights for mega sports events after the fall of apartheid, beginning with the 1995 Rugby World Cup and culminating in the 2010 FIFA World Cup, sent a clear message worldwide. These political

decisions symbolized international support of a new post-apartheid South Africa, celebrating greater democratization and human rights.⁴

And yet, efforts at promoting increased equality and justice among the international community has increased attention on the process of awarding hosting rights to nations of the global ‘South’ (Jackson & Haigh, 2008). In some instances, awarding non-western countries with traditional social values hosting rights for successful sports bids seems to have more to do with economic and environmental capacity than does the bidding nation’s human rights record. As a result, critics have accused the IOC of ignoring human rights abuses in its decision-making processes (Black & Bezanson, 2004; Kidd, 2010).

In 2001, over a decade after the Tiananmen Square massacre, the IOC awarded Beijing, China hosting rights for the 2008 Summer Olympics. The ‘Democracy Movement’ prompted by student protests in Tiananmen Square was ultimately suppressed when the Chinese military enforced martial law in the country’s capital. Unlike South Africa, it would be difficult to claim that China was awarded hosting rights to this mega sporting event because of increased democratization and a demonstrated protection of human rights. While Jacques Rogge, former IOC President, boasted that the Beijing Olympics were ‘truly exceptional Games’, international human rights activists were less impressed with China’s track record at home, in Tibet and in Myanmar and Dafur (Cha, 2009; Hong & Zhouxiang, 2012).

Neoliberalism, identity politics and international sport

A belief in the power and ultimate responsibility of the international community to support human rights efforts is grounded in the political philosophy of liberalism, which

has its roots in the affirmation of the moral sovereignty of the individual, expressed in the principle of equality. Historically, liberalism’s commitment to equality as a political principle generates a tendency to use the power of the state to extend equality and oppose inequality. (Barnett, 2005, p. 8)

The notion of liberal internationalism extends this political principle yet further, particularly when some states perceive others as having failed to honor the essential tenets of this principle. Liberal internationalism, or what critics refer to as liberal interventionism, is a foreign policy doctrine that calls for liberal states to intervene in other sovereign states to pursue their liberal objectives (Burley, 1992; Ikenberry, 2009).

Liberalism can be seen as a ‘spontaneous philosophy’ within primarily western societies, promoted as a hegemonic understanding of the dominant structures inherent to bourgeois society. However, as a spontaneous philosophy rooted in capitalist social relations, liberalism may also be prone to

‘spontaneous combustion’ due to tensions in these relations (Polanyi, 1944). As Jessop (2002) argues, among other tensions, ‘there are problems generated by the nature of civil society as a sphere of *particular interests* opposed to the state’s supposed embodiment of *universal interests*’ (p. 456, author’s italics). These problems directly impact how human rights are defined and contested geopolitically.

Specifically, human rights struggles are connected to contemporary identity politics within institutionalized liberal democracies (Brown, 1995), particularly as the tensions and limitations of liberalism led to the rise of neoliberalism as an economic and political strategy. Identity politics or politics of difference refer loosely to political mobilizations of marginalized groups seeking self-determination while struggling against institutional discrimination based on race, religion, gender, sexuality and other social categories of difference.

Principle 6 of the Olympic Charter specifies that discrimination is incompatible with the Olympic Movement but sexual orientation is not currently included as one of these social categories. In a joint letter to IOC President Thomas Bach, 33 international human rights organizations and LGBT groups wrote that the IOC should reform the host city selection process and amend the Olympic Charter’s non-discrimination principle to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories.⁵

Sochi as case study: the build-up to the Games

In the build-up to the Games, Russia framed the attention to international gay rights surrounding Sochi as an ‘invented problem’ created by the western, neo-liberal media. In response, however, many in the international community publicly condemned these Russian laws (Palmer, 2013). These condemnations came primarily from North America and Western Europe, dramatically drawing parallels between the persecution of LGBT citizens in Russia today and the persecution of Jewish citizens under German nationalism (Bacardi, 2013; Colliver, 2013). In a *New York Times Op-Ed* piece, American actor and playwright Fierstein (2013) wrote,

In 1936 the world attended the Olympics in Germany. Few participants said a word about Hitler’s campaign against the Jews. Supporters of that decision point proudly to the triumph of Jesse Owens, while I point with dread to the Holocaust and world war. There is a price for tolerating intolerance.⁶

Fierstein and others in the USA and Western Europe called on their nations to boycott the Sochi Olympic Games, a reminder of earlier times when Cold War politics escalated to include boycotts led first by the USA and her allies of the 1980 Moscow Games and four years later by the Soviet Union and her allies of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. These calls to political action, in the form of a Sochi boycott, never received serious traction.

Arguing that boycotts are blunt and ineffective instruments of change, Vanden Heuvel (2013) noted that a boycott of the Sochi Games would have actually benefitted, rather than punished, Putin. She wrote,

Russian politics scholar Mark Lawrence Schrad recently wrote that ‘a perceived threat, even symbolic, from the liberal West would be a blessing for Mr. Putin, who can portray himself as the defender of the traditional Russian family, Orthodox Christian values and national pride all at once’.

Fierstein’s reference to Jesse Owens’ triumph in 1936, known as ‘Hitler’s Games’ or the ‘Nazi Olympics,’ is ironic here. He juxtaposes real political action, such as a boycott, with sport symbolism embodied in an athlete’s performance. African-American athletes such as Owens or Joe Louis, in his historic boxing matches against German Max Schmeling in the 1930s, came to symbolize American freedom and democracy in the face of German fascism and ideologies of racial supremacy (Edmonds, 1981). These examples demonstrate how modern sport represents political and ideological struggles at both the collective and individual levels. These examples also illustrate the potential hypocrisy of such symbolic struggles, as African-Americans in the 1930s were afforded limited freedoms in the USA, endorsed by state-sponsored racial segregation under the guise of separate but equal statutes.⁷

Three decades later, at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, African-American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved fists on the medal stand in protest of continuing racial segregation in the USA and elsewhere (Zirin, 2008).⁸ Despite being kicked out of the Olympic Village and treated like pariahs for years after the Mexico City Games, Smith and Carlos became human rights referents in Sochi, celebrated not for their athletic accomplishments as much as for their political activism.⁹

Thus, when nations have attended controversial Games, conflicted countries have often used this international competition to articulate an opposing set of values, expressed in a variety of ways. Political protest, for example, has sometimes been symbolized in the successful athletic performance of participating athletes such as Owens, Carlos or Smith. In order to curb these expressions of political activism, the IOC is forced to balance promoting the Olympic Charter’s fundamental principles while recognizing its edict banning political demonstrations and propaganda at the site of the Games. This balancing act poses an inherent dilemma for the IOC.

Aside from a few fleeting references to LGBT issues in Russia, however, the political activism of the Olympic athletes was anemic, despite IOC President Bach’s vow that no athlete would be denied freedom of speech while in Sochi (Rumsby, 2014). From the perspective of the primary stakeholders, particularly western national Olympics committees such as the United States Olympic Committee, a lack of athletic activism was the appropriate and desired result. The result confirmed the clichéd call for the separation of politics

and international sport. In reflection of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, there was no John Carlos moment; no athlete rose in strong symbolic opposition to LGBT discrimination in Russia and worldwide.

Let the Games begin: coming out at Sochi

Inherent to a belief in liberal internationalism, organizing bodies and sponsors bear a social responsibility to uphold human rights through their governance and promotion of international sport. At the Opening Ceremonies of the 2014 Winter Games, IOC President Thomas Bach sent a clear message when he stated,

Olympic Sport unites people. This is the Olympic Message the athletes spread to the host country and to the whole world. Yes, it is possible to strive even for the greatest victory with respect for the dignity of your competitors. Yes, Yes, it is possible – even as competitors – to live together under one roof in harmony, with tolerance and *without any form of discrimination for whatever reason*. Yes, it is possible – even as competitors – to listen, to understand and to give an example of a peaceful society (author's italics).

Like IOC President Bach, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon made a definitive statement regarding discrimination in his brief remarks at the Opening Ceremonies of the 2014 Sochi Olympics:

The Olympic spirit prevails: Fair play. Mutual respect. Friendly competition. Let us take that spirit and spread it around the world. For peace – and a truce between warring parties around the world. For human rights and an end to discrimination. For a life of dignity for all.

Moon's words are particularly promising given that Pyongyang, South Korea will host the XXIII Olympic Winter Games in 2018. Moon, a South Korean, suggests that there could be a shared convergence of human rights ideals between host country, the United Nations and the IOC at the next Winter Olympic Games.

Mega sporting events as sites of political struggle do not only prompt a scrutiny of international governing bodies; these events likewise challenge the values of media networks, sponsors and multinational corporations who may be complicit in ignoring human rights abuses, often for financial gain. In the USA, for example, gay-rights activists called on the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), which paid the IOC \$775 million for television rights to the Sochi Olympics, and another \$3.6 billion for the 2016, 2018 and 2020 Olympics, to take a stand against Russia's anti-gay propaganda legislation. In a letter sent to NBC Universal CEO Stephen Burke, the HRC, a leading US gay-rights organization, wrote that NBC has a 'unique opportunity – and responsibility – to expose this inhumane and unjust law to the millions of American viewers who will tune in to watch the Games' (Johnson, 2013).

While NBC was criticized for editing some of the most important content denouncing discrimination of any kind from IOC President Bach's opening remarks, the network devoted nearly two hours of Olympic coverage on LGBT issues related to Russia's anti-propaganda laws (HRC, 2014).¹⁰

Other large corporate sponsors made their own political statements in advance and during the Games. Two days ahead of the Opening Ceremony in Sochi, global communications provider AT&T posted on its website: 'We support LGBT equality globally and we condemn violence, discrimination and harassment targeted against LGBT individuals everywhere'. AT&T was the first US brand and Olympic sponsor to make a public statement in regard to LGBT rights surrounding the Sochi Games (Nichols, 2014). On the first day of the Winter Olympics, global technology company Google changed its doodle on its home page to illustrate six athletes skiing, sledding, curling and skating against a symbolically LGBT rainbow-colored backdrop. Principle 4 of the Olympic Charter appeared below the updated logo: 'The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind' (Bennett, 2014).

One of the most significant political statements made by the USA in Sochi had to do with the composition of its official Olympic delegation. The statement was symbolic both for who was and who was not included as part of the US delegation. A day after France said that it would not send any senior officials to Russia, US President Barack Obama also announced that no senior administrators would attend the Games. Rather, the US delegation included Russian Ambassador Michael McFaul, a former cabinet member and several prominent American LGBT athletes: legendary tennis player Billie Jean King, Olympic Gold medal figure skater Brian Boitano and Caitlyn Cahow, a two-time Olympic ice hockey medalist.

Boitano came out as an openly gay man once he was asked to be a part of the US Olympic delegation, a political act of its own. At Sochi, Boitano commented, 'everyone knows why we're here . . . I think Russians know that and I think Americans know that and we're proud to come from a country who supports tolerance and diversity and we stand strong'. But Boitano may have overestimated the impact of his and the US symbolic gestures of protest when he stated on NBC Meet the Press during the Olympic Games that 'I truly believe that the IOC will never award an Olympics to a country with a bad track record on human rights'.

Sochi aftermath: conclusions, implications and recommendations

One possible implication for the future includes whether the IOC will revise the parameters used for awarding hosting rights to future Olympic Games relative to human rights. In April 2014, Human Rights Watch submitted a document in response to Bach's call for outside contributions to the debate on the future of

the Olympic Movement.¹¹ As such, human rights organizations hope that the IOC will consider several non-discrimination benchmarks as part of the 2020 Reform Agenda.¹²

Mega sporting events often call attention to underlying politics of difference. These differences were well illustrated in Sochi as a site of political struggle. There is a rational, albeit liberal, argument to use the power of the international community and its relationships with sport organizations and sponsors to intervene on behalf of a marginalized group and thereby protect a discriminated class of citizens. Indeed, many people feel there is a moral justification for the international community to intervene, even when the discriminated citizens are from other nations. This was the successful strategy concerning South Africa and the international community's opposition to an apartheid and racist regime. Alternatively, the ultimate failure of the international community to oppose fascism and anti-Semitism at the 1936 German Olympic Games serves as a cautionary tale.

While there was significant attention paid to LGBT issues in Russia during the build-up to the 2014 Winter Olympics, and somewhat less during the Games itself, there has been a precipitous decline in the coverage concerning LGBT rights since the spotlight has shifted from Sochi. The dramatic decline in international attention paid to potential human rights violations of LGBT Russians has been diverted by the crisis in Ukraine. Russian troops entered Crimea, Ukraine just five days following closing ceremonies of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games, focusing western attention on these more pressing geopolitical concerns.

It appears that the anti-gay propaganda laws of 2013, and the corresponding state-sponsored homophobia, are part of a larger conservative agenda orchestrated by Putin and his Kremlin allies. As Marten (2014) argues, Russia's annexation of Crimea demonstrates Putin's willingness to use force on behalf of ethnic nationalism. She notes,

Putin is primarily focused on his domestic audience, not the international audience . . . And by his recent actions, he has shown that he no longer cares about the economic internationalists among the elites – the people who were pushing for Russia to join the World Trade Organization, the people who recognize that Russia's economy is in stagnation and that the only way to get it out of stagnation is to diversify beyond petroleum dependence and to really become a player in the international economy . . . Putin has chosen, instead, to throw in his lot with ethnic nationalists, who are associated both with conservative elements in the Russian Orthodox Church and with the former KGB.

The emerging power of this national trinity does not bode well for LGBT rights and LGBT people in Russia. Rather, a dark and dangerous cloud hangs over the country, and many LGBT Russians feel forced to flee but do not want to leave (Sharlet, 2014). Thus, once the spotlight of Sochi faded, LGBT Russians were left to fend for themselves.

Political protests against Russian anti-gay legislation and in support of LGBT rights may have been welcome signs of progress toward social justice for some. Others may have viewed these protests as examples of liberal interventionism or cultural imperialism. As a potential tool for international diplomacy, mega sporting events have the possibility of opening difficult dialog, even resolving differences. As an ineffective instrument of foreign policy, these events have the potential to exacerbate politics of difference. In either case, mega sporting events represent sites of political struggle.

This modern conundrum will only become more pronounced as more non-western nations are awarded hosting rights for future mega sporting events and the international community believes it their responsibility to define and protect human rights globally. While I began this article using the skunk as a metaphor for the possible uproar related to Russia's anti-gay legislation connected to the Sochi Games, the skunk could also be viewed as an unwelcome western import, just as supporters of traditional values in Russia see homosexuality as non-indigenous to their nation.¹³ After all, the skunk is primarily an American mammal, neither found in Russia nor most other regions of the world.¹⁴ For Putin, the skunk is not a metaphor for Russia's anti-gay laws, as the American HRC asserted; rather, the skunk represents the west's meddling method of imposing their values on the rest of the world. Thus, how one perceives the social issues and proposed remedies connected to LGBT people and rights will depend on one's political perspective, reflective perhaps of a cultural Cold War.

The Sochi Winter Olympic Games successfully served witness to the social upheaval and political negotiation surrounding the intersection of hosting rights, human rights and the social responsibilities of stakeholders associated with mega sporting events. Lessons learned in Sochi help inform how hosting nations, sponsors and the international community respond to calls for human rights at the site of mega sporting events.

The Sochi Games may have done little to protect LGBT rights in Russia. Despite varied political protests, statements and symbolic gestures of resistance, Putin and the Russian Parliament have not wavered in their support of their anti-gay propaganda laws. If anything, these protests have served to solidify politics of difference between East and West. Worse yet, the heightened attention on these laws may have made things worse for LGBT people in Russia.

On the other hand, Sochi may well be remembered as a watershed moment for the world to consider LGBT rights as human rights. Recommendations to amend the Olympic Charter's non-discrimination principle to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories suggest that the global conversations surrounding Sochi have been meaningful. More broadly, recommendations to reform the host city selection process and monitor human rights before and during the Olympic Games elevate the importance of social sustainability relative to economic and environmental factors. These recommendations illustrate the promise of mega sporting events to help influence international diplomacy in support of human rights. Moreover, these recommendations may find expression

in the IOC's 2020 Reform Agenda; even if these recommendations are not included in the reform agenda, the global conversation about human rights has been deepened and enlivened because of Sochi. The spotlight has now faded from the Black Sea resort in Russia, but a focus on LGBT rights as human rights will continue to draw worldwide attention.

Notes

1. I credit Fred Sainz, Human Rights Campaign (HRC) spokesman, for originally using this expression in reference to the Sochi Games and Russia's anti-gay legislation. Sainz stated, 'there is a skunk at the garden party that can't be ignored' (Johnson, 2013).
2. This article focuses on mega sporting events based upon dominant forms of international athletic competition, rather than events organized specifically for a traditionally disenfranchised group. While the Gay Games, originally called the Gay Olympics, are open to all who wish to participate, without regard to sexual orientation and qualifying standards, the event is organized by, and specifically for LGBT athletes. It is telling that a more spontaneous organization of an athletic event for LGBT athletes directly following the Olympic Competition in Sochi, the Open Games, were systematically prevented from proceeding, as venues and hotels were spontaneously closed to organizers and participants due to apparent bomb threats, misplaced and cancelled reservations, and so on.
3. Several authors have articulated the distinction between active and passive sport tourism (Glyptis, 1982; Standeven & De Knop, 1999), as well as vicarious participation (Weed, 2008; Weed & Bull, 2009). Reference to dialogic participants in human rights struggles actively associated with mega sporting events further complicates these conceptual distinctions.
4. The hosting of these major sporting events would seem to suggest that South Africa has achieved broad international recognition and success, not only for its own country, but also for a larger African Renaissance. This historical development, reflective perhaps of the nation's social, political and economic development, spurs the country to bid and host future, even larger, mega-sporting events (Cornelissen & Swart, 2006; Hiller, 1998). As many countries have learned, however, this cycle of bidding and hosting mega sporting events comes at a formidable cost. Residents of these countries, as seen in Brazil prior to both the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, argue that resources utilized during this process might better have been spent on socially sustainable programs for citizens of the host country who have significant needs (Gibson & Watts, 2013).
5. The joint letter can be accessed at https://allout-production-site.s3.amazonaws.com/allout-202-Open_Letter_to_IOC.pdf. The protection of gender identity within the Olympic Charter would not only expand the limited definition of human rights recognized by the IOC currently; this protection would also confront the IOC's discriminatory practice of sex determination testing or what is commonly referred to as 'gender testing'. While the IOC officially discontinued its previous process of gender verification testing in 1999, the organization continues to utilize hyper-androgenism testing made public as a result of the 2009 Caster Semenya case. For the IOC's regulations on female hyper-androgenism, drafted in advance of the 2012 London Olympics Games, see http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Commissions_PDFfiles/Medical_commission/2012-06-22-IOC-Regulations-on-Female-Hyperandrogenism-eng.pdf. For more on the controversial

- topic of gender verification testing, see Camporesi and Maugeri (2010); Fastiff (1992); Gandert, Bae, Woerner, and Meece (2013); Simpson et al. (2000).
6. The comparison of LGBT persecution in Russia with the Holocaust may seem hyperbolic until we heard the vitriol coming out of Russia in the build-up to the Games. Ivan Okhlobystin, a Russian television personality and former Orthodox priest, stated emphatically that he would like to shove homosexuals into ovens and burn them alive (Sieczkowski, 2013). Despite these disturbing comparisons between Nazi Germany and Russia today, Fierstein's assertion that few protested the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin is not historically accurate. There was a significant international campaign against the 1936 Games, nearly leading the USA and other nations to boycott Berlin in favor of Barcelona (Hilton, 2011). As Eisen (1984) argues, the ultimate decision by the USA to attend the Berlin Games was a byproduct of international diplomacy rather than moral conviction. This form of international sport diplomacy has consistently sought to separate politics from mega sporting events, too often turning a blind eye to troubling human rights records of host nations.
 7. This 'separate but equal' policy was established in 1896, central to the US Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The statute held that as long as separate facilities for different races were equal, segregation did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment, which claims that 'no State shall . . . deny to any person . . . the equal protection of the laws'. It was not until 1954, two decades after Owens and Louis competed in these symbolic athletic events, that the US Supreme Court unanimously overturned the earlier amendment with *Brown v. Board of Education*, paving the way for racial integration and civil rights for African-Americans.
 8. This political act of resistance on an Olympic medal stand occurred following the formation of the Olympic Project for Human Rights in 1967, which had initially called for an African American boycott of the 1968 Games. Both Owens and Louis, legendary African-American athletes of the 1930s, publically opposed the Olympic boycott (Hartmann, 2004; Zirin, 2008).
 9. In anticipation of the 2104 Games, Billie Jean King, famed American women's tennis player and openly lesbian member of the US controversial Olympic delegation to Sochi, commented, 'sometimes I think we need a John Carlos moment. I think there's watershed moments, benchmarks, I would hope the majority of the athletes would speak out. It's a great platform' (Keating, 2013).
 10. In total, there was an estimated 539 hours of NBC television coverage of the Sochi Olympics, with another 1000 hours of online coverage. The breakdown of coverage was NBC (185 hours), NBCSN (230), MSNBC (45), USA Network (43), CNBC (36) and NBCOlympics.com (1000 hours, online) (Chad, 2014). In the 1 hour, 59 minutes and 42 seconds devoted to LGBT issues related to Russia's anti-propaganda laws, MSNBC aired 66% (78:47 minutes) of the coverage, followed by NBC (26:46 minutes or 30%) and CNBC (4:02 minutes or 3%) (HRC, 2014).
 11. The Human Rights Watch (2014) document can be accessed at http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/SOCHI%20-%20HRW%20Submission%20to%20Olympic%20Agenda%202020%20Apr2014.pdf
 12. The five broad themes central to the 2020 reform agenda include: the Uniqueness of the Games, Athletes at the Heart of the Olympic Movement, Olympism in Action, the IOC's Role and the Structure and Organization of the IOC. The Human Rights Watch Submission to the IOC views integrating human rights in the Olympic Movement to be part of Theme 5, the Structure and Organization

of the IOC. Recommendations to the Reform Agenda will be presented for final approval at an IOC Extraordinary Session on 6–7 December 2014 (IOC, 2014).

13. As Ioffe (2013) has written,

the perception of homosexuality in Russia is that it's both a perversion of nature and a fashion import from the corrupt West: something into which a man can slip if he's had a bit too much vodka – by all accounts a common occurrence in Russia – and as a posture one adopts to be cool. Thus, the 'propaganda' ban. Homosexuality is seen as an aggressive ad campaign that, traditionalists fear, will persuade impressionable young minds that being gay not only isn't abnormal and abhorrent, but stylish and hip.

14. Outside of North and Latin America, the one exception is the Asian stink badger, recently added to the skunk family (Koepfli et al., 2008). To be sure, there are no actual skunks in Russia, just a host of metaphoric varieties ripe to spoil a future garden party, such as the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

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