Sweating bodies: Men, masculinities, affect, emotion

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A B S T R A C T

This paper investigates sweat to deepen theoretical understandings of how gender is lived. To do so we adopt a visceral approach that opens possibilities of thinking geographically about the affective ties and emotional bonds of sweat to engage with feminist logics of embodiment. Our interest is in what sweaty bodies can ‘do’. Attention is given to the way that affects, emotions and sensations associated with being sweaty, smelling sweat, as well as touching one’s own sweat, and that of others, provides insights into the gendered lives of people as they move through different context. Our analysis of how gendered is lived through sweaty bodies draws on ‘Summer Living’ narratives of 17 participants who understand themselves as men and live in Wollongong, a city of around 280,000 people on the east coast of New South Wales, Australia. We illustrate the theoretical significance of thinking about sweat for gender and geography by discussing the ambiguity, proximity and collectivity of sweaty bodies; and, the fragility, multiplicity and vitality of sweaty bodies. To conclude we outline how a visceral approach provides possibilities to improve household sustainability policies.

Introduction

Bodily fluids are too often ignored in geographic scholarship on embodiment (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). This paper asks how geographers might better understand the shifting connections that define gender through paying attention to sweat. We argue that sweat can tell us much about how an individual dwells within the world and assigns meanings to place, self, and social relationships. Our aim is to better understand the visceral experiences of sweat and sweating to investigate how bodies, spaces and gender are shaped and reshaped through the affective and emotional response to sweat. Sweat is a firm reminder of the body’s biological capacity to cool the body in hot and humid ambient temperatures. At the same time, the historical weight of discourses of hygiene posits sweat within morally loaded white middle-class sentiments (Hitchings and Lee, 2008; Low, 2006; Soo and Stevenson, 2007). With beginnings in the eighteenth century (Howes, 2005), the sensual logic of capitalism have fashioned certain cleanliness practices by appropriating certain smells as ‘fresh’ into the marketplace, where people ought to feel ‘good’ for not looking or smelling sweaty (see Claassen et al., 2003).

Sweat also draws attention to the privileged status of men’s bodily fluids within society through an appeal to the biological, and therefore seemingly indistinguishable, ‘natural’ gender differences (Grosz, 1994). As one of our participants Phil (Anglo-Australian, early-twenties, casual primary school teacher, single) noted; ‘if a guy smells, it sounds terrible, but I’d probably be more accepting of that than if a girl was a bit smelly. It’s terrible, but that’s just how it is, I guess’. Sweat is entangled with gender to reveal the ways in which some bodies still remain privileged. A privilege attributed to natural, ‘in-built’ biological differences. In focusing on men, rather than valourising the dualism of Western Cartesian thinking in the construction of men and masculinity, we argue that the specificity of the sample provides an opportunity to better understand men’s lived experiences of masculinity. Yet, sweat is often overlooked in geographical work investigating gender (see Longhurst, 2001; Longhurst and Johnston, 2014).

Our discussion draws on fieldwork conducted with 36 people aged 18–30 years, living in the coastal regional city of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia. Specifically, we focus on the 17 participants living as men because experiences of sweat are highly gendered. Sensitive to the importance of context, this article builds on feminist geographical work on masculine embodiment that emphasises the importance of how gender emerges by how bodies, spaces and affect/emotion co-constitute each other (see Gorman-Murray, 2013). Following Probyn (2000:7) we focus on the visceral as ‘gut reactions’ mobilised by sensory engagement to explore what sweat does to our participants’ understanding of bodies, social difference and space. In particular this paper explores the recurring theme that emerged during interviews – experiences of visceral disgust and shame – as this group of young men navigated
the dilemmas presented by the lived experience of sweat in summer urban spaces across work, public and domestic domains. In doing so, we help to address particular ‘blind spots’ in the geographies of masculinities (Hopkins and Noble, 2009: 816).

Our focus on the gendered embodied experiences of sweat is also underpinned by policy and scholarly concerns with young people and sustainability. Household sustainable politics focus on motivating people to ‘act environmentally’ through education campaigns including ‘carbon footprints’ and ‘energy star ratings’. While such campaigns are important, growing empirical evidence across geography suggests that extent of behavioural change in light of environmental campaigns is limited (Gibson et al., 2013). Added to this is the contradictory positioning of young people in the context of everyday domestic sustainability. Young people are framed as a pivotal age cohort in the pursuit of more sustainable futures; framed as ‘environmental ambassadors’ within families, peer networks and wider community networks (Gram-Hansen, 2007; Collins and Hitchings, 2012:195). Conversely, the work of Gram-Hansen (2007) and Hitchings and Lee (2008) suggest from their respective work in Denmark and Singapore that working against domestic sustainable practices are young people’s heightened anxieties around cleanliness. This suggests that policy campaigns founded on ‘the environment’ are far too limiting to take into account the paradoxes and ambiguities of the lived experiences of sweat and sweating in everyday life. Paying attention to the visceral response to sweat provides possibilities to improve political understandings and decision-making around household sustainability.

This article is divided into five sections. We begin with an overview of the growing attention paid by geographers to the study of men and masculinities. We then ask the question: How does sweat produce certain bodies? To answer this question we outline different modes of knowing sweat by considering the ‘body-we-have’, the ‘body-we-are’, and the ‘body-we-do’. We refer to benchmark work in feminist geography that enables us to develop the notion of the ‘sweaty-body-we-do’ within theoretical arguments around the visceral. The second section provides an outline and justification of our methodology. Our analysis of what sweat may ‘do’ for the people who are doing the sweating is presented in the third and fourth sections. We suggest that contradictory to dualist ideas of masculinity, our participants were very much ‘in touch’ with their bodies. The third section discusses the sensual pleasures of sweating. When corporeal pride is envisaged to exist as the mirror image of shame, pride is difficult to disentangle from the dynamics of disgust and shame. We identify when and for whom sweaty bodies become a privileged site by examining the sensual pleasures of the sweaty body. In the fourth section we outline how the dynamics of disgust and shame illustrates the fragility and multiplicity of masculinity within the situated social relations that configure the self in relation to others. We illustrate that sweating is a constant visceral reminder that the way we live is continually negotiated along the lines of age, gender, class, athleticism and ethnicity. What is important is a sensual form of sociality to becoming men, rather than commitment to a particular stable set of ideas about masculinity. We conclude that future sustainability policies would do well to further a visceral approach for deepening understanding of everyday household practices.

**Thinking men and masculinity through the sweating body**

The body is integral to geographical research on gender seeking to dispense with the dualisms that sustain identity politics underpinned by heterosexual/homosexual, man/woman and masculine/feminine (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). Since the 2000s, post-structuralist feminist geographers who advocate for a politics of becoming have productively critiqued structuralist dictates of gender identity, including Connell’s (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity. By thinking outside of social structures that sustains essential gender and sexual categories, post-structuralist feminists draw attention to the importance of body-space relations in the constitution, performance, and lived experiences of the gendered subject. For example, drawing on Foucault (1979) feminist geographers reconceptualised the relationship between bodies and spaces as a dynamic product of discourse (see McDowell, 1999; Longhurst, 2001; Johnston and Longhurst, 2010). By focusing on the importance of self-surveillance, these scholars conceive of gendered practices as a performance of, or identification with, gendered behaviours that are not structurally imposed ‘from above’ – but rather negotiated within the discursive powers that comprise a particular context. The workings of space, power and discourse is at the centre of how post-structuralist feminist geographers explore masculinity’s performative yet discursively-constituted qualities. The strength of performativity is how the gendered body inscribed by discourse is never completely accomplished, yet stability is achieved through the repetition of performance. Despite the merits of Foucauldian-inspired work that deconstructs the knowledge around masculinities as ‘natural’, one common critique was how the ‘fleshiness of the body’ is conceptualised.

Deleuzian-inspired work under corporeal feminism turned to questions of what bodies can do (see Slocum, 2008; Colls, 2012; Colls and Fannin, 2013). Bodies are conceived as in a state of constant becoming through their practices and encounters, in assemblages with other bodies. For example, Braidotti’s (2013) account is that of a (posthuman) body assembled in the folding and refolding of life, matter, technologies and signs. Following this line of thought the body loses any essential characteristic of a subject, including ‘gender’. Instead, gendered subjectivities emerge within material (bodies, things, objects) and expressive (ideas, affect/emotions, desire) forces that fold or assemble bodies within particular contexts. It is therefore possible to think of assembling masculinity within a context of situated body sizes, shapes, phenotypes, gestures, practices, ideas and desires while also in combination with the sensual responses to the myriad of material objects, including sweat.

So what of sweaty bodies? From a scientific perspective, sweat is an object of biological knowledge of the body-we-have that is measured and observed in a variety of ways. Sweat-we-have is known as secretion from three categories of glands located all over the object-body – eccrine, apocrine and sebaceous – but clustered in places of high hair density (Burry et al., 2003). The significance of knowing sweat for the body-we-have is: to cool the object-body from thermodynamic properties of an evaporative liquid (Burry et al., 2003); to reduce blood pressure invoked by stress, anxiety or drug addiction (Schulkin, 2004); as a bodily response to eating spicy food (Wilke et al., 2007); to maintain hair health (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014); or drug addiction (Schulkin, 2004); as a bodily response to eating spicy food (Wilke et al., 2007); or to maintain hair health (Barzanty et al., 2012). For forensic scientists, the worth of sweat arises from possibilities to identify individuals’ DNA code through amino acids (Genge, 2002). Whereas for some psychologists, the sweat-we-have is known through the pheromones as a chemical communication process (Wyart et al., 2007). Finally, for corporations manufacturing antiperspirant deodorant, the mode of knowing sweat for the body-we-have is as a chemical reaction that involves the many different bacterial species living on our skin (Barzanty et al., 2012). Manufacturers of antiperspirant deodorants locate body odour in the chemical reactions occurring on the skin surface of the object-body. These, then, are scientific object-definitions of sweat, representing a body-we-have.

Crucially, the modes of knowing sweat is not just about thermal regulation of a body-we-have in response to ambient temperature, physical activity, stressful situations, or some drugs or foods. There are normative ways of knowing sweat as part of the daily working lives of people that attends to their self-awareness. For example,
the body-we-are is inferred from how sweat is embedded in different symbolic registers of work. Consider, for example, how sweat is often read as a positive appraisal of manual blue-collar work and celebrated as underpinning the ‘we’ of a particular collective, including the nation (Beasley, 1988; Bosi, 1970; John, 1980). In contrast, sweat-shop labour within the mantra of structuralist economic analysis is understood as expression of dialectical materialism (Bythell, 1978; Bender, 2004; Ross, 1997). Through knowledge about the sweaty subject, unequal relations of global capitalist production are made present and visible. However, normally hidden within these structuralist accounts that attend to work practices are economies of sensation and self-awareness.

Furthermore, knowledge about the sweaty subject of the body-we-are prompts us to think about how is sweat ‘done’? This question is significant because the capacity of sweat to pass through pores of the skin undermines the illusory solidity and stability of bodily boundaries. Grosz (1994) focussed her thinking on how bodily fluids sit uneasily within masculinist appraisals of bodies that prioritise solidity over porosity, and dualistic thinking of mind/body, inside/outside and object/subject. The fluidity of sweat troubles such knowledge by producing bodies with uncertain boundaries. Grosz (1994) conveyed an ontology of embodied sexed difference by attending to how bodily fluids are rendered visible within the interests of a masculine hegemony and laws of physics governing solids. In this vein, Grosz (1994) provided an account of how bodies become sexed through bodily fluids. Grosz (1994) argued that while bodies have many of the same capabilities to leak and ooze, she underscored how viscous bodily fluids; like breast milk, menstrual blood and sweat were integral to how Western phallocentric knowledges make sense of women’s bodies as more threatening and/or dirtier. Viscous bodily fluids gained prominence in masculinist knowledge as most intimidating because they do not conform to the scientific laws governing solids.

Similarly, knowledge about the sweaty subject of the body-we-are prompts us to question how should bodies look and smell? Answering this question forces us to think about the multiple, and often conflicting set of ideas to apprehend how we know ourselves by being self-aware of sweaty bodies. Writing on Douglas (1966) and Shove (2003) remind us that the practice of knowing the sight, touch, smell or residue of sweat often becomes read in contexts of belonging. They remind us how visceral experiences of cooking and eating food may operate as a sensual bridge for migrants with their ‘home’ country.

Probyn conceives of the visceral to refer to the moods, bodily sensations and affects/emotions that emerge from our sensory engagement with both discursive and material worlds. Following Probyn’s argument, we suggest that bodies are affected every time sweat is sensed. Thus, the affect of sweat is conceived as an intensity that is neither fully objective nor quite subjective. Affects, as referred to here, are linked to emotions, and understood as series of non-conscious, physiologically-intense experiences. While affect has a basis in physiology: their registration as experience is always mediated through context, socialisation and discourse. When sweating we find ourselves in various assemblages, made and (re)making and ourselves over. Rather than sweat being understood as grounded in biology or as socially circumscribed, sweat becomes a personal visceral reminder of the ambiguities of our bodies that may open up fertile ground for questioning the historical and cultural context within which we live and rework subjectivities. Such thinking alerts us to appeals for a located, fragile, vital, multiple and immanent subjectivity, with the potential for differentiation. Here, gender is assembled out of elements of the physiological, social, embodied, discursive, material and spatial. Gender is experienced through the affective and emotional relations triggered by how sweat cuts across multiple sensory registers. Sweat is conceived here is one of a myriad of material and expressive force that assembles the body again. The affects and emotions of encountering sweat in a particular context is conceived as one example of disjunctive becoming where gendered bodies are assembled afresh. Encountering sweat either increases, or decreases, the body’s capacities to make, remake and undo relations that comprise social structures and spatial boundaries which in turn shape gendered practices of everyday life. It is through the experiences and peer judgments of sweating bodies, which are physiologically registered, that bodies learn to be affected by and affect others. Advocating for a visceral approach in geography opens up a way of apprehending the sight, touch and smell of sweat in a dynamic, multi-modal way through which different bodies and places become meaningful in the flow of relations with multiple others. Probyn’s (2000) notion of the visceral underscores that bodies function productively and interactively in constituting the provisional and uncertain connections between bodies and their spatial context. We conceive the visceral as active in maintaining as well as transforming masculinities.

Methodological approach

Fieldwork was conducted in March 2011, following a summer heatwave on the east coast of Australia that broke 150-year-old records in terms of duration and temperature. Interviews were conducted for a project entitled ‘Summer Living’ with thirty-six...
people aged from 18 to 30 years, who had resided for at least a year in the coastal regional city of Wollongong, Australia. Wollongong is roughly 80 km south of Sydney and has a population of 280,000 people. The interviews were part of a larger project on cultural adaption to climate change in Australia. The larger project aimed to investigate the everyday practices, tactics and responses to Australian summer warmth and humidity. Living with sweat is an integral part of summer (December–February) in Wollongong. The Australian Bureau of Meteorology (2011) reported that in the past decade the mean summer temperature was 23.4 °C, and the relative humidity around 67%. The 36 people who consented to participate were recruited using snowball sampling through the social networks of research assistants. The use of research assistants helped short-circuit the social norms that position talk about sweat as a taboo topic (see Young, 1990; Longhurst, 2001).

For the purposes of this paper we focus on the 17 participants living as men, given the gendered discourses that emerged around sweat. The sample of men was differentiated by employment histories, relationship status, ethnicity and whether they considered themselves fit. In terms of employment, one was unemployed, two were labourers, and eight were service workers, while six juggled part-time service employment with full-time university studies. In terms of marital status, six were married, six spoke of a partner and five were single. Two participants identified themselves as Indigenous Australians. One participant identified himself as Asian-Australian. The remaining 14 participants were of Anglo-Australian ancestry. All 17 participants claimed a heterosexual identity. Only one participant spoke about themselves as ‘overweight’ and ‘unfit’. Alongside the relative young age of our sample over other bodies in Wollongong, it is important to acknowledge the dominance of their whiteness, heterosexuality, relative affluence and fitness.

The interviews were conducted by the research assistants and us at a convenient time in participants’ homes, unless requested otherwise. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, were audio recorded, later transcribed verbatim and shared with participants on request. Interviews were structured into three sections: experiences of the February 2011 heatwave; followed by a discussion of laundry; then bathing practices. In the first section, participants were encouraged to tell stories that highlighted different aspects of living with sweating bodies. Given sweat is often a taboo topic, all of the researchers who engaged in this study shared their experiences with participants of living with sweating bodies. In addition to the interviews, we gathered information on the heatwave and sweat from advertisements in the local and state-wide print and online media. Of particular note is the emphasis in the print and online media on the stigma of living with sweaty bodies and advertisements emphasising the need for deodorant regardless of gender.

Our analysis relied upon conceptualising the transscripts as a cultural artefact with afective and emotional properties. mindful that as Gregg (2006: 9) points out ‘affect can exist within the text itself, and rise from the page as it is read’, we systematically coded extracts under a number of thematic headings that emerged including joy, fear, anxiety, guilt, pride, disgust and shame. In what follows, we consider some examples of what sweaty bodies can do by investigating how the dynamics of shame and disgust: 1. encourages participants to confront their attachment to gendered ideals and practices; and, 2. illustrates the fragility and multiplicity of emplaced masculinities.

**Ambiguity, proximity, collectivity**

In this section we pay attention to the visceral responses of the sweaty body to investigate how participants embody social contexts and cultural expectations. We argue that sweat alerts participants to their status as an embodied participant within contexts within which they are interested. We highlight the lived contradictions and ambiguities of masculine embodiment sensed through sweat. We identify the contradictory social contexts within which gender is lived through sweaty bodies. Sometimes sweaty bodies are lived as if they are attractive and other moments as disgusting. As Probyn (2000) argues, corporeal pride cannot be separated from the dynamics of shame and disgust.

The sweaty body as a force of corporeal pride illustrated the way in which some men experience sports culture that celebrates the structural codes of the athletic body and a particular ‘blokey’ masculinity. The corporeal pride and sensual pleasures of sweating were governed by regimes of truth about self-care and the body of the sports-person. For example, Phil illustrates how exercise regimens provide guidance in terms of how to relate to sweating both in relation to himself and to others.

At the gym I’m not bothered by it [sweat]. It’s certainly not as frowned-upon as it would be in a kind of more formal, social setting, or something like that. The times that I’ve been to the gym, or been to work-out classes, it’s just part of it [exercise]. You get sweaty when you’re working hard. It almost means that you’re kind of achieving something almost, because you’re working hard, and you’re working up that sweat, and that’s kind of what it’s about. Like I know, myself, when I go for runs and that, if I’m sweaty by the end of the run I’ll know that I’ve worked hard, and I can go: ‘I’ve achieved something’, ‘I’ve had a good session. It’s almost cleansing.

Phil suggests the exercising body is primed to notice sweat and is accompanied with an internalised ‘good conscience’. The body of the sports-person and the body of the person-with-sweat are neatly aligned and require less management. Sweating is a desired end point. In Phil’s words ‘I’ve worked hard’, and ‘I have achieved something’. Phil taps into a philosophy of self-care in order to elaborate individual pride in the transformative possibilities of working-up a sweat. Sweat is about practicing such care through disciplined body work, aimed at self-improvement. Phil goes on to illustrate how exercising with sweat is mediated through experiential and representational modes as purification. The exercising body-with-sweat may be felt as cleansing and expressed as ‘good’ when guided by the precept of how to live healthily.

You feel it [sweat] coming out of your pores and cleaning your pores. And, I really, really dig it. You almost wear it [sweat] like a badge. It’s like: ‘I’ve earned this sweat because I was out running, and I’m working out a sweat while you’re sitting on your arse doing nothing’. That’s how I kind of feel about it. And I’m not self-conscious about being sweaty in those sorts of situations.

Phil’s words convey the pride in refashioning himself by deliberately role-playing the performance of the runner. Crucially, as Probyn (2000: 132) points out ‘the move to pride stifles the power of our bodies to react’. In Phil’s words ‘I’m not self-conscious about being sweaty in those sorts of situations [exercising]’. The affective politics of difference from encountering one’s own sweat as part of an exercise assemblage operates to sustain binary identities that limit a body’s power of acting by regulating the afective and emotional forces such a body may legitimately experience, including slim/fat, active/’lazy and ‘good’/’bad’. Bodies are assembled anew in the context of exercise assemblages in ways that limit a body’s power of acting.

Exercising with sweat becomes a visceral reminder of how the slim, fit, athletic body of the sports-person inhabits a privileged status within the nexus of sport and urban space. For example, living with sweat is often part of the stigmatisation of fat bodies (see...
Kargbo, 2014; Raisborough, 2014; Hopkins, 2012). For example, Justin (Anglo-Australian, 19 years of age, full-time student, couple relationship), who described himself as both physically unfit and overweight, said:

> When I go to the gym or playground, I know I will sweat and I do it most often to fight off weight and get fit, so it’s [sweat] not a problem to me, and it may not be a problem to anyone there... I mean, everyone at the sport centre [is] doing exercises [and] may end up smelling at the end of the exercises, and no one cares. One day I went for an occasion that begins before sunset, and when got there I was already sweating, it was like I was coming from the beach even though I was wearing neat clothes. So, my girlfriend told me to go back home and change the clothes and I had to.

Justin’s experience of living with an overweight sweaty body exercising in the gym is experienced as pride in becoming fit and practicing health and weight-loss ideals. However, echoing findings of fat scholars, the sweat from his moving overweight body in the public domain is read by his partner as a site of disavowal, and experienced by Justin as shame rather than pride.

The sensuous experiences of the exercising sweat for fit bodies also provided validation of a particular expression of sporting masculinity configured by the gendered discourses of the Australian ‘bloke’ which remove themselves from the squeamish, prim and prudish. For example, Phil went onto discuss the sensual pleasures and corporeal pride of sweating as a visceral reminder of the affective ties and emotional bonds between men who play team sports.

> ...on the sports field, playing touch [football], I get pretty sweaty, but you’re with a bunch of blokes. It’s not something that you think about, not at all.

The embodied connections facilitated by the sight, touch and smell of sweat may confirm dominant gendered discourses of what it means to be a man in the relationships that constitute a collective within team sports. Similarly, Barry (Anglo-Australian, 20 years of age, full-time student, single) described the visceral disgust from the smell of other people’s sweat which becomes unbearable and offensive:

> The smell [of sweat]...it can be ethnicity, or people who have a mental disability. Uh yeah they’re the main ones. Um for instance Indians... tend to not wear deodorant... or some of the elderly Macedonians and Italians.
Max illustrates the instantly recognisable physicality of disgust that is difficult to control. Categories and hierarchies of social difference are brought into existence through the sensuous proximity of bodily smells that Max has previously rejected as ‘bad’. Troubled by regulation of sweaty bodies through a cultural system of white colonial legacies, cleanliness, age, disability, gender and class, Max illustrates how visceral disgust as a gut reaction operates as embodied practice to distance oneself as distinct from that which disgusts. As Probyn (2000: 142) argued “disgust forces upon us a tangible sense of the closeness of others”. Max feels the proximities of others that invade his body through his nose. Indeed, Max illustrates Ahmed’s (2004: 85) argument how the affective work of visceral disgust registered in the pit of his stomach in forging social groups and making sense of self by taking “over the object that apparently gives rise to it”. Following Kristeva (1982), Max’s response of being disgusted at the smell of body odour as an internal menace, may be understood as a way to secure his sense of self from all that he is ‘not’. The visceral disgust at bodily smells are a reminder of the fragile qualities of Max’s clean, ‘good’ smelling self that requires constant vigilance.

Max was not alone in talking about the fear of being disgusting, and the fear that body odour can easily render a person to be or become disgusting. For example, Barry suggests the scent of sweat is registered as a fleeting bodily experience of discomfort:

Umm I guess some people can cause discomfort if they are smelly; it’s not a nice feeling to be sitting next to, or near, someone who smells bad. I’m sure you can appreciate that as, being a human, it [the sweaty body] just doesn’t smell good.

For Barry, all human sweaty bodies smell ‘bad’. Barry suggests that participants experience the smell of their sweaty bodies as on the verge of being disgusting. Given this visceral suspicion of always becoming disgusting, the next section turns to explore the spatiality, resources and labour-intensive work participants do in patrolling the boundaries between self and other, so as not to confront and interrogate the visceral disgust and shame triggered by their own body odour.

**Fragility, multiplicity, vitality**

Kieran: I don’t like the smell of sweat. I don’t like the feeling that someone else can smell me. . . . I know when other people smell I will avoid them or give them space.

Kieran (Anglo-Australian, 25 years of age, full-time student/part-time environmental officer, couple relationship) conveys the spacing and fragility of subjectivity when he talks of his dislike of someone smelling his sweat. This was especially evident in work narratives of embodied practices in service-sector jobs. These participants are men who understood how body judgments are triggered by the smell of body odour in the public domain. At the same time, these participants provide insights to how the vigilant self-analysis underpinned by visceral disgust and shame at their own body odour, both widened and narrowed masculinity. Participants spoke about a number of ways for dealing with their body odour to cope with the perpetual discomfort of living in smelly bodies in close proximity to fellow commuters, colleagues or clients. Sweat prevention techniques included the application (and re-application) of deodorant and/or cologne, daily showering with soap, selecting appropriate clothes and changing clothes on an almost daily basis in summer. For instance, Max spoke with pleasure of the effectiveness and ‘good’ smell of deodorant:

I’m not against sweat, but just with the work that I do, because I am dealing with the public, I don’t particularly like sweating, because I don’t want to have an offensive odour. So, the wetness is bad, but it’s more a fact of the odour. At the moment I use a Lynx Dry, or I use . . . I can’t remember if it’s Rexona or Gillette, but it’s supposedly 48-h protection deodorant, clinically tested to reduce sweating. I’m pretty happy with the way it works because even if I do sweat, I can still smell the deodorant. But, kicking around the house, and stuff like that, I’ve nothing against sweat.

Max reassures us he has nothing against sweat ‘kicking around the house’. This is an important point. As Probyn (2005) argues, only someone, or something, that is of interest can trigger the dynamics of shame and disgust. Most participants were disinterested in sweat in the domestic domain. For example, Phil said:

I don’t really care if I smell in front of my family, it doesn’t bother me . . . See, if I was sweaty at home, even around my mates, sitting around having beers, I wouldn’t care, it wouldn’t bother me. Even if I stunk, like if it was my close mates, I wouldn’t care. I mean they’d probably give me a hard time, but I know that I wouldn’t be judged. But if I was at a club, at the bar, and you’re sweaty, and I have been, I mean it’s hot and stuff and someone said “Hey, you’re really sweaty”, it would be a bit embarrassing.

Phil illustrates that unlike the domestic domain, sweaty bodies in the public domain are often regarded as cultural outsiders not just because of the moral sentiments they prompt but also because they do not confirm to what people think of as ‘good’ or ‘right’ in relation to a nexus of gender, class and ethnicity. As Probyn (2005: 39) argues, the ‘shame of the cultural outsider is fed by a desire to fit in and an abiding interest in being able to do so – to belong where you don’t belong.’ Hence, Max and Phil, like all our participants who worked in the service economy, are deeply interested with controlling and sanitizing their public and professional corporeality. The sweaty body in the public and service economy domains do not sit comfortably with socio-cultural embodied truths of masculine embodiment fashioned by the affective economies of capitalism. Curtis (2008: 7) reminds us of the importance of bodily smells within ‘affective economies, in which capacities for sensory discrimination . . . of shame and disgust [are] advanced.’ Within the social and cultural structures and settings of his workplace, Max does not wish to be, or become disgusting. Max applies deodorant to avert shame and disgust triggered by his body odour. Max smells his deodorant, rather than confronting disgust from his own body smells, or of strangers, that threaten to dissolve aged, gendered, ethnic, ableist and classed social hierarchies and categories. The dynamics of shame and disgust illustrates the fragility of subjectivities.

Phil provides another insight to the fragility of masculine subjectivities by ways in which sweating disrupts the embodied space of his workplace corporeality. For Phil, the process of becoming a primary school teacher is upset by the absence of deodorant during summer:

I’d feel gross, because I’d be so conscious of it [not applying deodorant]. If I’d left home without putting deodorant on, and I got to school, and I realised at school, and I couldn’t do anything about it [body odour], I’d be really conscious about it [body odour]. I’d just constantly be smelling myself. I’d probably be going into the bathroom, wet my arm pits, just to make sure that they didn’t smell. And even if you don’t smell, you’re just so conscious of it [body odour]. So I worry, I hope I don’t stink. And the kids would give you a heaps hard time about it if you did. It’d be pretty embarrassing. I could only imagine half of the things that they’d say, what some of the older kids would say if you were a bit whiffy. But, thankfully, it hasn’t happened yet . . . Because you hear stories. I mean even
friends I'm with talk about 'that' teacher that always had sweat patches and always stunk; and you just don't want to be that guy.

Phil's body is actively engaged in sweating. In turn, the visceral disgust triggered by the smell and sight of sweat tells us how Phil inhabits the social conventions of the school. Sensing the material traces of sweat as 'stink', Phil is acutely aware of how the subject of the teacher and classroom are transformed by the dynamism immanent to bodily sweat. Knowing that 'older kids' at the school are not opposed to reprimanding teachers on how they smell, Phil admitted the disgust and shame he would feel about seeing and smelling the material traces of his sweat in the classroom. Phil's appreciation of his self-as being 'whiffy' incorporates what surrounds him: the deodorant he has forgotten to apply; the school; the pupils; his friends; and even embodied memories of his school days. The admission of visceral disgust and shame signals the way that the smell of material traces of sweat is premised upon an intimate knowledge of the body, socially acceptable smells and its enhanced or decreased capacity to 'act' in particular ways to a 'whiffy' self. In Colls (2007) work on fatness, she referred to these bodily capacities as the 'intra-action' of matter. Alongside acknowledging the existence of specific body topographies, its textures and surfaces of intra-body touch (Colls, 2007: 363) is how our bodies are primed to smell themselves.

To counteract visceral disgust and shame of body odour, physical action is required to rid or conceal the sight and smell of sweat from others. For Phil, to counteract visceral disgust physically, he must prepare his body as a teacher. In the service of preparing his body 'to do the right thing' in front of classrooms, Phil is not opposed to enlarging the terms of masculinity by shaving his underarms and carrying deodorant in his satchel.

It's [sweat] like a dirty thing. I've shaved my arm-pits before. And it [shaving] worked. It [shaving] limited the body odour. I didn't really notice a difference in sweat, but body odour, definitely, it [shaving] kind of really had an impact on [smell].

Phil illustrates the ongoing tension between the erratic character of men's bodies to break out into sweat, and men's efforts to regulate their bodies by deodorizing, shaving and showering bodies and washing clothes. These regulating activities to freshen masculinity reminds us of the capital accumulation through which contemporary advertising for deodorants, perfumes, laundry powder and other fragrance products have cemented the relations onto explain how, in the public domain, the smell of cologne within the material traces of sweat is premised upon an intimate knowledge of the body, socially acceptable smells and its enhanced or decreased capacity to 'act' in particular ways to a 'whiffy' self. In Colls (2007) work on fatness, she referred to these bodily capacities as the 'intra-action' of matter. Alongside acknowledging the existence of specific body topographies, its textures and surfaces of intra-body touch (Colls, 2007: 363) is how our bodies are primed to smell themselves.

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Well if you stink at work it isn't courteous, or professional. Also, when you are in close proximity to people on transport, etcetera, you need to smell, well, not necessarily good, but not bad either.

Cooper illustrates how in contemporary service sector workplace discourses, body odour is pathologicalised as a threat to the professional self. Inodorous bodies have their roots in discourses of hygiene and deodorizing campaigns of the eighteenth century, broadening its scope from disciplining and disinfecting the subordinate classes to sustaining professional olfactory identities. Inodorness is seemingly essential to assume a respectable status in the workplace. In Cooper's words 'you need to smell, well, not necessarily good, but not bad either.' Cooper implies that to express an identifiable odour would be disrespectful and unprofessional. Likewise, Kieran explains that when colleagues prepare their bodies to work:

It's not that I want them [colleagues] to necessarily smell like deodorant, but I don't want them to smell like BO [body odour].

Cooper and Kieran illustrate the particular sets of rules around the preparation of the respectable-smelling professional body. As Young (1990: 136) argues, respectability 'consists of conforming to norms that repress sexuality, bodily functions and emotional expression.' Cooper and Kieran remind us that regulating body odours is not only connected with sets of rules around work etiquette but also the heightened interest in removing possible threats to the social order and personal stability triggered by the dynamics of disgust and shame. In this mix, Cooper and Kieran prefer bodies to be inodorous. The inodorous professional body points to the inherent masculinity of the workplace and public domain through the neutralisation of certain sensation, distrust of the sensual and removal of traces of ambiguity.

In contrast to the neutralisation of body odour in the workplace, Rob (Indigenous Australian, 30 years of age, employed full-time/part-time post-graduate studies, single) draws attention to the role of bodily smells in regulating gender and confirming the ideology of sexual difference when 'going out' at night in the public domain. Rob explained the role of men's Cologne in naturalising sexual difference as an unproblematic binary:

I think it [bodily smells] has a lot to do with attracting the opposite sex. We want to portray a good image to the opposite sex, women; like to look and smell good. And actually the only time I know of mates or other males use cologne is when they go out and attract the opposite sex.

The association of bodily smells to sexuality has a long history (see Freud, [1905] 1953). These are men who understood bodily smells as the engine of heterosexual desire. This was especially evident in their ways of using cologne. Applying cologne to their bodies is understood as doing the right thing to become a good-smelling, heterosexual-appealing body. Bodies smelling of cologne was therefore restricted to times and places designated for 'going out' and 'attracting the opposite sex'. For Rob, there is nothing controversial about wearing cologne in nightclubs. Indeed, cologne is understood as integral to fashioning and solidifying the nightclub as a highly-charged heterosexualised space. In contrast, Rob goes on to explain how, in the public domain, the smell of cologne within his friendship-circle worked against linking bodies together as 'blokes'.

If you're with your mates, and around blokes, you don't care how you smell. In fact if you smell too nice around your mates they might pick you out and ask: "What's this girly stuff you got on?"

These are men that illustrate how the experiences of bodily smells are socially structured and derived through relationships with others in specific spatial settings. Rob illustrates how his male friends deploy shame to police the definitions of what it means to smell like a 'bloke'. Rob illustrates how shame is employed in the service of maintaining the intimate bonds of mateship between self-identified 'real' men as blokes/mates. As Probyn (2005: 8) argues 'shame makes us reflect on who we are – individually and collectively'. Rob is careful not to 'smell too nice' around his mates. Rob reminds us again of the historical weight of discourses that fashion sweat within middle-class sensibilities and blue-collar jobs. This then is the social framework that constructs the normality of blokes' bodily odours in particular spatial settings. Within leisure spaces configured by Rob's friendship circle the pull is towards normalising the smell of sweat to reconfigure the intimate relationships that sustain a blokey masculinity. How men's bodies smell, and are supposed to smell, both challenge and reproduce gender stereotypes. Bodies are always spatially situated within a
jumble of visceral disgust and shame and ideas of virtue, masculinity, mateship and respectability. The visceral responses to sweat may be understood in terms of thinking that ‘foregrounds the fact that we call one’s self, one’s body is in fact inhabited by several bodies moving at different speeds’ (Probyn, 2000: 24). Here it is the visceral response to sweat that alerts us to the fragility and multiplicity of subjectivities by enfolding the vitality of bodies within the situated social relations that forge oneself.

Conclusions

Sweat is a familiar experience of an Australian summer. The value of the affective and emotional experience of sweating bodies is how it brings to light something about how an individual inhabits its social conventions of their culture. Yet, there is a lack conceptually-informed work on what sweat does, and what sweating bodies can do within geographical scholarship. To illustrate the productive function of sweat in relations to geographies of gender, we chose to focus on the sweating bodies of people who live their lives as men that are categorised as belonging to a generation often ambiguously characterised by its obsession for cleanliness and future ‘environmental ambassadors’.

Adopting a post-structuralist feminist lens prompted us to bring to the fore how the visceral response to the smell, touch and sight of sweating bodies provides insights to how gender is lived in context. Throughout this paper, sweat is not reduced to chemical components. Rather, a visceral approach keeps the matter of sweat in play within assemblages of material (bodies, technologies, things) and expressive (ideas, desires, affect/emotions) forces. Sweat acquires meanings through the bodies and places it appears and is assembled. The capacities of sensuous bodies to affect and be affected by sweat combines and coalesces different ideas, objects, bodies, embodied histories and bodily judgment into working assemblages. Bodies come with an overwhelming embodied geographical knowledge of when living with sweat is both desirable and/or inappropriate. For instance, the familiar visceral pride lodged in bodies at the sight and smell of sweat that helps to sustain the intimate bonds of sporting assemblages. The pride located in some sweaty bodies is their ability to measure up to bodily ideals configured by a blokey masculinity that sustains dualism within identity politics. In relation to this project, visceral disgust and shame in response to sweat reminded participants of the fragility of spatial boundaries associated with the social and cultural frameworks in which they experience their bodies. For participants whose bodies fail to comply with contemporary ideas of professional masculinity the recognition of disgust and shame was painful. The recognition of visceral disgust and shame provided an opportunity to reflect about what it means to live one’s body as if it were disgusting. To avert the visceral responses of disgust and shame at their own body, participants used a range of embodied strategies to remain sweat-free and odourless. Some participants confirmed and legitimised particular embodied truths of the professional masculine subjectivity including deodorising, while others challenged embodied truths and gendered practices of masculinity – such as shaving their underarms. The visceral response to the smell, touch and sight of sweat is conceived as a telling instance of how the dynamics of pride, disgust and shame are spatial, relational and political.

A focus on the visceral geographies of living with sweat provides opportunities to consider what is missing from other less sticky, smelly and wet accounts of gender in geography. In writing about sweat we make a small step in writing about the messy, fleshly and material dimension of the body often omitted from geography. As Longhurst and Johnston (2014: 274) argue ‘bodily fluids are part of daily life … still represent that which is too banal, too material, too feminist, too mysterious, too Other for geography’.

We argue perceptions of sweaty bodies and interpersonal exchanges triggered by the affective and emotional responses to sweat are integral to the production of gendered subjectivities. How participants live with sweat across different urban spaces is an excellent example of how a seemingly mundane practice is illustrative of a performative politics of one’s subjectivity. There is a need for more research that examines the intersections between sweat, age, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity and body form that contribute to understanding how gender is lived and how people understand themselves in contradictory positions.

Our empirical focus on sweat brought attention to one part of everyday life that often go unnoticed in household sustainability policies, but has obvious implications for domestic material consumption of water and energy through bathing and laundry practices. The findings from this research also suggest a need for household sustainability policies to look beyond education campaigns about ‘the environment’ or ‘human impact’ that position young people as pre-existing ‘environmental ambassadors’, consumers or rational decisions makers. Instead, the visceral can inform sustainability policies by helping us better understand how subjectivities are assembled in different contexts. For many people, the prospect of washing clothes, or themselves less frequently, presents challenges to a series of deeply embedded classed, gendered, aged and racialised notions that help differentiate and stabilise bodies and public spaces. Implicit in this are cultural beliefs that bodies in public spaces should be inodorous. Clues to foster transition away from the inodorous bodies are perhaps provided in the myriad of relations that constitute the bodies, spaces and affects of some domestic contexts where sweat is understood as congruent with expectations. Equally, shameful affects and emotions may provide productive moments in the politics of sustainability to encourage people to reflect on their everyday laundry and showering practices. Understanding more about the visceral that brings to fore ‘gut reactions’ may be a productive line of investigation for households sustainability by investigating homemaking practices that are reductive to neither structure nor agency, yet assembled out of elements of each. We encourage other to investigate the sensuous dimensions everyday life that often go unnoticed in household sustainability policies.

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