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4. SEXUAL IDENTITY AND SPORT

INTRODUCTION

Within two weeks of each other in the spring of 2013, two professional athletes publicly came out as lesbian and gay. Brittney Griner, U.S. university player of the year 2012 and 2013, and first round Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) draft pick to the Phoenix Mercury, announced that she was a lesbian. Griner's "announcement" was subtle, and did not gain a lot of press. But, her coming out was significant given the few professional lesbian athletes who are open about their sexuality. The fact that a major news media outlet, *The New York Times*, picked up the story is indicative of the anomaly of college and professional athletes publicly discussing their sexual orientation. Two weeks after Griner's story, Jason Collins, a National Basketball Association (NBA) free agent became the first male athlete in one of the "big four" professional sport leagues (NBA, Major League Baseball, National Football League, or National Hockey League) to come out publicly as gay while still actively competing. Collins' announcement created a media storm, including a feature story for the May 2013 issue of *Sports Illustrated* which contained the personal story that Collins wrote. Collins soon received tweets from NBA stars such as Kobe Bryant and a telephone call from United States President Barack Obama in support of his declaration of being a gay athlete. The perception of these two professional athletes, Griner and Collins, differed in many regards. Most striking was the lack of media coverage in response to Griner's announcement in comparison to the media storm surrounding Collins' proclamation. While Collins' announcement was littered through sport and news media, Griner's subtle affirmation was largely ignored. Additionally, while Griner's coming out is evidence of the progress towards greater inclusiveness in women's sport, stories also emerged of Baylor University's homonegative culture and the insistence from her coach, Kim Mulkey, that lesbian athletes should not disclose their sexuality for fear of negative repercussions around recruiting (Fagan, 2013).

As we will discuss in this chapter, the ways in which gender and sexuality in sport are experienced by its participants varies widely depending on social and cultural norms that are prevalent in men's and women's sports. These two contemporary incidents provide an introduction for questioning the relationship between sexuality and sport: Why is it newsworthy when lesbian or gay male athletes announce their sexuality? What is the culture like regarding lesbian, gay male, bisexual, and

transgender (LGBT) athletes in sport? What is the history of LGBT inclusion in sport and how does this history help us conceptualize or make sense of sexuality in sport today? We aim to address these questions and more in this chapter. In this chapter, we will examine the historical roots of gendered scripts in sport, their impact on perspectives related to sexual identity in sport, and challenges to expectations surrounding gender and sexuality and discrimination based on sexual identity in contemporary sport.

DEFINING SEXUALITY IN SPORT

When examining sport in Western society, it is hard to avoid noticing the strong gender scripts and codes that are promoted. Boys and girls learn the expected and acceptable ways to act consistent with their gender; boys learn the importance of being skilled, competitive, and assertive while girls learn that they can play hard, but not to be too skilled, competitive, or assertive. In other words, boys learn to be masculine while girls learn that even in the physical arena of sport, there are rewards for being feminine and punishments for pushing the boundaries of femininity. When an athlete does not neatly fit into normative gender categories, her or his sexuality, or sexual orientation, often is questioned. For example, boys who show an interest in figure skating or gymnastics often are called “sissy” or “faggot” because they are not ascribing to masculine gender ideology. Girls and women who develop attributes for success in sport, such as muscularity, assertiveness, and competitiveness often are labeled “butch,” “dyke,” or “lesbian.”

This type of prejudice is targeted at gender non-conformity (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Krane, 2008) and these stances conflate sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Briefly, *sex* refers to the biological body whereas *gender* is socially and culturally constructed and refers to attitudes and behaviors that have been associated with masculinity and femininity (Krane & Symons, in press). *Sexual orientation* is one’s emotional and sexual attraction to another person (Cho, Laub, Wall, Daley, & Joslin, 2004) and the term *sexual identity* is used to convey one’s sense of self (i.e., identity) consistent with emotional and sexual attractions as well as membership in a community with other people who share this orientation (APA, 2008). *Gender identity* refers to one’s internal sense of being female or male; this identity may or may not align with one’s physical body (i.e., sex) (Enke, 2012). People who have a gender identity that is not consistent with their physical sex assigned at birth and a gender expression that differs from conventional expectations associated with the assigned sex may identify as *transgender* (Krane, in press). *Intersex* people are born with internal or external genitalia, hormonal and chromosomal make-up, and/or internal reproductive organs that are inconsistent with one sex. That is, they may have a combination of male and female physical characteristics or ambiguous sex characteristics (Krane, in press).

Very often, in sport, masculine acting males and feminine acting females are privileged over other sportspeople. This expectation, that girls be feminine and

boys be masculine, is the foundation for much discrimination against LGBT people. Often, when boys act in ways consistent with femininity or girls act in masculine ways, their sexual orientation is called into question. *Homonegative* sport climates are openly prejudiced and people who are LGBT face negative stereotypes, bigotry, and discrimination (Krane, 1997). This hostility can range from denigrating comments or jokes to physical assaults. Although common in the popular press and everyday language, we purposely do not use the term homophobia (Krane, 1997; Herek, 2000). A *phobia* is an irrational reaction or fear, such as a fear of spiders or heights. Contrary, discrimination against LGBT people often is rooted in deliberate attitudes reflecting social, religious, political, or other ideological beliefs. When prejudice is aimed at someone due to her/his gender expression or gender identity, it is considered *trans prejudice* or *transnegativism* (Krane & Symons, in press).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our understanding and discussion of sexual identity in sport is guided by a queer feminist foundation and social identity perspective. In general, a feminist framework puts gender at the core of analysis. Feminists recognize the social hierarchies that tend to privilege males and masculinity over females and femininity. Queer theory extends feminist analysis with an emphasis on confronting heteronormativity, or the privileging and normalizing of heterosexuality in our society. To confront heteronormativity includes resisting the privileging of heterosexuality as well as being open and inclusive of all expressions of gender and sexuality (e.g., lesbian, transgender, bisexual). Altogether, our queer feminist foundation (Krane, Waldron, Kauer, & Smerjian, 2010) provides the framework for challenging dominant notions of sex, gender, and sexuality in sport. In particular, we contest on how sex, gender, and sexuality are socially constructed and reinforced in sport. This framework also posits a strong social justice theme.

The institution of sport has been one of the social and cultural spaces that has constructed and maintained binary categories of sex, gender, and sexual orientation. This means that these constructs are defined as opposites; to be male is the opposite of being female. Additionally, what it means to be male includes not being female. This framework also fits gender (i.e., to be masculine means not being feminine) and sexual orientation (heterosexual is the opposite of homosexual). This binary conceptualization is problematic because it negates the possibility that there is a middle ground. For example, the existence of bisexual people is erased or made invisible. Additionally, dichotomous categories of gender and sexuality set up hierarchies where one gender or orientation has power over the other. In Western culture, men are given more power than women, and heterosexuals have more power than LGBT people. Such binary categorization also creates stereotypes intermingling sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Stereotypically speaking, to be perceived as a heterosexual male, one must have a male appearing body as well as masculine mannerisms and personality.

While queer feminism provides a framework for understanding the social milieu surrounding athletes as they learn to negotiate expectations surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality, social identity perspective helps us understand group behaviors in sport. Previous research has applied this framework to understand prejudice against sexual minorities and how individuals with marginalized sexual identities navigate sport (e.g., Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane & Barber, 2005). Identity, in this perspective, is conceived to emerge from social group membership and the emotional attachments people have to these social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals recognize various social groups and categorize or define themselves as a member of particular groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1990). For example, an individual will recognize him or herself as a member of a religious or ethnic group. If membership within this category is considered important, that individual will embrace this social identity, be emotionally attached to it, and she or he will behave consistent with the values and social expectations of this group. Individuals have multiple social identities, for example based on gender, sexual orientation, race, social class, school, or athletic team. And, as Wright points out, it is important to recognize the “fluid and dynamic nature of collective identities” (2009, p. 864). That is, at different times and in different contexts different social identities become more salient. For example, as a Muslim, gay male athlete, in some circumstances his religious identity may be important whereas in others his athlete identity will be most relevant. Further, in some settings he may conceal his sexual identity and in others he may conceal his religious identity. There is a constant shifting in how some individuals may present themselves; when one’s social identities conflict or are associated with different social status, there also is a constant negotiation regarding how people act when with different social groups.

When individuals join a new group, such as an athletic team, they will learn and adopt the *social norms* (i.e., expected behaviors, attitudes, and values) of that group through the process of *depersonalization* (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reichter, & Wetherell, 1987). Wanting to be accepted and recognized as a group member, people will downplay their individuality and act in manners consistent with the group (e.g., talk or dress similarly). Through depersonalization, new members redefine themselves as group members, engage in normative behavior, and adopt group values and attitudes (Turner et al., 1987). *Collective esteem*, or feelings of self-worth gained from group membership (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990), emerge from acceptance as a group member. In other words, individuals feel good about themselves when they are recognized as a member of a group that is important to them.

Social identity perspective explains that not only do groups differ in social status, but that members of high status groups may work to maintain their social standing while members of low status groups may act to improve their standing. For example, in sport there has been a long-standing stereotype that gay men are effeminate and therefore cannot be good athletes. Thus, the social norms within high status men’s sport teams have reinforced the importance of highly masculine appearance and behavior. This has led to discrimination against boys and men who

are not heterosexual or who do not appear heterosexual. Members of low status social groups will engage in social change actions when they perceive that the treatment of their group is unjust and they can envision that social change will be successful (Wright, 2009). Members of high status groups also will fight for social justice and support low status groups when they perceive the treatment of the low status group is unfair and the inequity is pervasive (Ellemers & Barroto, 2009; Iyer & Ryan, 2009).

SOCIO-HISTORICAL LINKS BETWEEN SPORT, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

The social identity perspective helps us understand the development of stereotypes and historic negative treatment of LGBTs in sport. In the past, high status athletes were those who possessed characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity and femininity. While hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity are not always the most common, they are the most revered (Connell, 2005; Krane, 2001). Further, hegemonic beliefs often are so commonly accepted that they are considered “natural” and are not questioned. Adherence with hegemonic masculinity and femininity also create hierarchies. People who adhere to these ideals are admired, gain respect from their peers, and have access to greater privilege and resources than other athletes. For example, hegemonically feminine female athletes gain greater media attention and fan support. Their peers who admire them, support this hierarchy as they emulate hegemonic ideals and strive to gain the associated privileges. This has created a system in which privileged sportspeople (i.e., feminine females and masculine males) strive to maintain their power and social status.

Hegemonic masculinity, in particular, has guided the historic development of gender norms in sport. The goal of early sport in the US was to prepare boys and men for war. Particularly around the time of the industrial revolution, in the absence of physical labor for men, there became a fear that men would become feminized (Rader, 2008). Sport became a cultural site where socially constructed masculine traits, such as aggression and competition, would be instilled in young boys and men; this was an attempt to encourage masculinity and discourage femininity in them (Messner, 1990). Hughes and Coakley (1991) referred to this behavior as the sport ethic, composed of four primary characteristics: sacrificing oneself for “the game,” relentless pursuit of perfection, playing through pain, and accepting no limits. This ethic has become melded with hegemonic masculinity. Ideal athletes will have ideal masculinity by sacrificing their bodies, being aggressive towards opponents, and doing whatever it takes to win. Athletes who cannot live up to these standards were considered not masculine enough -- they were labeled feminine or gay. Historically, hegemonic masculinity became the foundation for being an accepted teammate and successful athlete.

Consistent with the social identity perspective, males learn the social norms of masculinity and strive to engage in masculine behaviors (i.e., they depersonalize). For male athletes, hegemonic masculinity was an ideal to live up to; when athletes failed to do so, they were called gay. For females, acting in ways too closely associated

with hegemonic masculinity led to being labeled masculine, which was equated with being lesbian (Cahn, 1993). Ironically, simply participating in sport and being athletic often led to girls and women being stereotyped as masculine (i.e., lesbian). However, males who participated in most sports (not including feminine-typed sports such as gymnastics or figure skating) were automatically marked as masculine. Accordingly, stereotypes emerged suggesting that gay men did not exist in sport whereas most female athletes were perceived as lesbians. While differently constructed, these two cultural archetypes, hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity, created an overtly hostile, or homonegative, environment for LGBT people in sport as they both emphasize distancing from, or even hostility towards, homosexuality.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Masculinity is a recurring theme in the reading of sport as a cultural construct and has greatly influenced the treatment and acceptance of gay men in sport. Historically, important components of being appropriately masculine included displaying overtly heterosexual behavior, commodification of women as sexualized objects, use of homonegative discourse (bragging about heterosexual conquests by heterosexual males in exclusively heterosexual spaces such as athletic locker rooms), and avoidance and intolerance of effeminate behavior which is associated with homosexuality (Anderson, 2005). Anderson (2005) referred to this type of behavior as orthodox masculinity. The more closely male athletes adhered to the sport ethic combined with homonegative and sexist conduct created masculine capital. This masculine capital refers to his worth, based on skills and adherence to these highly gendered attributes (Anderson, 2005).

Athletes with high masculine capital were the most privileged and revered. They also tended to be the most successful and often were team leaders. Since the social assumption was that such masculine men could not be gay, this morphed into the strongly held belief that gay men did not exist within the masculine culture of sport for boys and men. This was particularly true for men of color, specifically Black men, who had been oppressed and excluded from much of sport's history. Once feared, the Black male body became the epitome of masculinity in sport and of (hetero)sexual prowess (Kian & Anderson, 2009).

As gay men were perceived to not be present, heterosexism, homonegativism, and sexism became part of the dominant discourse. It was commonly accepted that less skilled players were called derogatory terms referring to femininity and homosexuality. For Black athletes, an already marginalized and oppressed group, conforming to hegemonic forms of masculinity became a way to raise their masculine capital (Kian & Anderson, 2009). It also is important to point out the strict limits of the boundaries of hegemonic or orthodox masculinity. These terms refer to highly selective behavior and are aimed at describing the most privileged athletes. As such, the dominant form of masculinity is associated with White, able-bodied, heterosexual, athletically skilled men (Anderson, 2005).

Hegemonic Femininity

Historically in women's sport, being feminine was held up as the standard. Early participation in sport for girls and women was guided by the misperceptions that female bodies were not strong enough for sport and that being too competitive or athletic would interfere with potential fertility (Cahn, 1993). Additionally, US sporting cultures for girls and women were guided by physical educators who emphasized Victorian ideals of femininity in which females were perceived as weak, docile, dependent, maternal, and as not having stamina needed for physical activity. Thus, efforts to avoid fertility problems associated with too much physical activity were coupled with a strong emphasis on being feminine.

Particularly around the time of the Second World War, there was a surge in female sport and physical activity (Cahn, 1993). At this time, physical activity and sport for girls and young women were integrated into the education system. To gain and maintain respect and support of male physical educators and coaches, female physical educators placed great import on femininity. Teaching proper posture, wearing make-up, and feminine attire were integral parts of physical education for women, with the goal to dissolve impressions of physically active women as masculine or to deter attributes associated with men and masculinity (Cahn, 1993). Similar to hegemonic masculinity, a hegemonic form of femininity also emerged, one that was consistent with White, upper class values. Sportswomen were to be graceful, composed, humble, and restrained. Too much exertion, sweating, competitiveness, and aggression were to be avoided. Under these conditions, and overtime, a social and moral shift took place in social views of women's participation in physical activity (Wushanely, 2004). Women who competed in sport and physical activity slowly were legitimized as long as they were perceived as feminine (Rader, 2008).

While White girls and women were encouraged to be feminine in sport, Black girls and women in the United States were not receiving equal opportunities in education which housed many sport opportunities for females (Cahn, 1994). And, Black sportswomen simply could not meet expectations associated with White, upper class femininity. As such, their sporting history differs from the educationally-based sport for White girls and women. Athletic programs open to Black females were developed through church leagues, community organizations such as the YWCA, and historically black colleges and universities. Similarly, working class women also could not meet the expectations of hegemonic femininity and they created sporting opportunities through industrial leagues. Both Black and working class female athletes pursued highly competitive and assertive sport which differed greatly from the socially sanctioned sport in which White middle- and upper-class sportswomen participated. While many White women in sport and physical education emphasized individual health, Black women leaders promoted community health and spirit as well as highly competitive athletic endeavors (Cahn, 1994). While they were supported and encouraged within their communities, broader society denigrated Black sportswomen as too masculine.

After World War II, as Cahn (1993) explained, the stereotype of the “mannish lesbian” emerged as an attempt to revert women back to domesticity, a code word for heterosexuality. While during the war, women were needed to fill in for the males who were overseas fighting. However, after the war, social expectations were that women would no longer engage in these male pursuits (e.g., being in the workforce, participating in sport). Masculine characteristics associated with sport, such as muscularity and assertiveness, were either perceived to imply lesbianism or thought capable of turning all female athletes into lesbians (Cahn, 1994). The long history of avoiding masculinity in girls and women’s sport combined with the strong associations between masculinity and lesbians created a climate strongly prejudiced against women who did not meet the demands of hegemonic femininity.

While hegemonic masculinity provided an ideal for male athletes, an ideal form of femininity also has emerged for female athletes. Coined hegemonic femininity (Choi, 2000; Krane, 2001), it also sets up a hierarchy of more and less privileged sportswomen. In other words, women who display characteristics such as gracefulness, compassion, gentleness, emotionalism, and weakness (Krane & Symons, in press) have what might be considered feminine capital and are privileged in sport. However, females who participate in sport often develop characteristics perceived to be in opposition to hegemonic femininity. Their bodies and personalities that help them achieve their sport goals contrasts social standards of femininity (Krane, 2001). Therefore, female athletes are stereotyped as masculine and many sporting women become targets of prejudice and discrimination. For example, in the 1980s, Martina Navratilova rose to prominence on the international tennis circuit. She was scrutinized for her muscular physique and dominance as a tennis player because of the societal belief that a “real woman” could never accomplish such strength and athletic prowess (Cahn, 1993). “Americans simply could not separate the concept of athletic superiority from its cultural affiliation with masculine sport and the male body” (Cahn, 1993, p. 2). Instead of praising Navratilova’s success, work ethic, and talent, she was criticized for being too muscular and powerful.

Female athletes who excel in sports where strength and muscularity are essential for success, challenge socially constructed ideals of what it means to be feminine (Krane, 2001). Consistent with social identity perspective, discrimination occurs because they conflict with socially sanctioned norms of femininity. In particular, they are stereotyped as lesbian. This lesbian stereotype has become a way to stigmatize women who participate in sport and discourages young girls and women from entering the historically masculine terrain (Cahn, 1993; Griffin, 1998). The use of the lesbian label impacts all women in sport as it oppresses and denigrates all females’ accomplishments. Some sport scholars argue that social construction of gender and hegemonic femininity are central to the attempts to ostracize, denigrate, and exclude women from sport (Kane, 1995; Wright & Clarke, 1999; Young, 1997). In other words, the dominant groups in society form opinions regarding how females should look and behave. Female athletes who do not conform to hegemonic femininity are perceived to threaten dominant gender-role ideologies (Veri, 1999).

Homonegative and Heteronormative Sport Cultures

Expectations surrounding hegemonic masculinity and femininity have created highly negative environments for athletes who do not have high masculine or feminine capital, and especially for LGBT people. By constantly marginalizing males with low masculine capital and associating gay men with femininity, sport has maintained the notion that homosexuality and athleticism are incompatible (Butterworth, 2006; Sierra, 2013). Similarly, in women's sport, the association between a lack of femininity, masculinity and being considered a lesbian has served to marginalize women's sport as a whole and denigrate individuals perceived to lack feminine appeal.

As explained by social identity perspective, sportspeople with high masculine or feminine capital will attempt to maintain their privileged status by reiterating and reinforcing hegemonic ideals. Since athletes who achieve these ideals are most likely to rise into leadership positions (Krane, 2008; Messner, 2002; Waldron & Krane, 2005), they will continue to reward others who follow in their footsteps. Athletes perceived as LGBT are marginalized or rejected by teammates, creating a homonegative climate in which LGBT athletes quit or hide their sexual identity.

Some sport settings are overtly homo- or transnegative and LGBT athletes or those perceived as LGBT are bullied by coaches and teammates. In these settings, athletes may be called names, lose playing time, be cut from teams, or be socially ostracized because of their sexual or gender identities. Even if not aimed at a specific player, the common use of homonegative epithets against all athletes reinforces the lack of acceptance of LGBT players. As Fletcher, Smith, and Dyson (2010) explained, homo- and transnegative language is a form of control over gender expression. Abusive terms such as "dyke" or "fag" serve to assert the importance of being perceived as acceptably masculine or feminine. According to Fletcher et al. (2010), "such terms are applied as a way of punishing perceived gender transgressions, regardless of someone's known (or assumed) sexuality" (p. 7).

Other sport settings may be described as *heteronormative*. That means that heterosexuality is considered the norm and there is a hierarchical privileging of heterosexuality. Because of the assumption that all sportspeople are heterosexual, the culture of sport often neglects people who are LGBT. This bias often is subtle, yet pervasive. For example, when reading coach profiles, heterosexual coaches often include information about their families (e.g., mention their wives or husbands and children; Buyssee & Wolter, 2013; Kane, LaVoi, & Fink, 2013). Lesbian or gay male coaches will not include this personal information. While seemingly innocuous, the repeated omission of same sex partners reinforces their invisibility (or the perception that they do not exist). Their omission also sets a standard in that new LGBT coaches also do not disclose this information, furthering the perception that all coaches are heterosexual.

Heteronormative environments often are described using the analogy of the former US military policy of "don't ask, don't tell." LGBT athletes and coaches are accepted in these sport settings as long as they don't talk about their sexual identity or openly

reveal it. The foundation for heteronormativity is *heterosexism*, which is an ideology that stigmatizes, denies, and denigrates identities, behaviors, and relationships that are not heterosexual (Herek, 2000). As Krane and Symons (in press) explained,

heterosexism specifically refers to discriminatory attitudes that disregard people who are not heterosexual, whereas heteronormativity reflects an ever-present cultural bias in favour of heterosexuality and the omission of other forms of sexuality.

Both heterosexism and heteronormativity often operate at the institutional level and are reflected in policies and attitudes that do not include LGBT people. The lack of inclusion of LGBT people creates that illusion that we do not exist and, therefore, we do not need to be supported. Heteronormative and heterosexist sport settings also may be prejudiced overtly against LGBTs. While heterosexism often is grounded in the lack of attention or assumed absence of LGBT athletes, some sport climates are outright hostile towards LGBT people.

Negative recruiting is an example of homonegative discrimination faced by female coaches and women's sport teams in US universities. The Women's Sport Foundation (2011a) defines negative recruiting as,

an unethical recruitment strategy within women's collegiate sports, essentially attempting to give their own programs an un-fair advantage based on perpetuating stereotypes, myths, and misconceptions. By implying to a recruit, that a rival college or university's coach is gay, or that an opposing team is "full of lesbians," school recruiters use this tactic to prey on unsubstantiated fears, one of which is that a gay coach or gay players might negatively influence the sexual orientation of potential recruits. (p. 1)

An example of negative recruiting is when a coach discourages recruits from attending a rival school by labeling the team or the coaches' as lesbian. In other words, when two coaches from rival schools compete for the same athlete, some coaches will use the lesbian scare tactic (e.g., "You don't want to play for a coach with that lifestyle") to discourage an athlete from attending the competing university. Although unethical and contrary to the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) policy, this practice has been reported frequently among the college coaching ranks (Ionnatta & Kane, 2006; Kauer, 2009; Krane & Barber, 2005) and is used to intimidate and discriminate against collegiate coaches in the recruiting process of athletes. Athlete recruitment is not an issue that should be taken lightly. At many elite level Division I institutions, getting the most talented athletes is a high stakes battle. The fear of negative recruiting has kept many coaches afraid to come out, and also has led to some coaches keeping their current players closeted, such as the case of Brittney Griner and her coach's insistence that her sexuality be kept private for fear of losing recruits (Fagan, 2013).

Heterosexism, heteronormativity, homonegativism and transnegativism have pervasive social and personal consequences. Socially, explicit or implicit acceptance

of homonegativism and transnegativism creates social norms that maintain the social hierarchical privileging of heterosexual and gender-conforming athletes. In other words, discrimination becomes the accepted action. On an individual level, when LGBT athletes perceive sport climates as intolerant, they are likely to attempt to conceal their sexual identity. Doing so can become highly stressful and interfere with sport performance (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Griffin, 1998; Krane, 1997). For example, Griner stated that early years at Baylor presented many personal challenges, at one point she was forced to delete a “Tweet” to an ex-girlfriend and that Mulkey never truly supported “all of her,” quashing an important part of her identity as a lesbian (Fagan, 2013). Contrary, when Megan Rapinoe, US Olympic soccer player, publically announced that she is a lesbian, she stated, “I guess it seems like a weight off my shoulders, because I’ve been playing a lot better than I’ve ever played before” (Buzinski, 2012).

When athletes are subject to harassment and bullying, they become likely to experience a decline in overall psychological well-being; this may include decreased self-confidence and self-esteem, and increased stress, depression, and suicidal thoughts or attempts (Krane, Surface, & Alexander, 2005; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011). These effects can be even more pronounced in youth who are questioning their sexuality and who are being teased or bullied as if they are LGBT (Espelage et al., 2008). Once individuals have come out, they are able to seek out supportive friends, family, and sport personnel. However, questioning youth still are working through their identity development and have not yet created these support networks.

CONTEMPORARY SPORT CLIMATES

We are experiencing a sea of change in today’s sport world. On one hand, we find LGBT athletes who are comfortable coming out to teammates (Sierra, 2013; Stoelting, 2011). In high school and college sports, there are openly LGBT coaches, administrators, and athletic trainers. Some professional athletes also are revealing LGBT identities publicly: Jason Collins (NBA), Brittney Griner (WNBA), Robbie Rogers (LA Galaxy/Soccer), and Fallon Fox (transgender MMA fighter) (see <http://www.outsports.com/out-gay-athletes>). These athletes are the new trendsetters and role models; no longer considered a shocking anomaly, they are being supported by teammates, coaches, and staff. At the same time, we also are seeing examples of highly homonegative sport settings. For instance, recent news stories have highlighted a video of Rutgers University men’s basketball coach Mike Rice hurling homonegative slurs at his players (Gregory, 2013). The reality of sport today is that there is a wide range in the level of acceptance of LGBT athletes. While publicly we are seeing greater support, there still are many places where education and change is needed.

A recent report by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) (2013) revealed that many LGBT student-athletes, in US middle and high schools,

still are experiencing bullying and harassment in school sports and that some settings remain openly hostile for athletes who are not heterosexual. Young athletes have described that bullying is common in locker rooms (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009) and LGBT students reported feeling unsafe in locker rooms and gyms (GLSEN, 2011). Similarly, Australian same-sex attracted young people expressed feeling “least safe at sporting events” (Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell, 2005). In their examination of heterosexual athletes’ attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, Roper and Halloran (2007) found that negative mindsets still exist. More specifically, male student-athletes held more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than did female athletes. And, the male athletes held more negative attitudes toward gay men than they did lesbians. While negative attitudes are still evident, studies have shown that overall attitudes towards LGBTs in sport and physical activity are generally positive and that students, athletes, and athletic trainers who knew and had contact with lesbians or gay men had more positive attitudes than their peers (Ensign, Yiamouyiannis, White, & Ridpath, 2011; Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2006; Roper & Halloran, 2007; Southall, Anderson, Nagel, Polite, & Southall, 2011).

Positive Changes in Sport

As Hargreaves (2000) asserted, sport provides a public and popular channel for social change to occur regarding LGBT athletes. Sport, as a social institution, provides a platform for athletes and sport organizations to create powerful structures and movements that help change the landscape of our culture. Climate changes towards greater inclusiveness regarding sexuality is occurring in men’s and women’s sport. As athletes are coming out to teammates, their teammates are responding positively (e.g., Adams & Anderson, 2012; Fink, Burton, Farrell, & Parker, 2012; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Sierra, 2013; Stoelting, 2011). Altogether they are creating supportive, inclusive teams and changing the previously heteronormative culture of sport. Anderson (2011a) describes a shift in the conditions of men’s sport environments; while previously he expressed that orthodox masculinity created a homonegative sport culture for men, today he is finding a more inclusive form of masculinity which embraces diverse masculinities and sexualities. In his research, he is finding that gay male athletes in high school and universities are less fearful in disclosing their sexual orientation to their teams than in previous generations and that teammates are supportive of their gay teammates (Anderson, 2011b). Popular press and research literature are supporting similar trends in women’s sport (Fagan, 2013; Fink et al., 2012; Stoelting, 2011).

Kauer and Krane (2006) found that in teams where diverse sexual identities were accepted, heterosexual athletes as well as lesbian and bisexual athletes worked to create more open and accepting environments. Their research revealed that female athletes who had high collective esteem about their athletic identity spoke out against heterosexist language or stood up for lesbian/bisexual teammates in the face of discrimination. Having openly LGBT teammates, supportive coaches, or having

at least one ally in athletics departments is an important component towards creating safe sport settings (Fink et al., 2012; Sierra, 2013; Stoelting, 2011). And, when athletes construed their sport climates as safe, they were more likely to disclose their sexual orientation. As Anderson (2011b) stated regarding gay male athletes, “there is a complex web of variables that most athletes use to make such decisions: team climate, social networks, the attitudes of their coach, and a host of other identifiable and unidentifiable factors” (p. 265). Seemingly, in today’s sporting cultures, more and more LGBT athletes are perceiving the climate as safe and are feeling supported and accepted.

In contrast to the goals of negative recruiting, which we previously discussed, interviewed lesbian athletes were drawn to particular teams and universities because they were known for having accepting social climates (Stoelting, 2011). Kauer (2009) also found that lesbian and bisexual coaches who are publically out are creating positive change in athletic department policy, normalizing partnerships and children in same-sex relationships, and breaking down barriers around negative recruiting. When referring to normalizing lesbian identities and relationships, coaches and athletes aimed to make being lesbian or having a same sex partner just as “normal” as heterosexual identities and partnerships. That is, all people are treated the same regardless of sexual identity. Coaches who normalized their same sex relationships (e.g., had pictures of partners in the office; their partners attended athletic events) often were met with acceptance from athletes as well as administrators (Ionnatta & Kane, 2006; Kauer, 2009).

Positive changes with regard to transgender athletes also are occurring. Transgender athletes are becoming more visible; Keelin Godsey competed in the US Olympic trials for the hammer throw and Kye Allums competed on the Georgetown University women’s basketball team (Torre & Epstein, 2012). Taylor Edelman, a university volleyball player, began his college athletic career on the women’s team and then moved to the men’s team after beginning hormone therapy and publicly identifying as a transgender male (DeFrancesco, 2013). As a true sign of his acceptance by his male teammates, he was voted team captain for his senior year. There also is growing support for transgender youth. For example, when 9 year old Jazz, a transgender girl, wanted to play on a Florida girls’ soccer team, she was prohibited from doing so by the Florida Youth Soccer Association (Woog, 2013). However, when her parents appealed the decision to the U.S. Soccer Federation, the board of directors almost unanimously overturned the previous decision. They also appointed a special committee that developed a policy of transgender inclusion and that applies to all soccer programs under the US Soccer federation.

The Ally Movement

In addition to the research documenting attempts to reduce homophobia in women’s sport, several activist organizations have spearheaded campaigns to create change and social justice for LGBTs in sport. One of the most influential programs in this regard was the Women’s Sports Foundation’s, *It Takes a Team*. As described by the WSF,

It Takes A Team! Education Campaign for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Issues in Sport is an education project focused on eliminating homophobia as a barrier to all women and men participating in sport. Our primary goals are to develop and disseminate practical educational information and resources to athletic administrators, coaches, parents and athletes at the high school and college levels to make sport safe and welcoming for all. (WSF, 2011b)

The director, Pat Griffin, provided educational workshops on issues related to heterosexism and homonegativism in sport to hundreds of high school and college athletes, coaches, and administrators. *It Takes a Team* has an educational kit including instructional and curriculum resources; action guides to help coaches, parents, athletes, and administrators address practical issues; administrative resources for addressing the athletic department climate; and legal resources. While this program no longer is active, it was one of the first of its kind to provide readily available, practical tools for people working in sport and athletics.

Another organization working to diminish heterosexism and homophobia is the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR, <http://www.nclrights.org/>). Since 2001, the NCLR has taken on the legal cases of lesbian athletes and coaches who have been fired or dismissed from their positions due to their sexual orientation. Several high profile cases, such as that of basketball player Jennifer Harris against Rene Portland and Pennsylvania State University, have been handled by the NCLR's Sports Project. Coach Rene Portland had a longstanding and well known "no lesbians" policy on her teams; however, due to the courage of athletes and the litigation provided by the NCLR, Portland no longer is coaching at Penn State (for a complete discussion of this case, see Newhall & Buzuvis, 2008). Through advocacy, litigation, and outreach, the NCLR's Sports Project is creating practical social change for all women in sport who are affected by homonegativism and heterosexism. The *GLSEN Sports Project* (sports.glsen.org) is another example of an organization working toward equality and acceptance. The Sports Project is an education and advocacy program that strives to create positive experiences in sport and physical education in kindergarten through high school settings for all students regardless of sexual identity or gender expression. Spearheaded by Pat Griffin, the program aims to "change the game" and eliminate homonegativism in sports.

The Nike Corporation also has taken a leadership role in addressing heterosexism, homonegativism, and transnegativism in sport. Nike held its first ever LGBT Sport Summit in the Spring of 2012 at their World Headquarters. Nike teamed up with many of the aforementioned organizations and brought together 30 sport leaders to speak at the conference, and promote strategies for making sport more accepting and safe for LGBT athletes. Following its own lead, Nike has promised endorsement deals to openly LGBT professional athletes; Brittney Griner of the Phoenix Mercury will be one of those athletes.

Recently, a number of ally programs have emerged. These programs were created by heterosexual allies compelled to work towards supporting LGBTs and creating

inclusive sport settings. *Athlete Ally* (<http://www.athleteally.com/>) is one such organization working toward creating positive climates in sport for all members. On the website, athletes, coaches, fans, and parents can sign a pledge to welcome all athletes and make all players feel respected, regardless of perceived or actual sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Thousands of people associated with all levels of sport have signed the pledge. As professional tennis player James Blake expressed, he is an ally and views inclusion less about political acts, and more about basic human rights for all athletes (Hernandez, 2013).

Founded by three professional ice hockey players, Patrick Burke, Brian Kitts, and Glenn Witman, and partnered with the NHL, the *You Can Play Project* (<http://youcanplayproject.org>) promotes locker rooms and sport venues that are “free from homophobia.” The site provides video messages and other resources to help create positive experiences for all athletes without regard for sexual orientation. Athletes can take the Captain’s Challenge and pledge to be respectful and to educate teammates when confronted with homonegativism. Other sport ally programs also exist; some of them include:

- It Gets Better campaign (<http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>)
- br{ache the silence (<http://www.freedomsounds.org/index.html>)
- Step Up! Speak Out! (<http://www.caaws.ca/stepupsppeakout/e/index.cfm>).

Additionally, it is becoming more common for professional athletes to take public stances in support of LGBT teammates and other sportspeople as well as take public stands supporting social justice for LGBT causes. In particular, NFL players Chris Kluwe and Brendon Ayanbadejo wrote and filed an amicus brief in the state of California in support of same-sex marriage (McManus, 2013). They have been outspoken advocates of accepting gay teammates (although no current athlete in the NFL is publically “out”) and have been at the forefront of creating a dialogue about LGBT rights in American football.

BECOMING AN ALLY AND CREATING SAFE SPACES IN SPORT

In spite of all the positive changes, there still is an important need to continue dialogue and education in sport and athletics. One important yet relatively simple way to work toward change and acceptance for LGBT athletes is to use and encourage appropriate language. For example, using the phrase, “that’s so gay” reinforces negative stereotypes about LGBT people, even though those who use this phrase are rarely referring to LGBT people. Coaches, athletes, administrators, and parents can interject when they hear someone using any kind of gay slurs. Additionally, people in sport can use language that does not reproduce heteronormative assumptions about someone’s gender identity or presumed sexual orientation. For example, coaches talking to a team of female athletes can use language such as “partner” or “significant other” instead of “boyfriend,” which assumes all team members are heterosexual. In the same vein, administrators can be sure to use inclusive language

in policy, memos, and athletic department documents, as well openly encouraging LGBT coaches who want to include partners or families in athletic media guides in similar ways that heterosexual coaches are granted. Roper and Halloran (2007) argued that universities can incorporate diversity coursework and workshops which can result in enhancing heterosexual athletes' and coaches' attitudes towards LGBTs. Additionally, many high schools and universities have Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Straight Ally groups on campus where students can come together in an organized club to work toward social justice and social change for athletes. Education and proactively addressing trans- or homonegative actions are important steps towards creating safe and inclusive sport climates.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Sport, as a major social institution, is an important part of many people's lives—as participants or fans. Sport also can be a powerful space for social change and social justice to occur. All people who participate in sport should be able to do so in an environment that is safe, inclusive, and accepting. As we have highlighted in this chapter, the history of sport has not always been inclusive and safe for LGBT athletes, and while significant positive change is happening, there also is much work to be done to continue this trend. As we explore the intersections of gender and sexuality in sport, dialogue will continue and these important aspects of people will gain acceptance. We look forward to when coming out as an athlete or coach is no longer newsworthy and when athletes such as Brittney Griner and Jason Collins simply can be themselves throughout their sport careers.

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