

COME OUT OR REMAIN SILENT: SPORT AND GENDERED HOMOPHOBIA

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Abstract

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This Major Research Paper explores the sporting environment and the impact certain sport spaces can have on lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes. Through an in-depth analysis of the literature, I explore how key scholars have critically examined themes of masculinity and femininity in sport. This was done in order to understand how coming out differs for athletes depending on their gender identity and the sport that they participate in. I engage with the theories of intersectionality, queer theory, ideology, cultural hegemony and gender performativity to enhance this analysis. I also developed original research by interviewing six male- and female-identifying athletes. Their experiences help explain why certain sporting environments are more or less accepting of sexual minorities in sports. This body of work is important because it provides readers with the opportunity to fully grasp and understand the hardships lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes endure in sports.

Key Words: Team-Based Sports, Single-Person Sports, Sexuality, Gender, Intersectionality, Race, Class, Identity Politics, Queer Theory, Ideology, Hegemonic Masculinity, Orthodox Masculinity, Cultural Hegemony, and Gender Performativity.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this MRP to the LGBTQ+ community. While identifying as LGBTQ+ can be seen as a barrier in sports, hopefully this MRP can serve as a stepping-stone into the lived realities of LGBTQ+ athletes in sport and spark positive change along the way.

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Introduction

Coming out as lesbian, gay or bisexual is a difficult process for many people. In the realm of sport, this endeavour is an even greater challenge because sport is one of the last domains where the unquestioned acceptance of gender norms prevails. Sport is a space where gender differences are reinforced in very rigid terms. This has implications for the perceived sexuality of athletes, which is primarily coded as heterosexual. As a consequence, the subject is often times considered taboo since there are not enough openly “out” athletes to spark a discussion on this issue. With that in mind, the sporting environment that an athlete is situated in will ultimately impact their decision to come out. By doing so, I suggest that an athlete is able to be publicly open about their sexuality to everyone involved in their life.

In this Major Research Paper (MRP), I explore how coming out differs among male and female athletes at the professional and varsity levels. More specifically, I examine how male and female athletes are treated in single-person sports versus team-based sports and how this may affect athletes from being open about their sexuality. Throughout this MRP, I argue that the team-based sporting environment is a much more difficult space to openly identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual compared to single-person sporting environments. I also try to understand how the male coming out experience is more challenging in comparison to the female coming out experience. With that being said, I propose that the male team-based sporting environment presents itself with the most difficult challenges to come out in. There is a stigma associated with male homosexuality and many interpersonal relationships are created through a team-based environment. I make this assertion because sports tend to project an orthodox masculine culture where homosexuality among male athletes is considered taboo while homosexuality among female athletes is seen as commonplace (Anderson, 2002). My assertion is also based on the lack of openly gay or bisexual male athletes in sports compared to openly lesbian or bisexual female athletes in sports. Having said that, I am not trying to undermine the experiences of female athletes who openly identify as lesbian or bisexual. Rather, I am attempting to explain that gay and bisexual male athletes do exist in sports and have trouble coming forward about their sexuality out of fear that their

sexuality may tarnish their athletic reputation/career. To support this claim, I explore various literatures on this topic and conduct interviews with male and female athletes.

Team-based and single-person sports are two entirely different sporting atmospheres. These two sporting spaces differ drastically since athletes involved in team-based sports are constantly surrounded by their teammates, coaches and staff, while athletes involved in single-person sports are either with a trainer or by themselves. I hope that my MRP will both enhance the existing sport and sexuality literature and serve as a valuable resource to raise awareness for athletes struggling with their lesbian, gay or bisexual identities.

To begin, I examine intersectionality, queer theory, Antonio Gramsci's understanding of ideology and cultural hegemony, and Judith Butler's conception of gender performativity. This will be supported by the existing literature on sport and sexuality in order to understand how homosexuality is perceived in male and female sports. I primarily engage the following scholars: Brian Pronger (1992); Eric Anderson (2002, 2005, 2014); Pat Griffin (1998, 2014); and Helen Lenskyj (2003). These authors provide a gendered account of the coming out process in sports. I also examine how different scholars have taken up themes of masculinity and femininity in sports because their work builds off of these primary authors. Using these theories and the above literature will aid in my understanding of how the sporting environment can impact lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes from coming out. I applied semi-structured interviewing techniques, Straussian grounded theory, and ethnographic content analysis. I conducted six interviews with male- and female-identified research participants who participated in team-based and single-person sports.

My own personal experiences as an openly gay male sport spectator and participant inspired this project. This work builds on previous scholarship examining male and female athleticism and their relationship to gender ideologies in the sporting environment. Sport scholars such as Brian Pronger (1992), Eric Anderson (2002, 2005, 2014), Pat Griffin (1998, 2014), and Helen Lenskyj (2003) have critically explored concepts of masculinity and femininity in sport and its impact on lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes. Having said that, there is not much scholarship on the environmental (sport setting) aspect of openly identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual in sports. My

research is original because it aims to cross-examine how coming out differs for male and female athletes depending on their gender identity and the type of sport that they participate in.

This work will also serve as an extension to the conversation on homophobia in sport culture because there are minimal consequences for homophobic actions/incidents that occur in sports. There have been male and female athletes who have come out in single-person and team-based sports. However, sporting institutions must do more in order to raise awareness and acceptance to create a more open, inclusive and safe environment for openly lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes as well as closeted athletes struggling with their sexuality. Hosting events such as Pride nights at athletic stadiums or having athletes endorse LGBTQ+ campaigns is fundamental in establishing a safe environment for lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes. My hope is to shift homophobic attitudes that continue to exist in an athlete's sporting environment since these homophobic attitudes go unchallenged by sport governing bodies in certain sporting spaces. Furthermore, in my research, I would like to educate spectators, fans, coaches, teammates, and sporting authorities that are unaware of the hardships that lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes endure in sport.

This research topic is significant because it suggests that the sporting environment an athlete is situated in will ultimately result in ambivalent experiences for lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes. These athletes may feel safe to openly express their true identities in some spaces and reluctant to do so in other spaces. This positive and/or negative experience can be examined via an athlete's ability to be open about their sexuality through coming out publicly or having to remain silent about their sexual identity. Therefore, this research is imperative because it will show the various difficulties that lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes have to go through during their sporting careers.

Theoretical Framework

In order to facilitate a discussion on coming out in sport, it is important to understand the ideological underpinnings of sport and the sport superstructure. To do so, I am guided by intersectionality, queer theory, Gramsci's understandings of ideology and cultural hegemony, and Butler's conception of gender performativity. These scholars' work will be important when discussing homophobic discourse in sport because they assist in understanding how common ideologies of sexuality structure sporting environments, thereby hindering athletes from coming out as lesbian, gay or bisexual. In addition, following these scholars will aid in my analysis of conducted interviews by providing a common conceptualization on how lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes are treated in various sport settings. The theoretical framework provided by these scholars provides a critical lens for understanding how the sporting world functions and how its practices often reinforce the status quo.

Intersectionality is a broad concept used as a way to describe multiple identities within group politics (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality encompasses many identity markers such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, and disability (Walby, Armstrong, and Strid, 2012). This term can be used in order to understand "how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). By this, intersectionality concerns itself with "multiple inequalities" experienced by people with intersecting identities (Walby, Armstrong, and Strid, 2012, p. 225). I have incorporated intersectionality into my MRP because there are various identities that are interwoven into the experiences of the research participants that I interviewed. Exploring how the research participants negotiate their intersectional identities is important since it shows that there are various layers that impact an athlete's decision to either be open or silent about their lesbian, gay or bisexual identity.

Identity politics is a term used to describe "any mobilization related to politics, culture, and identity" (Bernstein, 2005, p. 48). The terms, multiculturalism, LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights, ethnic rights, civil rights, etc., are often provided as examples of identity politics (Bernstein, 2005). Identity politics is an important factor in queer theory since it aids in the discussion of how LGBTQ+ people negotiate their identities in a

predominantly heterosexual world. For example, the categories that queer theory engages include heterosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual (Watson, 2005). These identities are considered “fragile constructs” that are reliant on the “performance of gender” (Watson, 2005, p. 68). Identity politics of queer theory, then, follows a trend of “interrogating the historical and cultural positioning” of gender and sexual identity markers (Watson, 2005, p. 68). With regards to sexual identity, queer theory looks at how these identities are enacted to either enable or constrain people in terms of power, resistance, and conformity (Watson, 2005). Along with Butler, discussed below, Sedgwick (1990) is another theorist that has made significant contributions to queer theory. Sedgwick’s (1990) work is significant due to her conceptualization of the “closet” and its impact on LGBTQ+ people. When an individual decides to come out as LGBTQ+, there is a direct correlation to the “image of the closet” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 71). The “closet” is the “defining structure” for LGBTQ+ people who have not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 71). By remaining in the closet, lesbian, gay or bisexual people are seen as a “discrete category of persons” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 84). This results in the categorization of “definitional barriers between “the homosexual” (minority) and “the heterosexual” (majority)” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 84). This theorization can be directly applied to my research since queer identities, such as lesbian, gay or bisexual are being constrained (silenced) depending on the sporting institution an athlete is situated in.

The identity politics of queer theory also looks at the impact of power relations among group settings (Watson, 2005). In this sense, there is a relationship to the team-based sporting environment as well as an understanding of how certain cultural norms in team-based sports can impact an athlete’s decision to come out or remain silent. Identity politics of queer theory offers a framework for understanding identities, challenging taken for granted positions/perspectives, and acknowledging lesbian, gay and bisexual identities as relevant (Watson, 2005).

Like identity politics of queer theory, Antonio Gramsci’s interpretation of ideology is a significant theoretical concept to explore in relation to this MRP. Gramsci defined ideology as the ruling ideas, which present the “social cement” that unifies and holds together the established social order (Kellner and Durham, 2012, p. 4). Gramsci (1929-1935) proposed that the dominant ruling class develops, maintains and defends

ideologies. Through this, the dominant class is able to directly and indirectly influence public opinion (Gramsci, 1929-1935). Having a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity automatically constitutes a minority status to the cis-gendered heterosexual majority in society. Within certain sporting environments, cultural ideologies regarding masculinity and femininity exist that make it difficult for an athlete to come out as lesbian, gay or bisexual since these identities go against the status quo (Pronger, 1992). In doing so, these ideologies tend to view heterosexuality as “normal” and other sexual identity markers as “deviant” since they do not align with the gender norms associated with an athlete’s gender identity (Norman, 2013, p. 1335). As a result, these embedded ideologies within team-based and single-person sports can have a direct impact on lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes deciding to come out or remain silent.

Gramsci’s understanding of cultural hegemony is also important to my analysis. According to Gramsci, social groups attain hegemony (or dominance) in society by holding a majority status over other groups (Kellner and Durham, 2012). While hegemony is maintained by the state (or the ruling class), “civil society also plays a role in establishing hegemony” (Kellner and Durham, 2012, p. 5). Civil society includes institutions such as the church, schools, traditional and elite culture, media outlets, sports, and forms of popular/entertainment culture (Kellner and Durham, 2012). In this research, cultural hegemony can be understood through various sporting institutions. For example, Pronger (1992) states that hockey is coded as a masculine sport due to the amount of violence in the game. Cultural hegemony relates to this through popular entertainment. One example is *Coach’s Corner* with Don Cherry asserting his views on how young hockey players should play aggressively. While this reiterates how hockey players should act like on the ice, it may also have an impact on how they behave off of it. Furthermore, this theory looks for a historically socio-cultural analysis of specific forces in order to understand how culture and social institutions facilitate social and political ends (Kellner and Durham, 2012). In this sense, sport-governing bodies and every outlet related to that sport (e.g. the media) are able to reproduce hegemony from the dominant ideologies regarding gender and sexuality via highlighting representations of athletes that maintain the status quo while downplaying those that resist it.

Gramsci's theories of ideology and cultural hegemony provide a framework for understanding how different forms of masculinity take shape and align themselves with certain cultural institutions. The two types of masculinities relevant to my analysis are orthodox masculinity and hegemonic masculinity. Orthodoxy can be understood and signified through flaunting heterosexuality such as showing off a wife and/or children, wearing certain types of clothing, or speaking in a masculine manner (Pronger, 1992). To thrive in these settings, gay or bisexual men must conform to the orthodoxy embedded within the sport realm (Pronger, 1992). According to Pronger (1992), "it is no longer necessary to keep homosexuality a deep dark secret; the issue now is how open one should be about it" (p. 119). Ultimately, the degree of openness will depend on the situation an athlete is in (Pronger, 1992). I argue that the team-based sporting environment may make it more difficult for an athlete to openly identify as gay or bisexual since there is simply a lack of openly gay or bisexual athletes in team sports compared to single-person sports. In addition, there may be an extra layer of fear associated with team-based sports due to the interpersonal relationships created from a team setting. Here, I am suggesting that more is at risk for gay or bisexual male athletes because relationships between teammates can begin to collapse and coaches could downplay their role in the team to not disrupt the team's chemistry. Therefore, the power that structures these relationships has a major influence on an athlete's decision to be open with their sexuality because there is the possibility that coming out will deteriorate their career.

Similar to orthodox masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is another theory that is highly applicable to the sporting environment. According to R. W. Connell (2002), the concept of hegemonic masculinity is a convergence of three main sources. These sources include "women's political experience and research on gender hierarchy; gay men's political experience and theorizing of oppression; and empirical research with boys and men in locales such as schools and workplaces" (Connell, 2002, p. 90). Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as a "culturally idealized form of masculine character" that has a strong emphasis on connecting masculinity with toughness (Nylund, 2004, p. 139). Hegemonic masculinity also emphasizes the subordination of women and marginalization of gay men (Nylund, 2004). Thus, this concept recognizes the struggle for "the

hegemonic position and contestation of hegemony overall” (Connell, 2002, p. 90). This means that hegemonic masculinity can explain how cis-gendered heterosexual men benefit from patriarchy because their powerful position within society goes unchallenged. Because it goes uncontested, any other form of masculinity or sexuality is subject to discrimination. In doing so, this term looks at how men develop “social hierarchies” and how that “hierarchy is created and legitimized” (Anderson, 2014, p. 38).

Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity will also be valuable to my analysis. A main element in gender politics is to demystify the regulatory nature of “compulsory heterosexuality”, while also legitimizing “non-normative sexual minorities” such as lesbian, gay and bisexual folk (White, 2015, p. 318). Thus, Butler developed the term gender performativity. This term states that gender is “a series of repetitive acts”, which develops into a normalized gender and a cultural tool of survival to conform to the patriarchal norm (White, 2015, p. 319). Performing our gender means that we adhere to society’s ideals of what it means to embody and embrace femininity and masculinity (White, 2015). This performance is created by our gestures, mannerisms, speech and language (White, 2015). It is determined within the framework that an individual is required to participate if they want to be considered a successful and legitimate member of society (White, 2015).

Butler’s argument suggests that the patriarchy is created by masculine and feminine genders, which are built by culture, through male and female bodies (White, 2015). Gender is performative due to this idea of “compulsory heterosexuality” or heteronormativity (White, 2015, p. 317). Butler argued that in order for an individual to be recognized as having a legitimate and valuable life, individuals would have to be “viable subjects” who do not deviate from societal norms (White, 2015, p. 318). This idea can be understood through heterosexual hegemony, which attempts to understand the relationship between sex, gender and desire (White, 2015). A consequence of this understanding is that “sex determines how we perform our desire” and thus creates a right and wrong “dichotomy that labels heterosexuality as the norm” (White, 2015, p. 318). By this, Butler is suggesting that individuals who are heterosexual have no problem navigating their role in society because their heterosexual identity is the identity of the majority. Those who are not heterosexual are then seen as less than, at a “social, legal and

political” level, because their identities are often challenged by the majority (White, 2015, p. 318).

Butler argues that there is no sex that is not gendered and that all people are gendered at birth (White, 2015). For example, one such instance when this occurs is when parents announce the sex of their child at birth (e.g. it’s a girl) (Butler, 2015). From birth, we are then born into a society of proposed norms associated with our gender identity. These gender norms “make their way with us” by structuring our “forms of responsiveness” (Butler, 2015, p. 29). Not only do these gender norms become encrypted into our brains, they also inform how we react to certain situations (Butler, 2015). In a sense, we are oftentimes obligated to reproduce and perform our designated gender norms assigned to us at birth to not be seen as deviant. When gender norms are broken, we see identities begin to emerge such as trans, butch, femme, or gender-queer identities (Butler, 2015). These types of identities “question the very notion of an original or natural identity” (Xhonneux, 2013, p. 299). Without these ideological norms set in place, there can be no gender (Butler, 2015). Therefore, gender acts as a performance tool in order to showcase how we appear in the public eye (Butler, 2015). This is significant since gender norms constrict individuals from expressing their true identities (Xhonneux, 2013).

According to Butler (1999), the loss of gender norms would destabilize the naturalization of “compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 223). Through this, gender is seen as an “act” of “politically enforced performativity” (Butler, 1999, p. 223). Gender performativity relates to sports in particular since sports are gendered activities based on how we (sport-governing bodies) have socially constructed them. For instance, sports tend to have both male and female gender categories. In most cases, participants in these sports must be born a biological male or female in order to participate in this gendered category. This is ultimately exclusive towards trans and non-binary folk since their gender identities cross certain boundaries of what it means to be male and female. With the exception of a few, a majority of sports tend to exclude these individuals from participating. This relates to my MRP since athletes are required to abide to the gender norms associated with their gender identity and the sport that they participate in. Thus, sports are sites where we are, more often than not, presented with uncontested and taken

for granted representations of what it means to be male and female—gender difference is normalized making resistance to it difficult.¹ In doing so, this sets up a false representation of how male and female athletes should act in order to perform and conform to their gender identities. For example, a male athlete in a team-based sporting environment such as hockey will be required to assert higher levels of masculinity compared to a male athlete in a single-person sport such as figure skating. Since team sports such as hockey assert violence and aggression, a male athlete in this sporting environment will be required to conform to their gender identity or potentially be perceived as less than (Pronger, 1992). Furthermore, this theory is important to incorporate into my MRP since it generates a discussion on why athletes in certain sporting environments will remain silent about their sexuality and put on a heterosexual performance in order to adhere to the agreed upon cultural norms of their sporting environment.

While Cheryl MacDonald (2014) is not necessarily a theorist, I am discussing her in this section due to the way she lays out how hegemonic masculinity has been theorized through this idea of performance. According to MacDonald (2014), many sport scholars have pointed to hegemonic masculinity to explain the predominant gender performance expectations for and representations of male athletes in sports. For instance, sports such as hockey can be seen as a “primary site of socialization for boys and men” (MacDonald, 2014, p. 95). MacDonald (2014) suggests that this form of socialization becomes quite problematic when male athletes begin to embody hegemonic masculinity. Through this, hockey players are expected to be “aggressive, stoic, competitive, independent, to show

¹ There are cases against Dutee Chand and Caster Semenya from competing in sport because they are intersex women https://journals-scholarsportal-info.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/pdf/00948705/v44i0002/229_twis.xml.

Rachel McKinnon, a trans cyclist, had to defend her win at the UCI Masters Cycling World Championship after criticism that she possesses an unfair advantage <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/by-winning-a-canadian-transgender-cyclist-fans-flames-of-gender-politics>.

Martina Navratilova, a former female tennis star, has criticized trans participation in sports <https://www.cbc.ca/sports/tennis/martina-navratilova-criticized-trans-comments-1.5023677>.

little emotion, and to police the maintenance of these traits amongst themselves, especially in the context of the game” (MacDonald, 2014, p. 96). This quote relates to this idea of heterosexuality coded as normal because the traits that MacDonald (2014) mentions are typically associated with heterosexuality. Homosexuality on the other hand is coded as feminine and therefore negates these idealized traits. This can have a direct impact on male athletes from openly identifying as gay or bisexual because their identities signal that they are unwilling to socially align themselves with this idealized form of masculinity. Furthermore, in hockey, there has never been a player, current or former, openly identify as gay or bisexual. This is problematic as it shows the intolerant state in which hockey functions. It also shows the impact hegemonic masculinity can have on athletes struggling with their sexual identities in order to abide to the patriarchy and the strict gender binary.

Literature Review

Overview

My MRP primarily engages with the scholarly work of Brian Pronger (1992), Eric Anderson (2002, 2005, 2014), Pat Griffin (1998, 2014), and Helen Lenskyj (2003) in order to understand how coming out as lesbian, gay or bisexual differs among male- and female-identifying athletes in sports. I also examine how different scholars have critically explored themes of masculinity and femininity in sports since their work serves an extension to the authors listed above. Reviewing these sport scholars is important because it will provide a detailed account of the gendered experiences of coming out as lesbian, gay and bisexual in team-based and single-person sports.

The Sporting Environment

To begin the conversation of coming out in sport, it is crucial to understand how certain gender ideologies have been set in place and reinforced throughout male and female sport culture. MacDonald (2014) suggests that “organized sports were created as a homosocial sphere where men could enact masculine practices in a space of their own, away from the supposed threat of femininity” (p. 99). In addition, sports are often documented as an extremely hostile and homophobic institution for male and female athletes (Norman, 2013). This can stem from heterosexism because this idea rooted in the ideology that heterosexuality is coded as “normal” while other sexual identity markers are considered “deviant” (Norman, 2013, p. 1335). In turn, this translates into homophobia, which can be understood through “thoughts, actions and processes that contribute and maintain a system in which heterosexism is the dominant ideology”, similar to that of racism (Norman, 2013, p. 1335). Since homophobia is a complex issue to recognize, sport-governing bodies ignore homophobia or the significance it has on lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes (Norman, 2013). Other scholars such as Anderson (2002, 2005, 2014) and Lenskyj (2003) have also examined this theme in their work. For instance Anderson (2002) believes that the existence of gay athletes in certain sporting environments “threaten to soften” certain forms of masculinity (p. 873) while Lenskyj (2003) notes that female participation in sports is “perceived as a threat to the existing gender order” (p. 36). As a result, lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes are stuck at a crossroads. These athletes can either conform to the status quo by remaining silent over

their sexual identities or potentially become ostracized from the sporting community through coming out and thus challenging the patriarchy.

Masculinity and the Male Experience

Male sport expert Brian Pronger (1992) aims to explore the relationship between sport, gender and sexuality. Pronger (1992) claims that sports are expressed through categories of “violence, struggle, and aesthetics” (p. 19). Sports that are considered the most masculine often exhibit the most violence (Pronger, 1992). An example of these types of sports would be hockey or American football. Sports that are considered to be in the middle include those where one struggles with oneself or with opponents without committing an act of violence (Pronger, 1992). Such sports can include baseball or golf. The least masculine sports involve the lowest levels of aggressive behaviour because these sports tend to assert more “skill and aesthetic expression” (Pronger, 1992, p. 20). Diving or figure skating are prime examples of this. This mindset tells athletes, depending on their gender identity, that their participation in sport should be defined by masculine or feminine attributes. The team-based sporting environment tends to project more violence resulting in what is understood to be more masculine. These environments are often hostile and toxic towards homosexuality and bisexuality among men. Therefore openly gay or bisexual male athletes may gravitate towards single-person sports since they are considered more accepting of gay or bisexual presence (Pronger, 1992).

Furthermore, Pronger (1992) asserts that orthodox masculinity in sport culture plays a role in gay or bisexual male athletes remaining silent about their sexuality. Here, orthodox masculine ideologies are embedded within the sporting arena, especially in sports that are understood to be more masculine. This form of masculinity is reinforced and oftentimes praised in the realm of sport culture. With that in mind, it is important to note that by openly identifying as gay or bisexual, there is an “unwillingness to go along with the status quo” (Pronger, 1992, p. 118). Even more striking is the notion that there is no major concern for openly gay or bisexual male athletes in sports. Considering athletes feel the need to suppress or hide their sexuality in their sport is not necessarily important for sport-governing bodies and officials (Pronger, 1992). By openly identifying as gay or bisexual, these athletes “expose the mythic relationship of masculinity and sports” (Pronger, 1992, p. 118). By remaining silent, the appeal of sport as a masculine

environment will succeed since these athletes are endorsing the orthodox patriarchal environment that they are situated in (Pronger, 1992).

Eric Anderson's (2002, 2005, 2014) work builds off of Pronger's exploration of masculinity through a critical assessment with gender theory and engagement with gay male athletes. Anderson (2002, 2005, 2014) specifically discusses the role hegemonic masculinity has on male-dominated spaces. Hegemonic masculinity maintains that male athletes possess "100% heterosexual desires" and continuously prove that they are heterosexual (Anderson, 2005, p. 22). Furthermore, hyper-masculine sports can be described as a place where hegemonic masculinity is reproduced since male athletes represent an idealized version of "what it means to be a man, a definition that contrasts what it means to be feminine and/or gay" (Anderson, 2002, p. 860). In a homophobic environment like in sports, this is best accomplished through the use of homophobic discourse or slurs and through the objectification of women (Anderson, 2005). This banter is commonly understood as locker-room talk. "The mere existence of openly gay male athletes in sport suggests that hegemonic masculinity is not seamless and that it can and is already beginning to be contested" (Anderson, 2002, p. 864). Therefore, gay and bisexual male athletes can be perceived as deviant in the sporting environment since they "defy culturally defined structures of hegemonic masculinity" (Anderson, 2002, p. 861). In doing so, this creates an air of hostility towards homosexuality in male-dominated sports in order to preserve hegemonic masculine ideologies.

Anderson (2014) goes as far to suggest that homophobia also exists within the sporting environment for both male and female athletes. For male athletes, homophobia is a male's fear of being homosexualized due to certain associations with feminine behaviour (Anderson, 2014). For female athletes, homophobia is when heterosexual female athletes are homosexualized because they are participating in something traditionally associated with masculinity (Anderson, 2014). Due to these presumptions, homophobia can be understood as an extension of homophobia since it tries to police gender and assumes that gender is directly related to sexuality. Anderson (2014) posits that three factors must coincide with one another in order for homophobia to take shape. These three factors include:

- (1) The mass cultural awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual

orientation within a significant portion of the population; (2) a cultural zeitgeist of disapproval toward homosexuality; and (3) disapproval of men's femininity or women's masculinity, as they are associated with homosexuality (Anderson, 2014, p. 42).

These elements are relevant in the sporting environment since certain sports are associated with masculinity and femininity. As a result, athletes are required to act accordingly with their gender identity. If an athlete does not act accordingly by participating in a sport not traditionally associated with their gender identity, there are barriers set in place that prevent them from expressing their true selves. This is done in order to legitimize heterosexuality as the dominant sexual identity marker and re-instate the patriarchy that exists within certain sports.

While Pronger (1992) and Anderson (2002, 2005, 2014) have served as gateway authors into the discussion of masculinity in male sport spaces, scholars such as Allain (2010), MacDonald (2014), Billings, Moscovitz, Rae, and Brown-Devlin (2015), Fenwick and Simpson (2017), Kian (2014), and Nylund (2004) have all taken up different perspectives on masculinity in men's sports. For instance, Allain's (2010) article on Sidney Crosby and Canadian national identity looks at the impact masculinity has in hockey. Although Sidney Crosby, the face of the National Hockey League (NHL), is not gay or bisexual, his masculinity has come into question. Here, Allain (2010) suggests that veteran commentators, such as Don Cherry, are to blame because they assert their beliefs about masculinity to an extent that can influence public opinion in a negative way. In turn, this can impact hockey players struggling with their sexual identities because their sexuality does not align with these idealized traits of hockey masculinity. MacDonald (2014) on the other hand explores the relationship between masculinity in sport, with a specific focus on hockey. Here, she explains how various scholars have used hegemonic masculinity to explain why sports remain a homophobic environment. Billings et al.'s (2015) study explored media narratives after NBA player Jason Collins came out. Their article points to the way the media frames the coming out experience and how hegemonic ideas of gender and sexuality go unquestioned (Billings et al., 2015). Fenwick and Simpson's (2017) research explored the coming out experience among six gay male athletes. They reported that the role of masculinity on male sport culture had a major impact on athletes remaining closeted (Fenwick and Simpson, 2017). In Kian's (2014)

article, it was reported that mass media also assists in the “preservation of hegemonic masculinity” within sports because veteran reporters do not engage in discussions around sexual orientation (p. 463). Lastly, Nylund (2004) looks at radio talk show host Jim Rome and how he is a problematic figure in sports because he instills homophobic discourse through his monologue and resorts to hyper-masculinity as the cause for this. This scholarship is significant and relates to my MRP because these articles share a common theme surrounding male homosexuality and bisexuality. They provide accounts into why homophobia exists within male sport culture and propose that certain forms of masculinity are to blame for athletes remaining silent about their sexuality. This is beneficial since it aids in my discussion on why gay or bisexual male athletes feel the need to suppress their sexuality in some sports and be open in other sports.

Femininity and the Female Experience

Pat Griffin (1998, 2014) and Helen Lenskyj (2003) provide important pieces of work to examine because they use a gendered analysis of female athletes in sport and the perceived notions of sexist and homophobic comments they endure. Following a similar trajectory in the way Pronger (1992) and Anderson (2002, 2005, 2014) discuss male athletes, there are also stereotypes and assumptions surrounding female athletes, lesbian and bisexual identities in female dominated sports, and femininity.

Griffin’s (1998, 2014) studies show the impact of homophobia on female varsity athletes, as well as societal presumptions regarding female participation in sports. According to Griffin (2014), female athletes are often trivialized and marginalized by the sporting world. One of the main discourses associated with female athletes is that women who play high-level or competitive sports are lesbians (Griffin, 1998). While traits such as “prowess, physical strength and competitive toughness” are celebrated for male athletes, these traits are seen as suspicious for women since they challenge femininity and heterosexuality (Griffin, 2014, p. 269). In turn, this marginalizes female athleticism in certain sporting environments since it dictates respectable behaviour for female athletes. For instance, Griffin (1998) highlights that parents are to blame for this stigma associated with female homosexuality. According to Griffin (1998), parents might even discourage their daughters from playing sports such as softball or basketball since these sports are considered “lesbian sports” (p. vii). This is done out of fear through the image of the

“lesbian bogeywoman,” which is a stereotype that is created and reinforced by the media to promote images of female athletes (Griffin, 1998, p. 53). Griffin (1998) posits that there are several preconceived beliefs about lesbians in sports that parents, along with athletes, coaches, and others express concern about. These beliefs include:

(1) Particular sports are associated with lesbians; (2) participation in athletics promotes lesbianism; (3) lesbians are sexual predators; (4) lesbians are immoral and are therefore poor role models for young women; (5) cliques of powerful lesbians band together to discriminate against heterosexual women and men in sport; (6) [and] lesbians have an unfair advantage over other women in sport because they are not “normal” women (Griffin, 1998, p. 55).

These negative tropes associated with female athleticism can contribute to female athletes remaining silent about their lesbian or bisexual identities in sport. Since there is a stereotype and often a stigma about female athletes participating in traditionally masculine sports, parents, coaches and society at large are trying to diminish this so-called stereotype that exists in female dominated sports. Doing so would then tarnish this negative image that exists around female athletes and reduce the fear around homosexuality in female sport spaces.

Like Griffin (1998, 2014), Lenskyj (2003) points to coaches, sponsors, and societal ideals of femininity as prohibiting factors that silence female athletes from openly identifying as lesbian or bisexual. According to Lenskyj (2003), female participation in sports is seen as “crossing the line into masculinity”, which in turn raises questions about a female’s sexual orientation (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 35). Women who identify as lesbian or bisexual are forced to oblige by the “façade of emphasized femininity” (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 36). This results in women having to adhere to the strict gender binary by implicitly and explicitly presenting themselves “in ways that are unequivocally heterosexual” (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 35). This is important since it reassures the heterosexual cis-gendered majority that “underneath their tough exteriors”, these female athletes are similar to “the girl next door” who obliges to culturally acceptable forms of femininity through interests such as clothing or boys (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 36). Through this, it is quite apparent that the female sporting environment tries to nullify the possibility that female homosexuality exists in order to demystify the stereotypes that exist around female athleticism.

Coaches and sponsors also play a role in supporting gender ideologies around femininity in female dominated sport spaces. It has become a common practice that coaches and sponsors have imposed strict dress codes on female athletes (Lenskyj, 2003). Such dress codes include female athletes having “revealing uniforms, long hair, shaved legs and makeup” (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 36). A prime example of this is at the varsity level, where some American campuses impose mandatory makeover classes (Lenskyj, 2003). Furthermore, the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) hired an “image lady” in order to “promote a more publicly acceptable image” for female golfers (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 36). This occurs due to marketing strategies, since female athletes are already considered non-conforming to their gender identity; they should at the very least conform to the “prevailing standards of heterosexual attractiveness” (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 36). These two examples are highly problematic and constitute a major problem within the female sporting environment. This shows that gender plays a role in how female athletes should behave on and off the field of play. It also tells female athletes who possess more “masculine” traits that they are unacceptable in sport, therefore making female athletes engage with a heterosexual façade by performing with their gender identity. Finally, this also shows that sport governing bodies often conflict gender identity with sexuality due to pre-existing ideologies and stereotypes surrounding female participation in sports.

In addition to Griffin (1998, 2014) and Lenskyj (2003), authors such as Norman (2013), Feinberg (2018), Nylund (2004), and Billings et al. (2015) have also explored femininity and female sexuality in sports. To start, Norman (2013) looks into the impact of gendered homophobia in sport, specifically focusing on the ramifications this has on female coaches. Norman’s (2013) findings suggest that there is a lack of respect for female coaches among various sport governing bodies. Furthermore, female coaches also suffer from a culture of silence regarding sexual orientation (Norman, 2013). Here, sport governing bodies and colleagues are aware if a female coach does not identify as heterosexual, but does not acknowledge or discuss their lesbian or bisexual identity (Norman, 2013). In addition, Feinberg’s (2018) article is also quite prevalent. Even though this is not an academic article, but rather a newspaper publication, it discusses the impact of coming out in the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA). Feinberg’s (2018) report ultimately describes how the WNBA has drastically transformed

into a very accepting sporting association towards the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. In doing so, this has allowed lesbian and bisexual basketball players to be open about their sexuality without any fear of ramifications that may follow. Unlike Norman (2013) and Feinberg (2018), Nylund (2004) and Billings et al. (2015) take a different approach to discussing femininity and female sexuality. Nylund (2004) specifically discusses the impact of radio host, Jim Rome, through a masculine lens. However, Nylund (2004) also engages with how feminists and femininity is viewed through sports media. Here, media is often oppressive to both gender and sexual minorities (Nylund, 2004). Billings et al. (2015) on the other hand look into the coming out experiences of male athletes, specifically focusing on Jason Collins' experience. With that being said, they also describe how there is not much media frenzy when a female athlete comes out because lesbianism is considered "invisible" in sports due to the stereotypes that surround it (Billings et al., 2015, p. 146). This literature is important for my MRP because these scholars discuss the impact femininity has on lesbian and bisexual athletes. The negative stereotype that surrounds female sport culture has a major impact on female athlete's decision to remain silent or come out. Understanding this supports my discussion of lesbian and bisexual athletes because it shows that different sporting environments are more accepting of female homosexuality and bisexuality than others.

Methodological Approach

My subjectivity as a researcher in relation to the subject matter of this MRP is an important aspect to touch upon because it offers insight into the type of critical lens that I bring to this analysis. I am a white Canadian male with Italian ancestry. I am also a cis-gender male and openly identify as gay. I have actively participated in sports from a very young age and in more recent years, have volunteer experience in various sporting activities. A majority of the sports that I participated in included male-only and co-ed team-based sports such as soccer and hockey. I have also been immersed in single-person sports such as tennis and skiing, both of which were done as leisure activities. I think that sharing this information is significant in understanding my positionality for this type of analysis and allows one to understand the critical politics that I bring to my research. This can be viewed in many ways—as bias or as a valuable and rich insider awareness that I contribute to this work.

According to Pronger (1992), sports can be thought of on a spectrum of more and less masculine. For instance, team sports such as hockey are considered “masculine” since they assert violence and aggression, while single-person sports such as diving are coded as “feminine” since it requires aesthetics and precision (Pronger, 1992). Due to societal values regarding gender, sports that are coded as “masculine” are socially acceptable for boys and men while sports that are coded as “feminine” are socially acceptable for girls and women. Having female athletes participate in traditionally masculine sports, and male athletes participate in traditionally feminine sports may lead to the assumption that a person’s sexuality is related to their gender identity. As a result, this may have an impact for lesbian and bisexual athletes in traditionally feminine sports and gay and bisexual athletes in traditionally masculine sports. This may also hinder these athletes from coming out publicly and remaining silent in their sporting environment.

In order to understand how masculinity is related to social acceptability, depending on one’s gender identity and sport they participate in, I made sure that the people I interviewed spanned the spectrum of more and less “masculine” sports. Therefore, it was important to interview male and female athletes who participated in

sports that span the range of this coded “masculinity” scale. Interviewing athletes in this manner ensured that different coming out narratives were captured across a very broad and open-ended spectrum of what sports are coded as masculine and feminine.

Upon gaining research ethics approval, I started to recruit research participants for my study in September 2018. I used four methods during the recruitment process. The first method I used was to send out emails to every varsity level sport club associated with Ryerson University. I emailed each of the head coaches from each sport directly. Here, I asked if they could share my recruitment script with the varsity athletes. If an athlete was interested, they could contact me directly about the study via email. I managed to find one female-identifying athlete from this method. The second method that I used would be similar to the first. I created a new and private Instagram account. I then contacted professional athletes through their Instagram accounts and sent the exact same recruitment script. I assumed that this would be the best opportunity to potentially hear back from professional athletes. After a month-long wait, I gave up on this method because I did not receive a message back. The third method that I used was to develop my recruitment script into a recruitment poster. This poster was sent to the 519 Community Center as well as the Ryerson Recreation Manager from the Ryerson University Athletics Association. Unfortunately I had no luck finding research participants through this method as well. The final and most successful method was through word of mouth. I asked family and friends to spread the word to see if they knew anyone who participated in varsity or professional level sports. If that person agreed, I would then contact them directly via email to see if they would be willing to participate in my study. Here, I was able to find five more research participants for my study.

This was certainly a learning activity in and of itself. It showed me the challenges researchers have in recruiting research participants and how researchers should not solely rely on a single method of recruitment. The major problem I had when recruiting was trying to navigate research participants. When I started the recruitment process, I did not know where to start and how to actually recruit people to be a part of my study. When I managed to get a response from potential research participants who agreed to participate in my study, they never followed up and our conversations ended at that point. I was fortunate enough to have discussed alternative recruitment options with my research

supervisor and also have many people in my life that knew someone who would be interested in participating in my study. This activated my own social capital and learning about the challenges of the data collection process. It showed me how difficult recruiting research participants is for academic writing and helped me appreciate the depth of work required as a researcher. This was something I had initially taken for granted until being immersed with the actual recruiting experience.

Once research participants were found, the interviews took place sporadically between October 2018 to December 2018. The interviews all differed in time length. They ranged from 15 minutes to 40 minutes, generally averaging at around 30 minutes per interview. The research participants were under no obligation to answer every question and were given the opportunity to opt out at any time if they did not feel comfortable with the interview or their final transcript. I conducted a total of six interviews with male and female athletes at the professional and varsity level. The interviews included three female-identifying research participants and three male-identifying research participants. The research participants did not necessarily have to identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Instead, the purpose of the interviews was to get an understanding of the sporting environment towards lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes.

Each interview either took place in-person or via video chat. When conducting these interviews, I used semi-structured interviewing techniques. The interview style was open ended, not very formal, and followed a general script that covered a wide range of topics (Bernard, 2011). I believe that this style allowed for a general feeling of comfort between the interviewee and myself. In addition, I created an interview guide comprising questions that dealt with an individuals' experience in their sport in terms of sexuality, gender, race, class, religion, contracts, the sporting environment and the impact of homophobia in sport.²

Straussian grounded theory guided the data collection of this project. This version of grounded theory requires the researcher to raise generative questions to develop concepts and propositions about the research (Grbich, 2013). For my research, this involved me understanding why team-based sports are much more difficult to come out

² Please refer to Appendix C for the full list of interview questions distributed to the research participants during the interviews.

in compared to single-person sports. This also included my assumption that male athletes in team-based sports tend to remain silent about their sexual identity more often compared to female athletes in team-based sports and male/female athletes in single-person sports. Straussian grounded theory also requires dimensionalising and sub-dimensionalising (Grbich, 2013). Essentially, this means opening up the research question by creating main themes and sub-themes in order to gain insight into “areas where data needs to be collected” (Grbich, 2018, p. 83). The main themes included terms such as team sports, single-person sports, race, religion, class, and contracts. Sub-themes included categories such as gender identity, gender expression, sports coded by masculinity and femininity, and reasons for remaining silent in sport. These themes were used in order to develop my interview guide. I decided on these themes through an extensive overview of the existing literature on this topic. These were common themes that overlapped throughout a majority of previous research.

The next step in Straussian grounded theory is open coding (Grbich, 2013). Open coding involves word-for-word analysis of the data (the interviews), which can then be examined in order to identify concepts and categories that can be broken down for further analysis (Grbich, 2013). This step was applied after the semi-structured interviews took place. Each of my interviews were first transcribed and then coded. I started the transcription process by inputting the interview audio file onto an online transcription database.³ Once the online database transcribed the interview, I downloaded a copy of the transcription into a Word Document. I then re-transcribed the interviews myself making sure to add any missing information or fix any mistakes. From here, I then began to code my interviews. I decided to write out the main- and sub-themes that emerged from the interview data at the top of each transcript. The main themes included terms such as hiding, passing, hysteria, performance, athletic level, homophobia, race, and class. Sub-themes included categories such as gender and religiosity. I would then colour code each of the main- and sub-themes with a different colour highlighter. Then, I would simply review the transcript and highlight any area of text that corresponded with each theme.

In addition to open coding, Straussian grounded theory requires the researcher to use theoretical memos (Grbich, 2013). Theoretical memos are a “descriptive record of

³ The online database used was <https://trint.com>.

ideas, insights, hypothesis development and testing” (Grbich, 2013, p. 85). Theoretical memos are used to identify one’s hypothesis to a category, link categories together and generate theories from the findings (Grbich, 2013). This was applied when linking certain theories to the interview findings. The final step of Straussian grounded theory is integration (Grbich, 2013). By putting the empirical data (the open coding) and the theoretical memos together, research can be verified by theories sensitizing concepts (Grbich, 2013).

Straussian grounded theory allowed me to verify data with theories. Doing so would have been challenging if the Glaserian approach to grounded theory or Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory were employed exclusively. The Glaserian approach to grounded theory allows researchers to generate theories from the findings/act as a discovery theory (Grbich, 2013). Charmaz’s constructionist grounded theory allows for a greater relationship between the researchers and researched through close interactions, which act as a partnership in generating data together (Grbich, 2013). Although Straussian grounded theory may lead to a loss of the bigger picture through a lot of fragmented data, I applied this method to my research specifically due to the size limit of a MRP, the need to limit the scope of the overall research, and to create an appropriate timeline for completing this project (Grbich, 2013). I acknowledge that this means that my MRP may be missing the “big picture”. By this, I am suggesting that my research has the potential to delve into further areas of discussion or the possibility to branch out further and take on an intersectional approach. This is important to understand because it shows the specific way in which my MRP is structured and the arguments I am trying to make. It also shows that this type of research can be explored from various viewpoints, which implies that there are multiple ways to approach this type of research. Therefore, while my research may develop a discussion around important themes within my work, it may also lack a discussion around other important themes that could be examined further.

In order to generate Straussian grounded theory from the semi-structured interviews, I applied ethnographic content analysis. This type of analysis uses culture and context as key indicators for interpretation (Grbich, 2013). This method is applied to research when there are large sets of existing written data, which require analysis (Grbich, 2013). In this case, the data would consist of the transcriptions from the

interviews. A strength of using ethnographic content analysis is that it provides a thematic analysis in order to understand cultural contexts (Grbich, 2013). This was very important during the open coding process based on Straussian grounded theory. In addition, ethnographic content analysis places a major emphasis on “description, the search for contexts, explanatory meanings, patterns and processes” (Grbich, 2013, p. 195). This allowed me to critically analyze the connections between the treatment of lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes within team-based and single-sports, and to explain why there is a culture of silence regarding homosexuality in certain sporting environments.

Findings

Overview

The interpersonal data collected from the interviews will show how the interview subjects perceive the relationship between their gender identity, the type of sport they participate in, and their experience of openly identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual or being an ally to the LGBTQ+ community. This section will look into the eight themes that I uncovered while transcribing my interview data. These themes include hiding, passing, hysteria, performance, athletic level, homophobia, race, and class. I noticed that a majority of these themes tended to overlap among the six interview participants, and thus I decided to discuss them in more detail. Interviewees will be referred to as “Participant x,” with “x” referring to the numbers 1-6. Below, I provide a brief description of each participant.

The names and institutions of each research participant have been kept confidential for their safety and privacy. Participant 1 (2018) self-identifies as female, is a racialized individual, attended an institution in Massachusetts, United States, participated in varsity level track during the late-1990s, and openly identifies as lesbian. Participant 2 (2018) self-identifies as female, is a racialized individual, attends an institution in Ontario, Canada, currently participates in varsity level hockey, is sexually fluid, and currently identifies as bisexual. Participant 3 (2018) self-identifies as female, is a professional fitness athlete and participates in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and openly identifies as lesbian. Participant 4 (2018) self-identifies as male, attended an institution in Ontario, Canada, participated in varsity level running and swimming during the mid-2000s, and openly identifies as heterosexual. Participant 5 (2018) self-identifies as male, attended an institution in Ontario, Canada, participated in varsity and competitive level hockey during the early-2010s, and openly identifies as gay. Participant 6 (2018) self-identifies as male, is a racialized individual, attended an institution in Ontario, Canada, participated in varsity level basketball during the mid-2000s, and openly identifies as heterosexual.

Hiding

Hiding was the first major theme that emerged from the interview data. This theme is quite prevalent among the research participants, especially for those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, due to the pressure of socially coming out and

acknowledging their sexual differences. With that in mind, any research participant who did openly identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual during the interview was asked if they were open about their sexuality while they were playing their sports. Both Participants 2 (2018) and 3 (2018) were openly “out” in their sports, while Participants 1 (2018) and 5 (2018) kept their sexuality a secret. According to Participant 1 (2018), “I was still figuring things out for myself and I don’t think I had a lot of role models...and it just seemed easier”. Participant 5 (2018) on the other hand states:

I came from a very conservative area and I was in an all-white school, very Catholic, very strict...and so it was like obviously just a challenge to try to be the only person at the time who would have been out [openly gay].

When Participant 5 (2018) finally came to terms with his sexuality and felt comfortable enough to come out, he “was no longer playing a competitive sport”. Instead, Participant 5 “was just playing...recreational [sports] with friends, with work, with leagues like that”. Furthermore, Participant 5 (2018) builds on this perspective when they explain how hiding can create an “emotional and mental toll”. By this, they are referring to hindering factors that potentially prohibit an individual from coming out. For instance, Participant 5 (2018) notes: “I’ll just be quiet, I’ll just take my time and not worry about anything like that [sexuality] because if no one knows, I don’t deal with it”.

With that in mind, it is interesting to note that Participant 1 (2018) ended her varsity career in the United States twenty years ago, while Participant 5 (2018) only came out four years prior to the interview. The political climate towards the LGBTQ+ community, while not perfect, has certainly changed for the better, especially in Canada in comparison to the United States. Therefore, while hiding may have been a much more viable option for Participant 1 (2018) at the time, Participant 5’s (2018) decision to remain silent can in part be due to the environmental/cultural setting that they were involved in. Considering that Participant 5 (2018) was involved in a team-based sport that relies on an overt form of masculinity could have been a major factor in hiding his gay identity. This relates to the literature by Pronger (1992), Allain (2010) and MacDonald (2014) where they suggest that certain forms of masculinity can have a major impact within the hockey environment. This also relates to Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony due to the ways in which orthodox and hegemonic masculinity takes shape

throughout hockey culture. It implies that certain forms of masculinity are more acceptable than others. With that being said, Participant 5 (2018) is the only openly gay or bisexual male athlete I was able to interview. This may suggest that there are plenty of gay or bisexual male athletes still remaining silent and hiding their sexual identities in their sports. This may be due to the pre-existing ideologies that exist surrounding male athleticism and homosexuality.

Furthermore, the research participants were asked if they knew any teammates or fellow athletes who openly identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual in their sport or on their teams. Four of the six responses were all similar in that they did not know any “out” athletes in their sport while playing, and if they did, they only came out after they retired from their sport. What is even more interesting is the fact that Participant 1 (2018) was the only female athlete with this type of response, while Participants 2 (2018) and 3 (2018) already knew lesbian or bisexual female athletes who are open about their sexuality. Although it is difficult to know why this is the case, there is the possibility that this was due to the time period when Participant 1 (2018) participated in varsity athletics. In addition, Participants 4 (2018), 5 (2018), and 6 (2018) all agreed that they did not know any member of their sport who openly identified as gay or bisexual while playing. Only Participant 5 (2018) was aware of former players who openly identified as gay or bisexual after their athletic career. While Participant 6 (2018) is neither gay nor bisexual, they are convinced that hiding is highly prevalent, especially among team-based sports because “you're kind of like affecting well not affecting but your telling your whole team. Like more than one person. So it might be a little bit more difficult that way [to come out]”. From my interview data, these sentiments show that hiding is a factor that is quite widespread among lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes. While hiding has been experienced among the female and male research participants, it is clearly much more explicit among male-dominated sport spaces, especially in the team-based environment. This also shows that there is a connection with theories such as ideology, cultural hegemony and gender performativity in the male team-based sport setting. Here, I believe that ideology and gender performativity are interwoven because male athletes are expected to raise their masculine capital in order to perform this idealized version of how a male athlete should act like on and off the field of play. Cultural hegemony relates to this because these

ideologies are reinforced throughout certain sporting environments where they become the dominant set of existing beliefs.

Passing

Like hiding, passing was also a prevalent theme among the interview data, especially for Participants 1 (2018) and 5 (2018). When asked why there may be the assumption that all female athletes are lesbians and if hetero-normativity was existent among the track team, Participant 1 (2018) responded by saying:

Yeah definitely. So I think that's probably...why when my...wife and I started dating that we felt like that pressure [to come out] even though no one had ever said that [we were in a relationship] we just we definitely felt like it was just easier to try to pretend that nothing changed [by remaining silent].

This quote signals that lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes feel the need to suppress their sexuality in order to conform to the status quo. By this, I am suggesting that lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes do not want their coming out to deter from their athletic capability, thus resulting in the need to pass. Here, I turn to queer theory in order to understand the historical and cultural position of passing. In terms of the historical position, the idea of passing for Participant 1 (2018) could in part be due to the societal attitudes towards homosexuality while she was participating in varsity athletics. I say this because Participants 2 (2018) and 3 (2018) openly identify as lesbian and bisexual while they are currently participating in their sports. This can indicate that lesbian and bisexual identities in the women's game has definitely improved from when Participant 1 (2018) competed. The idea of passing for Participant 1 (2018) could also be based on the different cultural space that they were a part of. It is plausible that two athletes in the same sport have different perceptions of being "out"—one could be supported and the other rejected. There is also a relationship to what Lenskyj (2003), Norman (2013) and Billings et al. (2015) state in their literature because of the culture of invisibility surrounding female homosexuality. This indicates that an athlete can be open about their sexuality in the same place (sport) and time (era) but the culture of acceptance within their group dynamic may differ.

Participant 5 (2018) on the other hand is quite interesting to discuss due to his recent affiliation with competitive sports. This can imply that passing as hyper-masculine or heterosexual, plays a major role for many gay or bisexual athletes in male-dominated

sports. For example, Participant 5 (2018) discusses why athletes might participate in homophobic behaviour or express homophobic ideas or attitudes. Essentially, it boils down to trying to pass in the environment these athletes are situated in. Here Participant 5 (2018) further reinforces this theme: “I don't wanna be labeled as that [gay or bisexual] because obviously it's not going to be very fun [otherwise male athletes can be considered a target of homophobic verbal slurs/jokes]. So I guess I'd rather be a contributor [to those slurs/jokes] and put that on to someone else”. Participant 5 (2018) then goes on to say:

I had friends later I talked to [sic] who unfortunately at the time didn't stand up for it [the jokes/slurs] or stand up for anyone but they were saying you know I'd rather just call someone a faggot than at the risk of being called one.

These quotes demonstrate that the male team-based sporting environment is heavily ingrained in homophobic ideologies and heterosexual hegemony. Additionally, these sentiments directly relate to passing since it shows that an individual would rather be an offender than be subjected to homophobic verbal abuse. In doing so, the male team-based sporting environment develops into a negative cycle where homophobia becomes commonplace because no one is willing to stand up and challenge individuals who participate in this manner. If, and when this eventually begins to occur, the male-sporting environment will become much more inclusive towards sexual minorities, as evident in female sporting environments and proven by Participants 2 (2018) and 3 (2018).

Hysteria

While hiding and passing were two themes that were exclusively experienced by the openly lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes that I interviewed, the concept of hysteria had been experienced by all of the research participants in this study. When I discuss hysteria, I am referring to Anderson's (2014) concept of homohysteria, which I have thoroughly discussed in my Literature Review section.⁴ Hysteria was primarily experienced when the research participants discussed factors that hinder an athlete from openly identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual in sports and if religion played a major role for the research participants or other athletes affiliated with the research participants sport.

⁴ Please refer to Page 14.

When the research participants were asked about contributing factors that might hinder an athlete from openly identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual in sport, each research participant all shared a similar response in that hysteria possibly plays a role. Participant 1 (2018) explains how “people would worry like we often use team locker rooms, you’re getting changed showers like um [sic] people might be worried about that”. Participant 2 (2018) builds on this theme because they think that this hysteria stems from society and works its way to a more personal level via the family and the team. She notes:

I think their parents you know starts at home and the acceptance there so if fear there they might fear of society [sic] because that sheer close-knit foundation...I think teammates as well you’re not sure depending on which team you’re on...So it really depends on your circle your group of friends and how comfortable you feel...You know laws and activism you know [sic] watching the history of it all unfold it’s not as comforting as it could be (Participant 2, 2018).

Participant 3 (2018) also experienced such hysteria because her sport requires close proximity when training. This results in hysteria because if someone finds out about a person’s same-sex attractions, they “won’t want to roll with me or train with me” (Participant 3, 2018). Participant 4 (2018) explains how “if I was the individual in that situation, I don’t know if I would have been comfortable thinking that [sic] taking that risk [of openly identifying as gay or bisexual]”. Participant 5 (2018) supports this perspective when they state that athletes

Might be concerned about the dynamics and relationships you have within a team. Obviously these are very like quote unquote Bro-e masculine type sports. And also I think your environment at that time. Oh no I don’t want to be in the locker room as someone who is gay which is like a typical generalization that obviously isn’t valid. So that could be part of it.

Finally, Participant 6’s (2018) comments further reinforce this theme when they state that “there would maybe be some backlash over it [coming out]. [A] lack of understanding over it. So it’ll be it’ll be [sic] really hard for somebody to come out openly if they are”. These responses are significant since they outline a common misconception and belief between male and female sporting environments. What Participant 2 (2018) and 5 (2018) state explains this perfectly since society and the sporting environment can have a major impact on an athlete. Society has socially constructed gender norms and hetero-normative

assumptions in place. This suggests that the homo-negative hysterical environment within sports is a product of societal ideologies.

Religion was highly prevalent among some of the research participants and plays a role in developing this type of hysteria towards lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes. Religion relates to intersectionality because it can also be a contributing factor that hinders LGBTQ+ athletes from coming out. Religion can be understood as a structure where people are grown into that belief system and therefore do not have much personal autonomy until they grow up. As these individuals become immersed in certain environments (in this case sports), religion plays some role in how athletes view certain subject matter (e.g. coming out as LGBTQ+). For example, Participant 1 (2018) identifies as Christian and had no personal struggle with identifying as a lesbian and as a Christian. However, “it did have impacts on other people’s reactions who were more religious than I was. It impacted how they accepted me” (Participant 1, 2018). When Participant 5 (2018) was asked if religion played a major role in their life, their response builds upon this perspective:

I'm not religious but religion has and has [sic] a huge impact in my life. So I come from a very very [sic] staunch Catholic family. In terms of practicing Catholic and I was raised Catholic and went to a Catholic school. So my entire life I've only been indoctrinated and taught the roles of the Catholic Church and Catholicism. Um so today I'm an atheist.

Participant 5 (2018) was then asked whether or not religion played a major role in their sport and hindering their coming out process.

Yes I think it delayed me coming out because I think religion was not THE factor but a contributing factor to an intolerant community towards gay men. And then that results in the pressures that you have coming out and what the precautions might be. So I think it was inadvertently or indirectly a...component (Participant 5, 2018).

Finally, Participant 6 (2018) believes that the association between religion and sport is “50/50”. Participant 6 (2018) was unable to answer whether or not religion had a major impact on lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes in his sport. With this in mind and the fact that Participant 6 (2018) identifies as heterosexual, this may have not fazed him at the time and there is the possibility that religion could have had a negative impact for gay or bisexual athletes. These responses highlight that religiosity in sport and broader society

as a whole can develop into some form of hysteria. This hysteria is the fear of homosexuality and the idea that homosexuality goes against the laws of nature, therefore being understood as deviant. With regards to the lesbian and gay research participants who identified as religious, while religion was not the only factor that hindered their coming out process, it certainly had an impact on their coming out experience.

Performance

Performance is also another common theme that was experienced by a majority of the research participants. My use of performance is guided by the work of Butler taken up in the above Theoretical Framework section.⁵ Performance was primarily prevalent when the research participants were asked female- and male-specific questions about the sporting environment and the various presumptions that exist in their games. Listed here is an example of a female-specific question: why might there be an assumption that all female athletes are lesbians? Listed here is an example of a male-specific question: why might there be an assumption that all male athletes are heterosexual?⁶

When the research participants were asked why athletes might participate in homophobic behaviour, performance played a major role as to why athletes express homophobic attitudes. According to Participant 1 (2018), “there were maybe some players who were pressuring another player who later came out to act more straight and maybe wear a dress”. Participant 5 (2018) on the other hand explains that the idea of performance stems from the “social hierarchy” within certain sporting environments. For instance, Participant 5 (2018) notes: “if you see particular people whether it's leaders of a team...naturally you're gonna want your behaviour to be so much theirs because you're looking for acceptance within the group”. The two ideas shared by Participant 1 (2018) and 5 (2018) show that this idea of performance is quite prevalent within the sporting environment. For Participant 1 (2018), performance is signaled through dress codes and femininity. By femininity, I am suggesting that Participant 1's (2018) remarks signal that female athletes should adhere to the strict gender binary since female participation in sports, especially for lesbian and bisexual athletes, is seen as “un-feminine”. For

⁵ Please refer to Page 8.

⁶ Please refer to Appendix C on Page 55 for the full list of male- and female-specific questions.

Participant 5 (2018) then, performance is a tool used to justify one's masculinity through acting the part by being homophobic.

With regards to the questions specifically asked to the female-identifying research participants, Participant 2 (2018) discussed the impact fellow athletes had on her gender expression. I asked if Participant 2's (2018) femininity had ever been questioned in her sport and she responded by saying: "yeah I believe my teammates sometimes question whether it exists or not". Participant 2 (2018) builds upon this perspective when they say:

I don't wear a dress, I don't straighten my hair. So I think they do question it [my femininity] and when it does happen, if it does rarely they they're like [sic] oh my gosh you know you're in a dress its like you know who knew that you could assume this role.

These sentiments show that performance is prevalent within Participant 2's (2018) sporting life. More specifically, it outlines how her teammates react when she assumes a more feminine role since they bear witness to a more masculine version of how Participant 2 (2018) presents herself. With that being said, Participant 2's (2018) statement shows that she is questioned when she performs a more feminine role.

For the male-identifying athletes, Participants 4 (2018) and 5 (2018) experienced some form performance in their sports. Participant 4 (2018) believed that other teammates questioned his masculinity due to his mannerisms and caring how he dressed. Participant 4 (2018) is quoted by saying that "it's not a typical trait of a teenage boy. Not completely abnormal. Just just [sic] wasn't the majority". Participant 5 (2018) on the other hand considered himself to be a stellar athlete. In doing so, Participant 5 (2018) used his athletic skills to "deflect questions surrounding masculinity because often that would be tied to performance". Participant 5's (2018) experiences further reinforce this theme in this quote where they state:

If I'm performing really well in the sport, then someone's less likely to then question masculinity and your ability to play. It also happens that I play defense and I'm almost six two and I was quite big on the ice and I spent a lot of time in the gym so being someone who played rough and I guess a position that required that also kind of blended a bit of a hand to reinforcing masculinity as opposed to maybe a position that didn't require that.

These responses demonstrate the impact performance has on male athletes. It does so because male athletes who reject or do not confirm to hegemonic or orthodox masculine

ideologies are seen as suspicious (gay or bisexual) since they do not conform to their hetero-normative gender roles. Once this occurs, they are automatically questioned, as described by Participant 4's (2018) experiences. In addition, this idea of performance is connected to masculinity (hegemonic and/or orthodox). This is done in order to deflect athletes from challenging one another about their own sexuality through the use of sexist and homophobic verbal slurs/jokes.

Athletic Level

Many of the research participants also believed that the different levels of sport (e.g. amateur, varsity, or professional) could contribute to an athlete remaining silent or open about their sexual identities. Participant 1 (2018) claims that the amateur level and professional level are the most difficult spaces to come out in. At the amateur level, "you have people you have known your whole life or your family and its just its just [sic] more connected" while at the professional level, athletes have "the camera lens" on them and "more expectations from people" (Participant 1, 2018). For Participant 1 (2018), the easiest spaces to come out in are at the varsity level because athletes get a "fresh start to do your own thing and kinda make your own way". Participant 2 (2018) views this question in a slightly different way. According to Participant 2 (2018), the higher levels of sport are much more difficult for men because

We've seen it. Coming out has had a negative impact on their careers. I don't think the male side is ready for that step but I think with females it is very much encouraged and more widely accepted at any level from high school all the way up to professional Olympic levels.

This quote is interesting because it relates back to this idea of gay or bisexual male role models in the sport setting. There is a limited number of openly "out" male athletes. A majority of openly gay or bisexual male athletes have generally decided to come out later on in their careers or after retirement. When male athletes have come out early on in their careers, as seen with Michael Sam, their career is put at a standstill. Furthermore, there are also many male athletes who continue to remain in the closet because they fear that negative ramifications may tarnish their athletic careers. Therefore, there are no major role models for gay or bisexual male athletes to look up to, and to know that it is okay to be open about their sexuality.

Participant 3 (2018) builds upon this perspective when they explain that the amateur level is the easiest sporting environment to be open about your sexuality because “nobody really knows you”. At the professional level “maybe it’s harder” because athletes may “think they can lose their sponsorships” (Participant 3, 2018). Participant 5 (2018) had some interesting insight into this matter as well. They provide a different perspective on how the various levels of sport differ in terms of an athlete’s ability to be open about their sexuality.

I think it can contribute differently but to different extents. So I think sport team sports [sic] that are not overly competitive at a professional or league level. I think it's surrounding more that social component of being labeled something that you don't want to experience. I think that’s what would hold you back. I think to the more professional high-level athletes and the thing that would probably hold them that would be the concern that it may somehow have any impact on their career. Having known some incredible professional elite athletes, their goal is not whether or not unfortunately whether or not [sic] they are out about it. It is “I want to be a champion in this and I want to win in this”. And so to them that I think would be the biggest obstacle for the really high elite athletes that’s going to hold them back and say oh I might not get the recognition I should get or the opportunities I should have because I'm gay (Participant 5, 2018).

This quote is important because it represents what gay and bisexual male athletes may feel, especially as their sport becomes much more competitive. For Participant 5 (2018), “ultimately it was one of the key reasons why I just wanted to stop playing” because “it takes a ton of energy to give up so much...and to know like you’re still not able or allowed to be all of you”. Participant 5’s (2018) sentiments express the homo-negative ideologies ingrained within male sport culture. With that being said however, Participant 6’s (2018) personal experiences demonstrate that the amateur level may be “more difficult because of the understanding with the kids, more teenagers”. By this, Participant 6 (2018) is suggesting that there is a lack of education around homosexuality and acceptance, therefore resulting in negative attitudes towards gay or bisexual presence. These quotes provide insight into how the different levels of sport function. While there may be negative assumptions about an athlete’s sexuality in the lower levels of sport, a majority of the research participants have all concluded that the more competitive the sport becomes, the more toxic it is for sexual minorities. This can relate to the cultural hegemony associated with the competitive sporting environment because professional

sports are a place where dominance is maintained and reproduced. If an athlete disrupts the established social order, they are seen as outliers because they do not align themselves with the dominant ideologies surrounding gender and sexuality. With that being said, it is also important to note that Participant 2 (2018) views the male experience as much more difficult compared to the female experience. This can indicate that even female athletes recognize the hardships placed on gay or bisexual male athletes. The level of acceptance is certainly different compared to lesbian or bisexual female athletes.

Homophobia

Homophobia was very common from the interview data. With the exception of Participant 1 (2018), all of the research participants were either victims or perpetrators of homophobia. The research participants experienced homophobia when they were asked if anyone in their sport used anti-LGBTQ+ comments on or off the field of play. According to Participant 2 (2018), homophobia is not as prevalent in university because homosexuality “is a lot more widespread”. Participant 3 (2018) experienced such homophobia at the end of a fighting session when “a guy went up to her [opposing opponent] and he was like do you know that she’s a lesbian”. Although Participant 4 (2018) cannot speak to any specific incidents, homophobia “was more commonplace than it should have been” because it was “not abnormal...to say if someone was gay or [a] fag as like as a as a [sic] negative”. Participant 5’s (2018) experiences further reinforce this theme because they “heard the word faggot every day in a very derogatory manner”. Participant 5 (2018) believes that “it just kind of becomes a part of the environment...because you see other people doing it [acting homophobic]”. Finally, Participant 6 (2018) explains that homophobia was used “if a person is not like doing what they’re supposed to be doing” in the sporting context. As a result, “we would get on them. Like stop being a sissy or stop being a pussy...It’s kind of just to man him up. That’s why we would use it [homophobic verbal slurs/jokes]”. These responses show the vast differences between the women’s game and the men’s game. The women’s game is not as susceptible to homophobia, especially when a female athlete progresses to the higher stages of their career. When homophobia is experienced, as it did for Participant 3 (2018), it was through a male spectator. This is important to note because it shows that in most cases, homophobia is structured through a male perspective. Here, homophobia

originates from a hegemonic/orthodox masculine place because these forms of masculinity are uncontested and therefore the dominant force over minority identities. The men's game on the other hand indicates that homophobia is highly prevalent. While Participant 4 (2018) did not have any specific examples, both Participants 5 (2018) and 6 (2018) whom participated in team-based sports, shared plenty. This goes to show how heterosexual hegemony and ideas of gender performativity are engraved within male sport culture due to the ways in which masculinity asserts itself as the dominant identity marker.

Furthermore, homophobia is also evident through locker-room talk, especially in the men's game. Locker-room talk can be understood as a homo-social sphere where men are expected to enact their masculine capital. Here, locker-room talk polices and sets boundaries for desired and accepted forms of performance. According to Participant 4 (2018), locker-room talk was more prevalent in the men's swim team compared to the running team. With that being said, locker-room talk took the form of "hazing" since it was "very much the norm in the sport" (Participant 4, 2018). By this, Participant 4 (2018) is suggesting that locker-room talk tended to humiliate other athletes based on their differences, such as not performing/conforming with their gender identity. In addition, Participant 5 (2018) also experienced homophobia within the locker-room.

Locker-room talk happens every single time you're together as a group...It's often talking about the opposite sex usually not in the most polite or respectful ways...It's like that group mentality and their strength in numbers and I think locker room talk can be super toxic (Participant 5, 2018).

Lastly, Participant 6 (2018) builds upon this perspective because they explain how locker-room talk would often be sexist when "you're talking about a girl" and homophobic "if let's say we're trying to go out after and somebody says oh no I gotta go home. We'll call them like [sic] we'll say homophobic remarks". While female athletes do participate in locker-room talk as well, Participant 2 (2018) asserts that "it's less disrespectful". From the interview data that I have collected, this seems to be the case considering that Participants 1 (2018) and 3 (2018) did not have much to comment on this matter as well. It is clear then that my small amount of interview data points to male sport culture as being very prone to homophobia, especially when there are close-knit interactions with other athletes in the locker-room. This shows how orthodox and

hegemonic masculinity are structured within male locker-rooms and the dynamics that are created in order to avoid a rejection of the ideal hegemonic position, thereby acting in a homophobic manner to conform with the majority.

Race

With the exception of Participant 3 (2018) and 4 (2018), race and racism was another prevalent theme that was experienced by the research participants. I believe that incorporating race into this discussion is important to provide an intersectional lens. While race may not necessarily relate to sexual orientation, it can impact a racialized sexual minority because these individuals experience much more discrimination compared to a sexual minority who is not racialized. The athletes were primarily asked whether or not they experienced or encountered racism in their sport. While Participant 1 (2018) is a racialized individual, her “teams were fairly decently diverse”. Because of this, Participant 1 (2018) explains that she never encountered racism as an athlete while competing in her sport. Participant 2 (2018) on the other hand has experienced racism directly in her sport. The first time Participant 2 (2018) experienced racism in her sport was at the house league level.

We had just finished playing a hockey game and we shake hands at the end of the game and I was shaking hands I was the first person in line [sic]. And the three girls in front of me on the other team that were coming towards to shake my hand each called me the N word and I left the line (Participant 2, 2018).

As Participant 2 (2018) progressed through to the junior level, she experienced racism once more. At this level, “it wasn't so overt as the N word but I had a team call me a thug or something along those lines” (Participant 2, 2018). While this type of racist behaviour was perpetuated from opponents, Participant 2 (2018) also experienced racism from her own teammates. Here she states that

I had to deal with I guess passive aggressive black jokes. They were meant to be harmless but only I can gauge whether that's true or not, not my white counterparts and I don't think they realized that they were being racist (Participant 2, 2018).

With that being said, Participant 2 (2018) has never experienced racist commentary from opponents or Black jokes from teammates at the varsity level. Although racism will not go away with the blink of an eye, Participant 2's (2018) case shows that racism must be

managed better in every level of sports because it continues to exist and is highly detrimental for racialized athletes. Furthermore, while Participant 5 (2018) is not a racialized person and has “never experienced” racism, he has certainly observed it in his sport. For example, Participant 5 (2018) notes: “I’ve seen people call African-Americans the N-word. I’ve seen them use derogatory terms around people from Asia. Also very targeted chants toward the Middle Eastern and Indigenous peoples so like [sic] very frequently”. Participant 5’s (2018) experiences build upon this perspective when they explain how racism is similar to homophobia in the sense that “you can use that mentality to either protect yourself”. By this, Participant 5 (2018) is suggesting that in a team-based sport such as hockey,

Someone could crash up to you, hit you cleanly but really hard and hurt. They could have made you look bad by scoring a goal on you and you experienced frustration and anger and all of a sudden here's an outlet for it. And I've identified something about you. You're different. Now I'm trying to exploit that. And even whether or not it's accurate or not it's an outlet for me to have some of that anger out. And also even in front of my peers even if I just made an error or mistake or something, hey look what I just called this person X, Y, and Z. Look how tough I am.

This quote indicates that racism, like homophobia, is used as a tactic to deflect the attention from your own mistakes onto others. It also shows that racism, which is perpetrated by majority groups, is a tool of power used to communicate to marginalized groups that they do not belong—it is used to “other” individuals for their differences. There is also a relationship with theories such as ideology and cultural hegemony because racist ideologies are embedded within the white patriarchy, or in this case the sport governing bodies. As a result, not much is done in order to combat racism because it is not seen as a major threat. Lastly, Participant 6 (2018) has experienced racism from opponents and teammates. For example, Participant 6 (2018) has heard comments such as “Oh get that monkey” or “Filipinos are short they can't play basketball you shouldn't be playing”. However, Participant 6 (2018) believes that the type racism he has experienced takes the form of a micro-aggression. For instance, Participant 6 (2018) thinks that these remarks are a “challenging remark than an actual like I hate this race”. With that being said, I see Participant 6’s (2018) comments as the most problematic because there is a lack of acknowledgement about racism in his sport. Although other research participants

have stated more overt forms of racist behaviour, they have at the very least acknowledged that there is a problem regarding racism in their sport and the problems it imposes on racialized athletes.

In terms of race and LGBTQ+ racialized identities, only Participant 1 (2018) felt that race had an impact on her coming out experience. When asked how her racial identity challenged her from openly identifying as LGBTQ+, Participant 1 (2018) explains:

I definitely think um you know [sic] when I first came out some of the people I was most anxious talking or letting find out were some of my also other African-American teammates. I think I was [sic]. Cause I know they had more traditional families and so I was more worried about how their reaction would be for sure.

This quote is important because it shows the way intersectionality functions. While sexuality is not necessarily connected to race, it shows the impact sexuality can have on a racialized individual. While there were other research participants who identified as racialized minorities, they never experienced an air of hostility regarding a person's racial identity and their sexuality. Although this may not always be the case for racialized sexual minorities in sport, this is certainly relieving to hear from my interview data considering that this minority population is negatively targeted in other aspects of life.

Class

Like race, classism was also a major theme that was experienced by the research participants, with the exception of Participant 4 (2018). Although class may not influence an athlete coming out or remaining silent, class is important to discuss because it provides an intersectional lens to this research and describes how certain sports are more accepting of different social classes compared to others. Here, the research participants were asked if class identity had a major impact on their sport. Participant 1 (2018) explains that the group dynamic within her sport “made things seem like there are different levels within the same team”. For example, Participant 1 (2018) states that there were certain team members “whose parents could fly out see our meets wherever we were or could take people out for dinners and things like that and who would have other like go skiing or have other [sic] events like that”. While Participant 1 (2018) did not experience a direct form of discrimination due to her class identity, classism was certainly experienced indirectly when engaging with other members of her sport.

Participant 2's (2018) experiences build on this because classism is "more prominent when you're younger" and "disappears more at the university level". Participant 2's (2018) reasoning is quite similar here to Participant 1 (2018). Here, she notes that

If your parents can buy you that Gatorade after the game versus another parent who can only afford the bare minimum just to get you there... You get to know your teammates by their cars. It's when you show up to hockey tournaments and you know that you know someone's there because they drive the big Escalade and you know someone else's there because their moms in the Honda and I'll [sic] think when you're that young you realize how classist the sport is (Participant 2, 2018).

Participant 3's (2018) sport can also be seen as classist since it is very expensive to be involved in Jiu Jitsu. According to Participant 3 (2018), it costs "two hundred dollars a month just to get the membership so unfortunately there is no poor people practicing that sport". Participant 5's (2018) experiences further reinforce this theme because his sport (hockey) is "extremely expensive" to participate in. Because hockey is such an expensive sport, some people would make fun of a person's class if they "didn't have the proper equipment" (Participant 5, 2018). Participant 5 (2018) builds upon this perspective by suggesting that this is due to a "group mentality" where you "can't make fun of them [an individual who has a lower economic status] because they're white and you know they're straight, but you know what, they seem kind of poor. That's something we can make fun of". Another example of this would occur if you were playing a team from a "small town no one has ever heard of. That's a prime example of something that you could make fun of them because you're able to make the assumption that they have a lower class" (Participant 5, 2018). With that being said, Participant 5 (2018) makes a very compelling observation when he states that class can impact how others view minorities. Here he states:

I think that also relates to the idea of privilege and the amount of children who had just never had to worry about these sorts of issues that are difficult to challenges [sic] in life. So you may lack the compassion or understanding for someone who has had to go through other challenges like being gay. And you know you stop and think of a straight white privileged athlete without [sic] the 95 percent of people on my team they're historically speaking the most fortunate demographic in the world. And so then they don't have to concern themselves with other issues. And they're very comfortable just being around other people who are exactly like them (Participant 5, 2018).

Finally, Participant 6 (2018) expands on this theme when they assert that people will act negatively towards players with a lower economic status because they feel that “their spot is threatened...So they try to bring them down by saying no you're not good enough here, you can't even pay for the sport”. While a majority of the research participants state that class does have a role in your ability to play a certain sport, Participant 5 (2018) provides a deeper analysis into understanding that class can also be used to target minority populations. While those with higher economic status will most likely never have to experience some form of struggle in those regards, they may not be sympathetic for those who do experience societal challenges. Thus making it difficult for minority populations to state their cause because those with higher income levels may conform to the patriarchy.

I did wonder whether or not class identity ever challenged athletes from openly identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual. This observation was based on statistics surrounding homeless youth because a high percentage of homeless youth are reported to be from the LGBTQ+ population.⁷ While this may be the case for some lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes, it was fortunately not the case according to the openly lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes that I interviewed.

Concluding Thoughts on the Interview Data

After a thorough investigation of the above themes, it is apparent that the sporting environment does present an array of problems and obstacles for lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes. The extent to which an athlete is able to be open or silent about their sexuality truly depends on the sporting environment they are situated in. From the interview data collected, it is clear that the female sporting experience, while difficult to a certain extent for lesbian or bisexual athletes, is much more accepting of lesbian and bisexual presence in comparison to the male sporting environment. Here, male sports culture is surrounded by toxic forms of masculinity that make it difficult to be open about male homosexuality and bisexuality. The participants' experiences reflect some of my theoretical assumptions surrounding male sport culture as well as team-based sport culture. They show how ideologies surrounding gender performativity and certain forms

⁷ <https://www.covenanthousetoronto.ca/homeless-youth/facts-and-stats>.

of masculinity take place within the male game, thereby hindering gay or bisexual athletes from coming out. In addition, cultural hegemony regarding gender and sexuality also plays a major role in team-based environments through the use of regulating behaviour. With that being said, the research participants also challenge some of these assumptions because their experiences all differ to a certain extent. For instance, the interview data showed that intersectionality played a major role in some of the participants' lives, but a relatively minor role with regards to their sexual identity. Additionally, queer theory offered a greater understanding of the hardships placed on lesbian and bisexual female athletes within certain sporting environments. This is important to recognize because it shows the ways in which my theoretical assumptions are supported and refuted. It also provides insight into areas where further analysis is required in order to improve the research.

Discussion

Through an in-depth investigation of the literature as well as interview-based data, this MRP explored the relationship between coming out as a male and female athlete in both the team-based and single-person sporting environments. After testing my original thesis statement, I realize that I was accurate in assuming that the male sporting environment presents itself with the most difficult challenges to come out in. The male sporting environment as a whole is a more hostile environment towards gay and bisexual presence compared to the female sporting environment where lesbian and bisexual athletes are much more welcome. However, I was forced to understand that my conception of single-person sports is not as it appears. Although the idea that single-person sports are understood to be played by an individual, these individuals are very much a part of a team setting. Therefore, these athletes share similar experiences to those who I classified as team-based. Having said that, an athlete's ability to come out or remain silent is not solely independent. Instead, this act is very dependent on the sporting environment and culture that an athlete is situated in. The research participants that I interviewed as well as the data collected in the Literature Review indicate that coming out as lesbian or bisexual is much easier for a female athlete. The female sporting environment presents itself as more accepting, non-discriminatory, and open to change. Unlike the female sporting environment, the male sporting environment continues to present challenges towards gay and bisexual athletes. According to the literature and the sentiments shared by Participants 4 (2018), 5 (2018), and 6 (2018), homophobia continues to exist without being contested. Gay and bisexual male athletes will remain silent about their sexual identities if the male sporting environment does not challenge the status quo. By this, gay and bisexual athletes need help from heterosexual allies and sport governing bodies. Enforcing stricter punishments towards athletes or sporting organizations that do not comply with openness and acceptance seems to be a key support strategy. By ending toxic masculinity and homophobia, gay and bisexual male athletes will be able to be much more open about their sexuality and no longer feel the need to suppress their gay or bisexual identities.

After a thorough observation with the literature, there are also flaws in the various studies that I have discussed. A majority of the literature that I examined tended to only focus on a single aspect of the coming out experience. By this, the literature would only share the experiences of the coming out process and the impact coming out has on certain sporting spaces. This interpersonal data is helpful in providing a greater understanding into the dynamics within certain sporting environments and how individuals react when someone comes out as lesbian, gay or bisexual. With that being said, there tended to be a lack of intersectional research in the literature. To start, many of these scholars tend to avoid an overall discussion on race and racism in sport. Although race is not directly related to sexual orientation, it can and does play a major role for racialized athletes because racialized athletes face similar forms of discrimination compared to sexual minorities. Understanding these differences is important since it shows how race, like sexual orientation, creates a power hierarchy within certain settings. Additionally, racialized sexual minorities also face further prejudice because their identity constitutes two minority identities. While the LGBTQ+ community is a repressed group within society, it is also helpful and insightful to understand how racialized members within the LGBTQ+ community negotiate their identities and prohibiting factors that may limit their ability to be open about their sexual orientation.

Class was another theme that could have been discussed to a greater extent in the literature. A majority of sports tend to require a lot of money in order to participate and pay for the necessary equipment. This is important because it shows that class can limit participation in certain sports. Since a high percentage of homeless youth also identify as LGBTQ+, this may have an impact on why there are not many openly lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes in sports. They simply lack the necessary funds to join sports in the first place. Finally, the literature never discussed that certain sporting environments can prohibit an athlete from coming out. Here, I am suggesting that scholars never explored the relationship between sports where LGBTQ+ presence is accepted versus sports where LGBTQ+ presence is non-existent. Knowing that certain sports present greater challenges for lesbian, gay or bisexual athletes is significant because it shows that the sporting environment an athlete is situated in will ultimately impact their decision to either be open about their sexuality or remain silent.

As this MRP is coming to a close, I believe that my methodological approach was useful in completing this project. With that being said, I think that like all methods, there are also weaknesses. The particular method I am referring to in my MRP is Straussian grounded theory. This theory was very useful in generating questions and collecting data for the research. Had I used an alternative form of grounded theory or a new theory altogether, this would have altered the way I framed my MRP and how I completed my research. Having said that, and mentioned previously in my Methodological Approach section, this theory can lead to a lot of fragmented data. As a result, this type of research can branch out further and expand on areas of discussion. Such areas can include gender, sexuality, race, class, and religion. While these topics were touched upon in my findings, there was the possibility to explore them in greater detail.

While my MRP attempts to showcase the differences between team-based sports and single-person sports, it has become apparent that as I end this body of work, I am open to the possibility that there is room for improvement and areas of critique. Before I started writing this paper, I was under the assumption that a team-based sport is a sport where individuals are placed together as a group and compete together to achieve one common goal. I believed that a single-person sport was a sport where a person individually competes against other individuals. From this, my argument was created to suggest that team-based sports present themselves as a more difficult space to be open about one's lesbian, gay or bisexual identity compared to single-person sports. I thought that the team-based sporting environment was harder to come out in because more is at risk for athletes. By this, relationships among teammates could possibly begin to deteriorate and coaches can limit an athlete's playing time so that the team's chemistry is not interrupted. After completing my interviews with athletes that I classified as participating in a single-person sport, many of these research participants explained to me that while they may compete individually, they still feel that they are a part of a team-based environment since they are training with other athletes in the same sport on a regular basis. Many of the examples provided by these "single-person sport" athletes are all similar to the "team-based sport" athletes. They all had many close-knit connections with one another and they participated in some form of locker-room talk. Therefore, I realize that there is something going on in single-person sports, in the small and non-

representative sample in my study. This could mean that these athletes' navigation of structural limits and overall environment allow for less intense experiences with homophobia. This can also suggest that the classification system of what a single-person sport and what a team-based sport are differ depending on the individual.

In addition, I believe that while my MRP was able to touch upon race, class and religion to a certain extent in my Findings section, I could have been more intersectional at thoroughly discussing race, class and religion throughout the entirety of my MRP. This could have enhanced my understanding on how athletes with various racial, class and religious backgrounds negotiate their lesbian, gay or bisexual identities. As shown in the Findings section of this paper, it is clear that lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes have to engage with other discriminating factors in their lives. While I had some background knowledge on this, I figured that these intersectional identities would not conflict too much. As proven in my findings, I was incorrect about this to a certain extent. This is helpful in understanding that taking on an intersectional approach to research is useful in understanding how various identity markers intersect and how they relate to one another.

I hope that after having read this MRP, I was able to provide some insight into the sporting environment towards lesbian, gay and bisexual presence. Although my sample size was small, my findings showcase how lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes negotiate their identities in certain sport spaces. They also tell us that the coming out experience differs for every athlete, no matter what gender they identify as or sport that they participate in. Ultimately, the degree to which an athlete decides to remain silent or come out is a personal decision. With that being said, the environment that an athlete is situated in can have a major impact on a lesbian, gay or bisexual athlete's decision to be open or silent about their sexual identity.

Appendix A: Letter of Recruitment

Title: Come Out or Remain Silent? Sport and Gendered Homophobia

Dear (Insert Athlete's Name or Athletic Association—e.g. Ryerson University Varsity Athletics)

My name is Francesco Collura. I am a second year Ryerson University graduate student in the Master of Arts, Communication and Culture program. I am emailing you today regarding my Major Research Paper. My research examines single-person and team-based sport culture. More specifically, I will be conducting interviews in order to better understand the environments of lesbian and gay athletes and what their experiences have been like in sports.

If you have been or are involved in varsity or professional level sports, over the age of 18, and interested in this study, please respond to this message. Alternatively, if you know anyone involved in varsity or professional level sports, over the age of 18, who you think might be interested, please forward them this message.

Time commitment: 45-60 min.

Incentives: Aid in addressing an issue that often goes unquestioned within the realm of sports. Create awareness and acceptance for lesbian and gay athletes.

This study has been approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board (REB). My REB file number is 2018-293.

If you have any questions or concerns or wish to learn more about the study before you make your decision to participate, please contact me or my supervisor Dr. Nicole Neverson at neverson@ryerson.ca or at (416) 979-5000 ext. 2603.

Thank you,

Francesco Collura

Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Agreement—Major Research Paper Interviews

Title: Come Out or Remain Silent? Sport and Gendered Homophobia

This study is being completed in partial fulfillment of Ryerson University Master of Arts, Communication and Culture Program and will be submitted to the Department of Communication and Culture upon completion.

You are being asked to participate in this study. Before you give your consent to be interviewed, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions necessary to ensure that you understand what you will be asked to do.

Research Investigator:

Francesco Collura, Graduate Student, Department of Communication and Culture, Ryerson University.

This study has been approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board (REB). My REB file number is 2018-293.

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Nicole Neverson

Email: neverson@ryerson.ca

Phone Number: (416) 979-5000 ext. 2603.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to understand how coming out as lesbian or gay differs between female and male athletes in team-based and single-person sports.

Description of the Study: Participants will be interviewed by the research investigator, Francesco Collura. The interviews will be audio recorded and span approximately 30-60 minutes. Interviews will be conducted in-person, via Skype or phone call (to be determined once consent is given).

Risks or discomforts: Participation in this study may generate minimal risks and minimal discomfort. Participants may feel uneasy answering and critiquing their sport and sport culture.

Potential risks may include: Psychological risk (e.g. feeling anxious, upset or uncomfortable); Social Risks (e.g. being exposed or embarrassed, potential loss of privacy, damage to reputation); Personal identity being revealed (e.g. participant being identified either directly or inadvertently); Potential group risk; and Vulnerability (individuals or groups in vulnerable circumstances caused by limited access to social goods, such as rights, opportunities and power).

Potential risks will be mitigated by: Explaining the risks and benefits of the research and of being interviewed; Keeping the interviewee's name and specific team/sporting organization confidential in the written report; Allowing the interviewee to abstain from answering any questions or disclosing information they do not feel comfortable with; Addressing any questions or concerns that the interviewee might have throughout the duration of the interview; Referring the interviewee to the 519 Community Centre for support; Referring the interviewee to the research supervisor; or allowing the interviewee to withdraw from the study in any point in time.

Benefits of the study: While I cannot guarantee any individual benefits, participation in this study may help in promoting awareness about homophobia within sport and interviewee's sport culture/sporting environment. This research will also inform spectators, coaches, and teammates about the hardships lesbian and gay athletes endure and what straight allies can do to create a welcoming climate for these athletes.

Confidentiality: No individual, athletic affiliation, or names will be used in the Major Research Paper. Participant data will be securely stored on a password blocked computer file. Pseudonyms will be used to hide names, organizations, university names, etc. Athletes' titles will be slightly altered to hide identifying information. Interview transcripts will be shared with interviewees before completing the analysis section of the Major Research Paper allowing for a review of accuracy.

Audio recording: During the interview process, interviews will be audio recorded using an audio recorder. Audio recordings will be used during the transcription process. This will be done to ensure that everything the interviewee says during the interview process is recorded word-for-word.

Data storage: Audio recordings, transcriptions and detailed notes of the interviews along with signed consent forms will be stored until the completion of my Master of Arts in Communication and Culture has been completed. Audio recordings will be stored on an audio recorder, transcriptions and detailed notes will be stored on my personal secured laptop, and signed consent forms will be stored in a personal file folder. Only the research investigator will have access to the electronic data. Discussions about the data will take place between the research investigator and the research supervisor in private meetings in the supervisor's office or via private Skype/Whatsapp calls.

Data dissemination: There is a possibility that this Major Research Paper will be published as a journal article or book chapter or presented at research conferences.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether to participate will not influence your future relations and/or interactions with Ryerson University. You are not being compensated for participating. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you are providing your consent to appear on audio recordings that will be used in the Major Research Paper, potential publications, and conferences. You are free to withdraw your consent and stop your participation at any time. If this

occurs, the responses you provide will not be used in any fashion. During the interview, you may refuse to answer any question or stop participation altogether.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about this study now, please do not hesitate to ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact the Research Investigator, Francesco Collura, Graduate Student in the Department of Communication and Culture, Ryerson University. Email: fcollura@ryerson.ca

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Ethics Board for information. Research Ethics Board, c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation Ryerson University, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON M5B 2K3, Phone: 416-979-5042. Email: rebchair@ryerson.ca

Agreement to be interviewed: Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you: are an adult age 18 or older; an athlete at the varsity or professional level; have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time.
By signing this consent agreement, you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date Signed

Signature of Research Investigator

Date Signed

Agreement for Audio Recording: Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you: are an adult age 18 or older; an athlete at the varsity or professional level; have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time; understand that the audio of this interview will be recorded; and have been given a copy of this agreement.

By signing this consent agreement, you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date Signed

Signature of Research Investigator

Date Signed

Appendix C: Interview Guide

General Questions

1. What sport do you participate in?
2. What level of sport do you participate in?
3. Do you openly identify as LGBTQ?
4. Do you know any teammates or fellow athletes who openly identify as LGBTQ?
5. Have you or anyone in your sport ever used anti-LGBTQ comments on or off the field of play? If so, provide examples.
6. Why might athletes participate in homophobic behavior or express homophobic ideas?
7. What might hinder an athlete from openly identifying as gay in the sport you participate in?
8. If you have encountered LGBTQ athletes in the sport you participate/participated in, have they openly identified as lesbian or gay after they retired or during their playing careers? Do you know how they arrived at their decision to come out or stay in the closet?
9. Do you think sports can provide a safe space for lesbian or gay athletes? If yes, how and why?

Team/Single Person Sport/Varsity/Professional Sport Questions

1. Do you believe team sports are more difficult spaces to openly identify as gay compared to single-person sports? Why/how?
2. Do you think the different levels of sport (i.e., varsity, amateur, professional) contribute to athletes remaining silent or open about their sexual identities? Why/how?
3. Are you familiar with the term “locker room talk?” [Explain if required]. How prevalent is “locker room talk” in your sport?

Administered only if interviewee openly identifies as LGBTQ

1. Was it hard to come out in your sport? Why or Why not? [Or if out in other parts of life but not sport ask] Do you feel it would be hard to openly identify as LGBTQ in the sport that you participate in? Why or why not?

Administered only if interviewee identifies as a Female Athlete

1. Why might there be an assumption that all female athletes are lesbians?
2. How might the experience of coming out as a woman differ from the experience of coming out as a man? Explain.
3. Have teams, athletes, coaches (etc.) questioned you or other athletes for being LGBTQ or too masculine? Has your femininity ever been questioned? If so, how?

Administered only if interviewee identifies as a Male Athlete

1. Why might there be an assumption that all male athletes are heterosexual?
2. How might the experience of coming out as a man differ from the experience of coming out as a woman? Explain.
3. Have teams, athletes, coaches (etc.) questioned you or other athletes for being LGBTQ or too feminine? Has your masculinity even been questioned? If so, how?

Race Questions

1. Have you ever experienced or encountered racism in the sport you participate in? Explain.
2. Do coaches, teammates, opponents or fans engage in racist behavior or make racist commentary? Explain.

Religion Questions

1. Does religion play a major role in your sport for you as an individual or other athletes that you know? Explain.

Class Questions

1. Is a person's class identity (wealth status) ever an issue in the sport you participate in? Explain.
2. Do coaches, teammates, opponents or fans act negatively towards players with a lower economic status in the sport you participate in? Explain.

Contract Questions

1. Are/were there agreements in your contract(s) that prohibit(ed) you from attending LGBTQ spaces (e.g. bars/clubs)? If so, can you provide examples? Explain the parameters of these agreements.
2. Can you provide some insight into why you think these conditions were included in your contract?
3. Did you feel uncomfortable signing the contract? Explain.
4. How did you navigate the reality of your contract conditions and those of your "out" or closeted self?

Appendix D: Research Participant Demographic Information

Participant 1 (2018):

- Self-identifies as female;
- Is a racialized individual;
- Attended an institution in Massachusetts, United States;
- Participated in varsity level track during the late-1990s; and
- Openly identifies as lesbian.

Participant 2 (2018):

- Self-identifies as female;
- Is a racialized individual;
- Attends an institution in Ontario, Canada;
- Currently participates in varsity level hockey; and
- Is sexually fluid and currently identifies as bisexual.

Participant 3 (2018):

- Self-identifies as female;
- Is a professional fitness athlete and participates in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu; and
- Openly identifies as lesbian.

Participant 4 (2018):

- Self-identifies as male;
- Attended an institution in Ontario, Canada;
- Participated in varsity level running and swimming during the mid-2000s; and
- Openly identifies as heterosexual.

Participant 5 (2018):

- Self-identifies as male;
- Attended an institution in Ontario, Canada;
- Participated in varsity and competitive level hockey during the early-2010s; and
- Openly identifies as gay.

Participant 6 (2018):

- Self-identifies as male;
- Is a racialized individual;
- Attended an institution in Ontario, Canada;
- Participated in varsity level basketball during the mid-2000s; and
- Openly identifies as heterosexual.

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Interviews:

Participant 1 (2018, October 9). Personal Interview.

Participant 2 (2018, October 17). Personal Interview.

Participant 3 (2018, October 22). Personal Interview.

Participant 4 (2018, November 6). Personal Interview.

Participant 5 (2018, November 15). Personal Interview.

Participant 6 (2018, December 2). Personal Interview.