

Inclusion and Normalization of Queer Identities in Women's College Sport

Mallory Mann

Pacific Lutheran University

Vikki Krane

Bowling Green State University

While recent studies paint an optimistic picture of acceptance and inclusion of queer athletes, it would be naive to assume homonegativism no longer exists. In this study, we interviewed 13 queer female athletes to understand their college team sport climates and how heteronormativity is reinforced and confronted in women's college sport. Using a feminist cultural studies approach, two types of team climates emerged from the data: *inclusive climates* and *transitioning climates*. On inclusive teams, queer and heterosexual members overtly communicated their norm of inclusion to new teammates, normalized diverse sexualities, and consistently engaged in inclusive behaviors. Transitioning teams were described as neither inclusive nor hostile initially, and, while they did not have a history of inclusion, they transitioned to becoming more outwardly accepting of diverse sexual identities. On transitioning teams, queer athletes surveyed the landscape before sharing their sexual orientation, after which the team evolved to become inclusive. All the athletes talked about awkward moments, occasional incidents of nonsupport, and the benefits of inclusion. These findings reveal emerging cracks in hegemonic heteronormativity in women's sport, especially among athletes.

Keywords: heteronormativity, inclusion, lesbian athletes, sexuality

Sport often is described as a heteronormative context that adheres to what Judith Butler (2006) refers to as the heterosexual matrix. Heteronormativity reflects a pervasive cultural bias that favors heterosexuality and disregards the existence of other sexual identities (Krane & Symons, 2014). It is hegemonic in that the privileging of heterosexuality is so routine that it seems normal and persists uncontested. The heterosexual matrix depicts the hegemonic supposition that biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation align in a predictable manner to create the socially-accepted masculine, heterosexual male, and feminine, heterosexual female. Because gender and sexuality often are conflated in sport, it is presumed that feminine females are heterosexual and masculine females are lesbian. Female masculinity often confers marginalized status in U.S. college sport, whereas feminine and, presumably heterosexual, female athletes garner privilege (Kauer & Krane, 2013). Though, as Butler contends, gender and sex are performative; people engage in actions and behaviors that replicate and reinforce the feminine/masculine and male/female binary categories. Although people have agency to perform gender and sex in a myriad of ways, cultural expectations and social rewards encourage hegemonic representations which then normalize the heterosexual matrix. As Waldron (2016) expressed, "despite the fluidity of gender and sexuality through performative acts, repeated performances of woman, feminine, and heterosexual lead to the taken-for-granted assumption or normalization that these concepts are innate and stable (Butler, 2006)" (p. 336).

In sport, the heterosexual matrix is reified, leading to the privileging of masculinity and heterosexuality (Kauer & Krane, 2013) and creating a dominant narrative that mythologizes lesbians (Waldron, 2016). In particular, Waldron theorized this narrative, or dominant discourse, reinforces the myth that female athletes, because they participate in the masculine domain of sport, are read as lesbian, and lesbian is perceived as a monolithic identity category. A female athlete is perceived masculine and therefore lesbian, in which case, the cultural logic continues, lesbians are masculine or butch. Labeling female athletes as masculine, butch, or lesbian often leads to discrimination (Melton, 2013; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009).

Accordingly, research has found that lesbian athletes have faced challenges and barriers based on their assumed and/or acknowledged sexual orientation (e.g., Griffin, 1998; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane, 1997; Melton & Cunningham, 2012). All female athletes contend with the stereotype that masculine-perceived female athletes are lesbian (Kauer & Krane, 2006; Veri, 1999; Waldron, 2016). Being labeled lesbian invokes stigma that limits opportunities, experiences, and status of sportswomen (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). As such, female athletes often face homonegativism, which includes discrimination, negative treatment, negative comments or jokes, blatant hostility, and possibly violence aimed at sexual minority athletes (Krane & Symons, 2014). When situated in heteronormative or homonegative sport settings, lesbian athletes may feel pressured to maintain a feminine image and/or engage in actions to conceal their sexual identity. These added burdens can lead to feelings of stress and social isolation, or divert psychological and emotional energy away from athletic performance (Krane et al., 2010; Melton, 2013).

Mann is with the Department of Kinesiology, Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA. Krane is with the School of Human Movement, Sport, & Leisure Studies, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH. Address author correspondence to Mallory Mann at mannmf@plu.edu.

While much has been written about the heteronormative culture of women's college sport, research also shows that when lesbian or bisexual women come out to their teammates, they are met with supportive reactions (Fink, Burton, Farrell, & Parker, 2012; Fynes & Fisher, 2016; Kauer & Krane, 2006). Prior to disclosing lesbian and bisexual identities, these athletes typically will consider the team climate and choose to come out if it is perceived as accepting. The presence of what Fink et al. (2012) called trailblazers, other lesbian athletes who are out on teams, is one indication that it is safe to share their sexuality. Initially, some athletes in these studies were apprehensive about coming out to teammates and, then, were pleasantly surprised at their support and acceptance. Hiding one's sexual identity from their teammates can be taxing and wearying (Krane, 1997; Malterud & Bjorkman, 2016), yet coming out also can be unnerving. Stoelting (2011), in her examination of why lesbian athletes chose to come out to their teammates, found they wanted to be honest and real with their teammates. This desire for honesty led them to be open about their sexual identity. Similarly, the lesbian athletes interviewed by Fink and colleagues (2012) emphasized that they wanted to be themselves.

In women's college sport today, many athletes are involved in ally programs (e.g., *You Can Play*, *SportSafe*, *It Gets Better*) in which individual teams or whole athletic departments promote queer inclusion. At the same time, we still hear of places where being openly lesbian or bisexual is not supported (Michon & Demers, 2018; Symons, O'Sullivan, & Polman, 2017; Zeigler, 2015). For example, in her biography, Brittney Griner describes how her college coach encouraged her to remain silent about her lesbian identity (Griner & Hovey, 2014). Athlete Ally's (2017) *Athletic Equality Index* reveals that many programs in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Power Five conferences score quite low on support for "LGBTQ student-athletes, coaches, administrators, staff, and fans." Given the wide-ranging climates for lesbian and bisexual athletes in contemporary college sport, we are interested in learning what occurs in various sport settings that supports or transgresses heteronormativity. To disrupt normative discourse surrounding sexual orientation, particularly in sport, we use the term queer as an umbrella term inclusive of the many ways sexual minority athletes may identify themselves as well as to confront the heteronormative bias in sport (Krane & Symons, 2014). While we use this term to be as inclusive as possible, it is important to point out that not all lesbian and bisexual athletes will use queer as their self-identity. We do not presume a stable or monolithic queer identity and recognize that identity labels are representative of a specific place and time. As feminist cultural studies scholars, we consider common, everyday behaviors that reinforce or contest gendered patterns and create power hierarchies in sport. The research questions guiding this study are: (a) How do queer female athletes describe the climate of their college sport teams; and, (b) In what ways is heteronormativity reinforced and confronted in women's college sport?

Method

Participants

Thirteen college female athletes aged 19 to 23 years old participated in this study. Each athlete was either a current member of their college sport team or within 6 months of graduation. Athletes competed in six different NCAA sports, including basketball, crew, field hockey, golf, softball, and track and field. Two participants

identified themselves as two-sport athletes. Seven athletes participated at the NCAA Division I level, one played NCAA Division II sports, and five athletes played on NCAA Division III varsity teams. Participants represented colleges and universities across the country (e.g., Southeast, Northeast, Midwest, South, North, and West). Athletes self-identified their race, gender, and sexual orientation. Eight athletes identified as White or Caucasian, three as African American or Black, one as Mexican, and one as Chinese and White. They all self-identified as female and specified their preferred pronouns as she/her. The athletes self-identified their sexual orientation as lesbian ($n = 5$), gay ($n = 3$), or bisexual ($n = 3$). Two athletes chose not to label their sexuality.

Procedure

Upon receiving approval from the university institutional review board, we utilized a snowball technique (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) to recruit participants. We began by asking queer athletes who one of the authors knew or other key informants (e.g., sport psychology professors) to reach out to potential participants. The informants shared a script we prepared inviting lesbian, bisexual, or transgender athletes on women's college sport teams to participate in interviews about their sport experiences. The script also included information about the study procedure, confidentiality, and contact information for the first author. When potential participants contacted the lead author, she explained the purpose and procedure of the study; asked if they preferred a telephone, in-person, or Skype interview format; and, if interested, scheduled a time for an interview. Then, we e-mailed an informed consent document to the athlete. We conducted interviews at times convenient for the participants; most were done by telephone, with one interview occurring via Skype. We encouraged athletes to select a quiet, comfortable, and private location for the interviews. Prior to beginning, the interviewer reminded athletes of the study purpose and rationale, reviewed the informed consent information, and obtained verbal consent. The queer athletes participated in two interviews, which were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

We chose to offer telephone and Skype interview formats so that we could reach out to athletes throughout the United States. This generation of college athletes are what Ward, Gott, and Hoare (2015) refer to as "phone savvy," or accustomed to and comfortable using their phones in daily life. Phone interviews also increase convenience as the speakers each can select comfortable nearby locations and neither incur financial nor time costs to travel to a mutual location. While a shortcoming of phone interviews is the inability to observe facial expressions and body language, conversely, this lack of visual cues will make some participants more relaxed and comfortable, particularly when discussing sensitive topics (Holt, 2010; Mealer & Jones, 2014; Ward et al., 2015). This relative anonymity actually may enhance the interviewer-researcher rapport (Ward et al., 2015).

The first interviews were unstructured (Berg & Lune, 2012) and lasted 60–120 min. Unstructured interviews elicit a conversational tone as they begin with a single, broad, open-ended question and rely on general probes rather than specific questions as researchers assume "they do not know in advance what all the necessary questions are" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 110). The fluid format invites participants to share important aspects of their experiences as they identify them as opposed to simply responding to questions the researchers presume are important (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The initial interview began with icebreaker questions

Trustworthiness

Establishing rapport was an essential feature (Berg & Lune, 2012) of this study that helped elicit open, honest, and complete responses from participants. Rapport building is a continuous process that begins with the first contact with athletes. From the recruitment e-mail through the second interview, rapport was cultivated and enriched through transparent descriptions of the study rationale, confidentiality, procedures, and expectations of participants. Athletes also consistently were provided with choices throughout the research process to encourage their autonomy (e.g., mode of communication, time and date of the interview, topics discussed during interviews). Before each interview began, the interviewer, again, allowed time to discuss participants' questions as well engage in small talk prior to seeking consent. During each discussion, the interviewer connected with participants through shared stories, which sustained a conversational tone, enhanced rapport, and encouraged athletes to share personal and potentially sensitive stories about their sport experiences.

Data Analysis

In line with our feminist cultural studies framework, we recognize that language provides a powerful tool for reinforcing and challenging hegemonic assumptions around gender, race, and sexuality. Therefore, we include athletes' self-identified descriptions of their social identities when quoting them. We do so to assert that how people choose to identify often is a personal and political choice and we made a conscious decision to allow female college athletes to represent themselves in personally meaningful ways. In doing so, we also distinguish between our choice of

academic language (i.e., queer or LGBT) and self-definitions situated in personal, historical, and cultural contexts (e.g., gay or not using a label). We honor our commitment to privileging self-identity in the discussion that follows by attaching multiple self-identified descriptors when introducing athletes' stories. In so doing, we aim to disrupt presumptions of Whiteness, heterosexuality, and homonormativity by acknowledging their various, intersectional identities. This also serves to situate their lived experiences. That these labels might feel cumbersome at times is part of the intent: to make multiple identities visible and bring intersecting social identities into readers' consciousness.

Findings

Based on athletes' descriptions of their teams and teammates, we identified two overarching team climates. Many of the athletes came onto teams that already had an *inclusive climate*. Here, they readily received cues that made them feel comfortable and welcome as queer athletes. Other team settings were in the process of *transitioning* toward becoming inclusive. No one described their team environment as hostile toward queer athletes, although there were a few individual athletes who were callous toward their queer teammates. It should be noted that these are not the only types of climates queer college athletes may experience. Rather, these settings reflect the stories of this group of women. And, although we discuss them separately, all climates occur on a continuum. The boundaries between the climates are fuzzy as, occasionally, athletes described inclusive climates with some elements of their team still in transition. In the following sections, we describe the characteristics of these two types of climates and how the athletes reacted within them.

Inclusive Team Climates

Many of the interviewed athletes became members of teams that already had norms of inclusion. Here athletes engaged in *introducing inclusive norms*, *normalizing diverse sexualities*, and *being inclusive*. In these settings, there often were other openly queer team members. While having other out queer athletes was one sign of an inclusive team, according to these athletes, climates could be accepting without that. More importantly, current members of inclusive teams, queer or heterosexual, purposefully communicated their norm of inclusion to new teammates.

When asked about her college sport environment, Victoria, a Black lesbian basketball player,² remarked, "Everyone on my team pretty much accepts [queer athletes]. No one really judges anyone. We're all really close . . . The way I dress or the way I choose to live my life, it doesn't matter to them." Having inclusive norms creates a team atmosphere where all athletes feel valued, as revealed in the following team description:

I think after you row a couple 5Ks with someone, you start to feel more comfortable. Um, I think, my team is my family. I remember the first 5K, we all finally got to the finish line and all I could think of was, "Wow, we all did this, we finished!" You know, our hands are bleeding, we're tired, we're sunburned, I have saltwater in my eyes, saltwater in my bleeding hands, this oar – I just want to get this oar out of my hands as soon as possible, but everybody behind me feels the exact same way and none of us gave up. And, I don't think you find that trust and that pride in anyone else very easily. So, it's love. I love 'em. When you're on a team, there's really no hiding

from them, so it's going to come out one way or another. (Elizabeth, a Caucasian rower who chose not to label her sexuality)

When discussing her track team, Harper, a White gay dual-sport athlete, said:

The track team never looked at you as gay first. To those people, you were an athlete. They would joke around, but in a humorous way, not a harmful way. They were the kind of people that if you did your job right, nothing else mattered. If you hurt the team, they had a problem with you. But not because one is gay or straight, it is because you didn't get your job done.

Later, Harper offered, "I blended in. I was just allowed to be who I am and no one made me change that." Although this quote could be interpreted to denote a *don't ask, don't tell* climate, these athletes explicitly framed them as examples of inclusion. That "it didn't matter" referred to the openness and normalization of varied sexual identities. Sexual identities did not serve to mark team members; instead, queer athletes were judged similar to every other member of the team, based on their contributions as a quality teammate.

Introducing Inclusive Norms. Several teams had athlete-initiated introductory activities that directly addressed athletes' sexuality. These events conveyed a compassionate interest in the new team members. For example, Elizabeth, a Caucasian rower on the West coast who chose not to label her sexuality, described:

I think it's part of initiation into the crew team basically, as my team gets into the van somebody pipes up, "So are you or aren't you?" And, it's just curiosity. They're not invasive about it. It's a strange form of bonding. Once my team starts to get to know you, they're curious, they'd like to know your sexuality. So, I think one of the first things that comes out is, "Well, what are your pronouns? What is your orientation? What would you like to be or preferred to be called?"

Another athlete on the same team described an activity that specifically focused on supporting transgender teammates. Gabby, a Chinese and White rower who chose not to label her sexuality, said:

This year is a little different than previous years. We have more incoming novice rowers/coxswains than ever before. We did a PGP [preferred gender pronoun] circle with the team at the beginning of the season, which is the first time that has happened in the couple of years that I've been here. There are three incoming first-years who don't use she/her pronouns and one person who was a coxswain last year but is taking the semester off [who] came out as trans this year.

While these athletes were on a team at a West Coast university known for its open and accepting climate, several other athletes told similar stories. Harper, a White gay dual-sport athlete from the Midwest, described an event that took place in the university cafeteria after her first softball team practice. Someone asked who on the team identified as gay. Harper was the only one whose hand "shot up in the air." Immediately, a teammate sitting across from her said, "'Good for you' and high fives me in front of everybody." These situations playfully communicated that it was okay to be queer and opened the door for new team members to come out if they so desired. These queer athletes recalled these introductory

events as important early moments when they realized their teammates were supportive and inclusive. As Harper stated:

They were fine. They were just curious about my life 'cause they didn't really know me. So, that's what it was and it was just a bunch of sisters asking you questions, you know, just a big family. I just became close to all of them. Like, there was really no negativity about it.

On some teams, revealing their inclusive climate began even before players joined the team, during on-campus recruiting visits. During these trips, there often is time when the recruit is with members of the team without the coach; this is when players have more freedom to speak openly with potential teammates. Sofia, a Mexican gay softball player in the Midwest, said one potential teammate bluntly asked, "So are you cool with gay people?" And, I was like, 'Yeah, 'cause I'm gay.'" Such openness, by both athletes, communicated a lot about the team setting and Sofia's potential fit within it. Olivia, an African American bisexual basketball player in the South, described that during her visit, her recruiting hosts took her out

to a gay club. And, everyone asked me, "Are you cool with this 'cause we don't want to take you if you're not cool." And, I was down. I was just there to have fun and do whatever. I mean it wasn't like I was uncomfortable in any type of way. They made sure I was comfortable and stuff, and I liked the fact that they would be that open about that 'cause, you know, then I knew that I could tell them things too.

These tactics might mean that some recruits choose not to attend these universities, but, it appears that, for these teammates, it was more important to set the tone by expressing their inclusive team norms early.

Normalizing Diverse Sexualities. On inclusive teams, athletes normalized LBT identities through open, honest conversations. Queer athletes mentioned that their teammates moved beyond simply recognizing their sexuality to asking about their dating life. Ava, a White softball player at a university in the Midwest noted, "[My teammates] just like bring it up, like they'll ask how my girlfriend is doing." Olivia, an African American bisexual basketball player in the South, described her teammates' reaction when she began dating a woman as: "My teammates were just like as if it was a guy, you know, [they] accepted the fact that I was in a relationship and all the cute stuff and all the little annoying little things that people do when they're in a relationship with someone." Victoria, a Black lesbian basketball player at a religious Southern university, said:

Whenever we're getting ready for practice or anything, we talk about everything: who people are dating, how's the relationship going, you know, stuff like that. Everybody pretty much shares their life with everybody. We'll go out as a team and [my girlfriend] will go. Some of my teammates might bring their boyfriend or girlfriend and, you know, we're just all a family when it comes to stuff like that.

In a similar manner, Sofia, a Mexican gay softball player in the Midwest, talked about her teammates' reaction to her recent engagement: "A lot of my teammates found out, and they were like, 'Yay, invite me to the wedding.' [They were] blowing up my Facebook, calling me constantly about wedding info." This reaction was no different than it would have been for a teammate becoming engaged to a man.

On teams that normalized queer sexuality and relationships, athletes were comfortable being themselves, talking openly about themselves, and joking around about their sexuality. Inclusion as standard fare was important because, as Harper, a White gay two-sport athlete, expressed, "They made me feel like I could be myself and say what I felt and they wouldn't look at me any differently." Harper provided the following example:

I had this one meet where the thrower from another team caught my eye. I remember making the comment in front of the majority of my team that I wouldn't mind cuddling up with her until it was time to throw. And, they just laughed and made comments like "you would say that" or "you should go give it a try and see how it goes." All being said with a smile on their face. I was able to make sexual comments about girls just like how the other girls made them about men.

Layla, an African American lesbian basketball player, also talked of joking around with her teammates. She would call one of her heterosexual teammates her "boo" and used playful pickup lines like "hey sexy" on others. "I don't really filter anything I say or do, and I think that helped with people just accept[ing] me for who I am." Layla also expressed that these interactions served as "a big step" in creating an accepting team climate.

Being Inclusive. The athletes provided a wide array of examples demonstrating what occurs in inclusive team climates. For example, teammates would reach out to players who were gender nonconforming to help them feel more comfortable or supported. Lily, a White gay golfer, described a situation at the NCAA Division II tournament:

There's this one day where like everyone dresses up. And, all my teammates were wearing dresses; but, prior to nationals, one of my teammates was like, "Let's go shopping and find something you'll actually like to wear." Like, they have like a goal of making me comfortable all the time. It's really nice, it upsets them that I was ever uncomfortable.

Gabby, a Chinese and White rower who chose not to label her sexuality, recalled:

At the regattas, sometimes I'll feel awkward. It's not a sexuality thing, but I don't shave. I really like being proud of my body, and I feel ugly when I shave, like I have to be ashamed of the way my body is. So, I have to like really force myself to "alright have courage, wear the unsuit, it's okay." And, I definitely feel more comfortable because that isn't a problem for a lot of the girls on our team. They're like, "Whatever, I'm not going to shave." And, so I feel a little more like it's okay, like I blend in, like there are other people like me on my team.

Across the inclusive teams, teammates created space for queer athletes to comfortably express themselves. Consequently, the queer athletes appreciated and benefited from their progressive team climates.

Team Climates in Transition

A number of the interviewed athletes were on teams that were neither considered inclusive nor described as hostile. These teams were not perceived by the interviewed athletes to have a history of inclusion; though, during these athletes' tenure on these teams, they were transitioning and teammates exhibited more outward acceptance of diverse sexual identities. In this section, we describe the

Therefore, prior to inviting in, the queer athletes often weighed potential backlash from teammates against their own discomfort being closeted. Lily's (White gay golfer) experiences reveal the conflict and trepidation inherent in some athletes. She said, "I wanted to feel like I had an important role on the team and like my teammates respected me, so that hopefully less would change when I came out." Yet she also admitted, "I prepared so much to be completely disappointed in everyone's reaction." Though, later, her teammates demonstrated clear support and acceptance. Lily provides a lengthy, but telling, explanation of the personal cost of concealing her lesbian identity and the benefits experienced after coming out to her teammates:

It was like December of my junior year. I just got really, really burnt out of trying to make excuses for why I wasn't dating guys who liked me and why I wasn't interested in any of the things my friends are really interested in. And, yeah, there have been situations at like parties where I would like leave parties because I would get to a point where I was about to tell one of my teammates because I was so unhappy. Like, I was really, really depressed. It's sooo exhausting, and people don't really understand. Unless they've been in that position, they just don't get how exhausting it is to just like live a lie. Everything you say, you have to be careful. There were a few times when my friends would say things I found offensive because I'm gay, but I had to be careful with what I said to defend the LGBT population and not necessarily myself. One time a friend of mine asked me why it was so offensive to me; and, instead of telling the truth, I told her that I had friends from home who were gay. It was just exhausting, so I kind of just decided that, if it made them uncomfortable, that was their own kind of ignorance. And, my coach is gay, and I had talked to her about it a lot, and she kind of just encouraged me to just stop lying.

Before I came out I would cancel plans with people, and I would avoid talking to my parents and sisters about anything personal. Now that I've come out to my family, we are much closer than we were before I came out. We talk about more personal things such as my relationship, and we have a much better relationship. Yeah, it was bad. But, I've never been happier now. So, looking back, life would've been so much easier if I was just open from the beginning. I think just like going out, when we go to parties or whatever, I can be myself. I can wear what I would actually choose to wear. Like, in the past, I was always trying to look girly, and, I am not a girly person. Now, I can just be myself around them.

The athletes on transitioning teams eventually decided to invite in their teammates partially due to their own need to be true to themselves and to alleviate the stress of concealing their sexuality. While they believed and hoped their teammates would be accepting, they also had prepared how they may react should they receive negative reactions from teammates.

Once the decision was made to invite in teammates, the path to doing so differed for each of these athletes. Some chose to approach a few trusted teammates first, whereas others chose to invite in the whole team at once. Emily, a White gay field hockey player, described:

I formed really good relationships with a girl on the team who was two years older than me. It was pretty immediate that we became friends; and, so, she was the first person that I talked to

about [my sexuality]. She received me wonderfully and she was just like, you know, "Our team is chill, it's fine and we're at [east coast university], which is a pretty liberal place, you know. Like, even if there aren't a lot of gay athletes or any gay players on our team, the girls here are totally open, and we're surrounded by it at [university]. It's not a new thing for us really." So, um, she like kind of told me that I didn't have anything to worry about and that if anyone did react negatively that it would not be well received by the team. It meant a lot because she was an upperclassman, so I knew she knew people on the team, and she was established on the team, so I felt like she had a better sense of the situation.

After talking with her older teammate, Emily eventually disclosed her sexual orientation to the rest of her teammates at the same time. During her junior year, Grace, a White lesbian field hockey player on a separate East coast team, invited in her teammates on a team road trip:

Our coach had us do this "three things" game. It was on one of our long bus trips between like Philadelphia and Maine, about 6 hours. We had to bring like three things that told something about ourselves. We could bring pictures or an object or something like that, just a get to know you game. Some people brought really serious things and other people just brought three goofy, fun things about themselves. It was kind of up to interpretation. And, one of the things I brought was one of the things my girlfriend gave me, and that was when I just kind of like told them the basic story of like us meeting.

Lily, a White gay golfer, chose to invite her teammates in one-by-one:

When I came out to my team, I came out to each of them individually, in the way that I thought was going to give me the best results. So, I came out to my two best friends on the team first and then a couple other people. Then, the two I thought were going to react the worst, last.

As these athletes invited in their teammates, they received supportive reactions from them. When Emily, a White gay field hockey player, invited in her teammates, they reacted by saying, "Oh, I hope you weren't scared to say this or anything like that. I hope you know that we're all totally cool with it and that you don't feel scared because you're the only gay girl on the team." These reactions were very affirming. Lily, a White gay golfer, described, "They were all excited. They thought it was the greatest thing ever. And, they were like, 'Oh, now we're going to find you girls.'"

One difference between revealing one's sexuality in inclusive versus transitioning teams was the depth of acceptance. As Grace, a White lesbian field hockey player, stated, "I would say as far as the team dynamic, it didn't like change my position in the team. Like I said, there was like no other discussion of it." Though the immediate reaction was positive and supportive in both climates, queer athletes' sexuality on some transitioning teams was recognized but not openly discussed.

An Evolving Climate. In these climates, initially, heteronormativity prevailed but not necessarily in a hostile or homonegative manner. The assumption that all players would be heterosexual eroded as more open conversations about diverse sexuality occurred among teammates. Although describing transitioning teams as tolerant and generally accepting, some of the queer

athletes, like Grace, remained guarded or socially distant from their teammates:

I'm also not exceptionally close to many of my teammates. [We are] close as teammates, but many of them I don't know many personal, personal stuff. Like, with field hockey and stuff, sometimes there was just so much "team time" that it was good to have a separate social group for me.

Emily, a White gay field hockey player, discussed similar feelings.

I knew when I came into school that I wanted to try to branch out and meet as many different types of people at [university] as possible. I happened to meet a group of people that I really clicked with who were outside my team. I've surrounded myself with people who um either are gay or know more gay people.

That some queer athletes on teams without other sexual minorities chose to develop close friendships with people outside of their teams should not be surprising. Though their (mostly heterosexual) teammates accepted their sexuality, in their free time they wanted to socialize with other queer people.

Part of becoming an inclusive team meant having open dialog, which led to the normalizing of LBT identities. On transitioning teams, the onus was often on queer athletes to initiate these conversations. Emily, a White gay field hockey player noted:

Initially, I don't think they knew how to approach it. I don't think they knew that I was okay just going out with them and having fun and being at a party and letting them do their thing. Like, I think that some people just don't want to ask me how to act in a situation or how I want to be treated in a situation, so they just don't communicate.

The queer athletes sometimes made the choice to respond authentically to uncomfortable moments with teammates and to encourage questions rather than shutting them down. Lily, a White gay golfer, said, "[My teammates] ask some really awkward questions, but it's nice because they are so comfortable with it." A few athletes mentioned having to initiate conversations and make concerted efforts to reassure teammates who felt uneasy about how to approach them. Emily, a White gay field hockey player on the East Coast, said, "I try to make being gay seem like not a big deal, so I'm not the anomaly. There are a lot of people like me, so I try to just like normalize it." She later articulated:

I've had to reach out a little more to my teammates because they formed easier connections with each other 'cause they see someone that's just like them. I have to show them that I'm totally into the team and say, "You know, I totally like you, too." I have to definitely make that clear. [For example], every sport team at [university] is paired, like every female team has a brother team that they're paired with. Um, so our brother team is the men's ice hockey team. Every year, we have a mixer with them, and a girl is paired with one of the boys. People like usually didn't really know how to approach me about it. Like, am I comfortable with this? Am I not comfortable with this? And, for me, it was like, I was fine with it, so, making it explicit, I was like, "No, you know, it's awkward for all of you." So, I guess, asserting that I was still comfortable enough in that situation and that they didn't need to be worried about me just because I'm gay. They just didn't know how to approach it, so they just didn't know how comfortable I was

with the whole thing. I was fine with it because I like meeting new people, and I like having fun and playing games like that.

Although revealing a heteronormative team/athletic department custom, Emily used the occasion to further dialogue about inclusion. A characteristic of some transitioning teams was that, while individual acceptance of queer teammates grew, broader oppressive social forces were not necessarily challenged.

Some of the queer athletes chose to approach overtly heteronormative moments as teachable moments. Grace, a White lesbian field hockey player on the East Coast said, "I'm not the most activist type person, but I think I get to be an example of this being a real issue that affects people my teammates knew." She described:

One of the things I said in front of my team was that one of our seniors was dating a guy off the basketball team. [She] never had to like stand up in front of everyone and say, "Oh, by the way, guess what, [he] and I are dating, yay!" And, I feel like I never needed to do that because straight couples don't have to do that, so why should I have to stand up and be like, "Oh, hey, by the way, [my girlfriend] and I are dating, yay?" It's one of the things I've thought about. When [my] straight teammates started dating people, they didn't announce it to the team, so I didn't feel like I had to.

Even when the probes into their personal lives felt invasive, the queer athletes interpreted their teammates' actions as well-intentioned and openly answered their questions. These types of conversations occurred in both transitioning and inclusive team settings. Importantly, these short conversations created more openness and trust among the teammates. Transitioning teams opened up new spaces, sometimes awkwardly, to learn about each other. In the process they dialogued, empathized, and appreciated one another. There was not a single path for transitioning climates; athletes on some teams readily began confronting heteronormativity, whereas, for others, social change moved more slowly.

Benefits of Inclusion

Having an inclusive team atmosphere benefited all athletes. Both inclusive and transitioning teams created spaces where diverse sexualities were supported, expected, and, ultimately, normalized. As previously described, these settings allowed for open dialogue about sexualities. Victoria, a Black basketball player in the South, said, when her teammates "actually like show me that they care about me personally, then that allows me to open up to them."

This sociability opened an avenue for joking, humor, and teasing, stalwarts of locker room culture. Being able to make fun of one another and oneself was both a result and characteristic of inclusion. This group of queer athletes spoke of their lighthearted conversations. Harper, a White gay dual-sport athlete said:

It was kind of like a joke, my sexuality, because I was like the only out girl on the [track] team at that time. But, it wasn't like they made fun of me or they hurt me. It was just something we could talk about, you know. I was involved in the conversation.

Sara, a White lesbian basketball player at a university in the Midwest, recalled:

Most of the conversations that happened with [teammates] that identified as straight were sarcastic, joking conversations like, "Nah, you already know I'm not on that." But, I think joking and laughing about it was a way to talk about it. I think when

attracted to women, in general. I told her some of my experiences, and it was a turning point for my friend. I was somebody she could turn to and ask about my experiences.

As women's sport has become more inclusive, there also seems to be an interesting twist on what, in the past, was referred to as the negative impact of lesbian stereotypes. Many of these queer athletes expressed that, because of the way they looked or acted, they were recognized as queer. Previously, such stereotyping was considered harmful as it had led to biased reactions. Today, however, at least for these athletes, it seems that presumptions about one's sexuality was an accepted practice in inclusive climates. It provided an avenue for communicating team norms and opportunities to disclose sexual identities. As Harper, a White gay dual-sport athlete, unequivocally described herself:

I'm like one of those "hundred footers." You kind of just look at me and you know. It's if you can see 'em from a hundred feet away, and you know that they're not straight. I'm the girl who wears the sweat pants everyday on the quad. Or, if I'm not in sweat pants, I'm in jeans and boots, you know. I don't wear make-up. I'm like one of those people that you look at and you're like, "Oh yeah, she's gay." I didn't dress up like the normal girls do. I don't wear makeup, I don't wear tight jeans and I always have a ball cap on.

Similarly Sofia, a gay Mexican softball player, noted, “I’ve got a Mohawk, and, I don’t know, I’m pretty gay, I guess. Most females who are straight don’t have a Mohawk. I mean it’s a male kind of cut to your hair.” These athletes acknowledged and appreciated that their teammates could decipher their sexuality, eliminating the need for an explicit coming-out proclamation.

Stereotypes about lesbians in sport sometimes created a path toward acceptance of sexually-diverse teammates. Though, at the same time, historic negative connotations of this same stereotype persist, particularly for queer athletes with minoritized racial identities. All of the queer athletes of color in this study addressed the intersection of racial and sexual stereotyping. As Olivia, an African American bisexual basketball player, explained, “It also ties into basketball, too, ‘cause like more Black girls are gay or bisexual than there are White girls that are gay or bisexual. . . . So, yeah, if you put African American and basketball together, yeah, it’s like an automatic stereotype.” Layla, an African American lesbian basketball player, lamented:

White women can dress tomboyish and still not necessarily be labeled as a homosexual. You wouldn't typically see a Black man with a woman that's dressed tomboyish. I mean, it's like if you go out to a grocery store, some people won't look me directly in the eye. Or, like, they miss little things, which will cause them to address me like "sir" or do some weird stuff. I feel like if I was White like you would get greeted differently, which would cause people to not misconstrue your gender. Being the individual that I am – Black, tall, athletic, and I have dreadlocks – puts me in the stereotypical category of a typical lesbian. If I was White and dressed how I did with straight hair, I could possibly be put into the category of tomboy, but people wouldn't second guess my sexuality.

Sofia, a Mexican softball player, described her experiences with her fiancé, who is multiracial:

[she is] half Black and half White, hear comments all the time . . . when we're passing by and we get some dirty looks or like,

WSPAJ Vol. 26, No. 2, 2018

power on the West Coast who chose not to label her sexuality, stated, “[For people who have] passing privilege, like, I guess me, when you see them there’s no real cues to give off that they were gay.” Emily, a White lesbian field hockey player, mentioned:

A benefit of inclusion is that teammates recognize and even expect that there will be queer people on their teams. For some athletes, this negates the need for overtly proclaiming non-normative sexual identities. Ironically, for some queer athletes with passing privilege, reliance on lesbian stereotypes obfuscates recognition of their sexual identities.

Along with the changing use of the lesbian stereotype in these sport settings is the expectation that there will be queer athletes and the expectation that they will be open about it. As Harper, a White gay dual-sport athlete, noted:

Similarly, Victoria, a Black lesbian basketball player in the South, stated:

Inclusive teammates also recognized when teammates were in relationships with women, negating the need for the queer athlete to explicitly come out. Again, this acknowledgment was part of learning about their teammates and not used in any discriminatory manner. Victoria, a Black lesbian basketball player, simply suggested, “They just put two and two together.” Sara, a White basketball player in the Midwest said:

When diverse sexualities are normalized, teammates recognized overt signs of beginning relationships and dating, which negated the necessity for grand pronouncements by queer athletes.

They didn't even know I was in a relationship for like 6 months. Like I literally don't talk to them about anything that happens. Like anything personal, I don't talk to them about. They're just not as accepting and, with that, I just don't feel like it's any of their business.

Playing on teams where everyone else identified as heterosexual carried inherent challenges. As Emily stated, “As much as it is an open environment through official department policies, it can feel a bit isolating at times, especially as the only gay athlete on my team, and as one of only a handful of gay athletes in the entire

department.” Grace, a White lesbian field hockey player on the East Coast, described her team as accepting. However, as the only lesbian on the team, she noted:

One of my self-uncomfortable moments was [during] my sophomore fall when my girlfriend was in Edinburgh for the term. But, um, Katy Perry’s “I kissed a girl” [song] came on in the locker room and internally I was like dying laughing. And, a couple of my teammates that knew were kind of like laughing with me, and I would say like 90% of my team had like no idea. It was kind of one of those ha ha like irony type of moments. When that song came on, I was just shaking my head thinking like of course that song would come on, and I felt like weird singing it cause, for me, it’s real, and it’s a joke to everyone else.

The event itself was described with a lighthearted tone, but it represents a very real limitation for athletes on teams with little, if any, sexual diversity. Lily, a White gay golfer, added this example of being the only queer athlete and traveling with a small team:

I mean I always room with the same people. With the two who I’m not that close with, they would never change in the room. But, I don’t room with them. The people who I do room with know that I’m uncomfortable rooming with the other two girls, so they make it like an effort. Like, I’ll take a room key and they’ll come with me. And, my coach will give the other [unsupportive teammate] a room key because we always have two rooms. Very strategic.

Despite referring to heterosexual teammates as allies, some of the queer athletes also developed a strong nonathlete social circle. Emily, a gay White field hockey player, stated:

I guess that’s like a part of the reason that a lot of my friends are off the team, ‘cause it’s like really important for me to feel really comfortable with my friends obviously. There is like such a lack of exposure on the part of a lot of my teammates and a lot of the athletes at [East coast] university, I think I’ve just chosen to surround myself with a different environment ‘cause I didn’t always want to be the only gay person in the room all the time, my whole career at [university].

Being on transitioning teams was not always easy. Being accepted is not the same as challenging heteronormativity. As the only queer athlete on a transitioning team, for some athletes, it became tiring and uncomfortable to be the primary person confronting heterosexual norms. In spite of the growing pains or occasional inconsistencies, these queer athletes generally felt accepted within their team environments. It was a joint effort among heterosexual and queer athletes to support and sustain inclusion. The inevitable bumps along the journey were mutually navigated, leading to enhanced understanding, open communication, and, ultimately, productive team climates.

Discussion

The stories from the queer women interviewed in this study shed light on what an inclusive sport climate looks like. While we separately presented their descriptions of inclusive and transitioning climates, these should not be dichotomized. Rather, there seems to be a continuum of climates that may range from overtly hostile to fully inclusive. And, while the queer athletes in this study were

clustered toward the more inclusive end of the continuum, we do not mean to infer that these are the only climates in sport today. Our data led us to focus on what transpires when teams are inclusive or are working toward inclusion.

Our feminist cultural studies perspective guides us to examine how typical, everyday actions impact power, privilege, and inclusion (Hall, 1996). As these queer athletes revealed, it was the mundane, taken-for-granted interactions among teammates that communicated inclusive team norms. For example, matter-of-fact questioning about sexuality or pronoun use, or joking with teammates about girlfriends and boyfriends normalized acceptance of diverse sexualities. As the expectation of sexual diversity was woven into the fabric of teams, being inclusive became normalized or just part of the everyday team environment. Some of the queer athletes interviewed, who were on inclusive teams, had openly queer teammates, or what Fink et al. (2012) called *trailblazers*, communicating a safe and welcoming climate. While this made it easier for new team members to recognize an inclusive climate, it was not required. In inclusive settings, all teammates talked about or were asked about their relationships and attractions. Athletes recognized and celebrated life events regardless of sexual orientation. Boyfriends and girlfriends were welcomed at team social gatherings. Notably, inclusive climates were marked by heterosexual and queer teammates consistently making their support and acceptance explicit to current and potential teammates. It bears repeating, it was the casual, everyday, consistent communications that marked teams as inclusive.

In these progressive climates, queer athletes *invited* in their teammates and they vividly described these moments with joy and happiness. We offer the term *inviting* in as a different way of thinking about athletes’ decisions to share their sexual orientation with their team. The decision to invite in others should be viewed as an expression of agency and self-care. Historically, coming out referred to an act of political resistance and emancipation. Many of the queer athletes in this study, and elsewhere, are not trying to be political. And, many of them never inhabited the closet of earlier generations (e.g., one filled with insecurities, secrecy, and fear). Instead, these athletes seem to want to be themselves and live honestly (Fink et al., 2012; Stoelting, 2011). Further, coming out invokes pronouncement of a specific LGBT identity, whereas inviting in does not rest upon a particular self-label; it allows one to explore, refuse, or adopt various or fluid identities (Moore, 2011). This notion is particularly fitting for the athletes who chose not to label their sexuality.

The experiences of the queer athletes in this study both reveal and challenge the stranglehold of heteronormativity in women’s college sport. When left to their own devices, athletes on transitioning teams did what they could to support their queer teammates. Though, often they did so within the overriding climate—changing individual behaviors but not countering heteronormativity. This was evident in the example of athletes ensuring their queer teammate was comfortable at the mixer with their *brother team*; however, there was no questioning of why teams were paired with teams with different sex athletes. Teams with norms of inclusion seem better able to challenge heteronormativity. They assume some teammates will be LGBT and, for example, defy social expectations regarding femininity (e.g., hairstyle, shaving one’s legs). Perhaps what set apart transitioning and inclusive teams was whether teams changed specific behaviors versus challenged heteronormative sport norms. Normalizing diverse sexualities exploits cracks in hegemonic heteronormativity in women’s college sport and provides the foundation for transgressing heteronormativity.

These queer athlete narratives provide guidance on how other teams can work toward inclusion. Notably, inclusive climates do not simply exist or result from shared social identities. Instead, inclusive climates were marked by heterosexual and queer teammates consistently making their support and acceptance explicit to current and potential teammates. From having trailblazers, to making inclusive jokes, to asking about all romantic partners, inclusion emerged. Once transitioning teams realized that one of the players was lesbian or bisexual, they made changes to become more overtly inclusive. Although sometimes awkward, most teammates had good intentions of supporting queer athletes. Though, on transitioning teams, the impetus to become more inclusive rested on queer athletes to initiate the transition and open dialog. Ideally, teams can develop norms of inclusion with or without openly queer team members. Troubling, it appears that athletes are taking the lead in supporting their queer teammates. As previous research indicates, athletic administrators are perceived as unsupportive (Fink et al., 2012; Fynes & Fisher, 2016). Seemingly, athletic departments as a whole still are entrenched in heteronormativity, and attempts to enhance inclusion need to target the administration.

Fink et al. (2012) stated, “the support of an individual athletic department employee was quite empowering for our LBT student-athletes” (p. 100, *emphasis added*). All it takes is for one person within an athletic department to step up for climates to begin changing. Coaches and administrators should be educated and empowered to counter programmatic heteronormative ideals and convey signs of inclusion. Queer athletes search for these signs; therefore, an important first step in creating inclusive settings is proactively signaling open-mindedness. Sport leaders should use gender-inclusive language. They can begin casual conversations about diverse athletes who are in the news (Krane & Barak, 2013). Talking about athletes who have come out publicly or homonegative incidents revealed through social or traditional media provide opportunities for athletes to express compassion and acceptance. These types of conversations become markers of inclusion. Further, coaches and administrators can frame inclusion as an essential component of athletic excellence (Kauer & Krane, 2010). Inclusive excellence can become a team vision in which acceptance of diverse athletes with different strengths is the foundation of achieving team excellence. Additionally, team leaders can be encouraged to promote and participate in one of the many LGBT ally programs (e.g., You Can Play, SportSafe). (Kauer & Krane, 2013). Further, Janssen (2004) advocates that we provide training for athlete leaders on how to be effective in this role, which could include helping them develop norms of inclusion. Inclusion is an active, dynamic, ongoing process that requires commitment from all team members, coaches, and administrators.

While our findings paint an optimistic picture of collegiate women’s sport regarding queer inclusion, we also recognize that this is not always the case. Administrators and coaches should intervene in climates where homonegative language and action are the norm or break the silence in *don’t ask, don’t tell* climates. To continue to ignore athletes’ diverse social identities, such as sexuality, is at best negligent and at worst harmful. Athletes seem to recognize the importance of inclusion; it also is important that administrators, coaches, athletic trainers, and other sport leaders do their part in supporting all team members.

Notes

¹Throughout each interview, the term each athlete used to identify her sexual identity was what was used by the interviewer.

²We purposely did not insert commas between the social identity markers so that each identity is read as a complete intersectional identity.

³This conversation took place before the Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality.

References

- Athlete Ally. (2017). *Athletic equality index: A comprehensive ranking and review of LGBTQ inclusion practices and policy in the NCAA Power 5 conferences*. Retrieved from <https://www.athleteally.org/aei-final-draft/>
- Berg, B.L., & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative research methods for the Social Sciences* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.
- Butler, J. (2006). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Caulley, D.N. (2008). Making qualitative research reports less boring: The techniques of writing creative nonfiction. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14, 424–449. doi:10.1177/1077800407311961
- Chase, S.E. (2008). Narrative inquiry: Still a field in the making. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (4th ed., pp. 55–84). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ely, M., Anzul, M., Freidman, T., Garner, D., & Steinmetz, A.M. (1991). *Doing qualitative research: Circles within circles*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Fink, J.S., Burton, L.J., Farrell, A.O., & Parker, H.M. (2012). Playing it out: Female intercollegiate athletes’ experiences in revealing their sexual identities. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 6, 83–106. doi:10.1179/ssa.2012.6.1.83
- Fox, D., Edwards, J., & Wilkes, K. (2010). Employing the ‘grand tour’ approach to aid understanding of garden visiting. In G. Richards & W. Munsters (Eds.), *Cultural tourism research methods* (pp. 75–86). Wallingford, Oxon: CABI.
- Fynes, J.M., & Fisher, L.A. (2016). Is authenticity and integrity possible for sexual minority athletes? Lesbian student-athlete experiences of U.S. NCAA Division I sport. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 24, 60–69. doi:10.1123/wspaj.2014-0055
- Griffin, P. (1998). *Strong women, deep closets: Lesbians and homophobia in sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Griner, B., & Hovey, S. (2014). *In my skin: My life on and off the basketball court*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Hall, M.A. (1996). *Feminism and sporting bodies: Essays on theory and practice*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Holt, A. (2010). Using the telephone for narrative interviewing: A research note. *Qualitative Research*, 10(1), 113–121. doi:10.1177/1468794109348686
- Janssen, J. (2004). *The team captain’s leadership manual: The complete guide to developing team leaders whom coaches respect and teammates trust*. Cary, NC: Winning the Mental Game.
- Kauer, K.J., & Krane, V. (2006). “Scary dykes” and “feminine queens”: Stereotypes and female collegiate athletes. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 15(1), 42–55. doi:10.1123/wspaj.15.1.42
- Kauer, K.J., & Krane, V. (2010). Inclusive excellence: Embracing diverse sexual and gender identities in sport. In S.J. Hanrahan & M.B. Andersen (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of applied sport psychology: A comprehensive guide for students and practitioners* (pp. 764–779). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kauer, K.J., & Krane, V. (2013). Sexual identity and sport. In E. Roper (Ed.), *Gender relations in sport* (pp. 53–72). Boston, MA: Sense Publishing.

- Krane, V. (1997). Homonegativism experienced by lesbian collegiate athletes. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 6(2), 141–163. doi:[10.1123/wspaj.6.2.141](https://doi.org/10.1123/wspaj.6.2.141)
- Krane, V., & Barak, K.S. (2012). Current events and teachable moments: Creating dialog about transgender and intersex athletes. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, 83(4), 38–42.
- Krane, V., Ross, S.R., Miller, M., Rowse, J.L., Ganoe, K., Andrzejczyk, J.A., . . . Lucas, C.B. (2010). Power and focus: Self-representation of female college athletes [special issue]. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, 2, 175–195.
- Krane, V., & Symons, C. (2014). Gender and sexual orientation in sport. In A. Papaioannou & D. Hackfort (Eds.), *Fundamental concepts in sport and exercise psychology* (pp. 119–135). Abingdon, UK/Oxon, UK: Taylor & Francis.
- Malterud, K., & Bjorkman, M. (2016). The invisible work of closeting: A qualitative study about strategies used by lesbian and gay persons to conceal their sexual orientation. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 63, 1339–1354. PubMed ID: [26914706](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26914706/) doi:[10.1080/00918369.2016.1157995](https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1157995)
- Markula, P., & Denison, J. (2005). Sport and the personal narrative. In D.L. Silk, A.D.S. Mason, & M.L. Silk (Eds.), *Qualitative methods in sports studies* (pp. 165–184). New York, NY: Berg.
- Mealer, M., & Jones, J. (2014). Methodological and ethical issues related to qualitative telephone interviews on sensitive topics. *Nurse Researcher*, 21(4), 32–37. PubMed ID: [24673351](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24673351/) doi:[10.7748/nr2014.03.21.4.32.e1229](https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2014.03.21.4.32.e1229)
- Melton, E.N. (2013). Women and the lesbian stigma. In M.L. Sartore-Baldwin (Ed.), *Sexual minorities in sports: Prejudice at play* (pp. 1–10). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Melton, E.N., & Cunningham, G.B. (2012). When identities collide: Examining minority stress and resilience among college athletes with multiple marginalized identities. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 6, 45–66. doi:[10.1179/ssa.2012.6.1.45](https://doi.org/10.1179/ssa.2012.6.1.45)
- Michon, C., & Demers, G. (2018). *Canadian transgender athletes' sporting experiences*. Presentation at the Social Justice through Sport and Exercise Psychology Symposium, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
- Moore, D.L. (2011). *Coming out, or, inviting in?: Reframing disclosure paradigms*. Lunch talk at the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, New York University, New York, NY.
- Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E.A. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (3rd ed., pp. 473–500). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sartore, M.L., & Cunningham, G.B. (2009). The lesbian stigma in the sport context: Implications for women of every sexual orientation. *Quest*, 61, 289–305. doi:[10.1080/00336297.2009.10483617](https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2009.10483617)
- Shenton, A.K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(1), 63–75. doi:[10.3233/EFI-2004-22201](https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201)
- Smith, B., & Sparkes, A.C. (2009). Narrative analysis and sport and exercise psychology: Understanding lives in diverse ways. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10, 279–288. doi:[10.1016/j.psychsport.2008.07.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2008.07.012)
- Sparkes, A.C., & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stoeltig, S. (2011). Disclosure as an interaction: Why lesbian athletes disclose their sexual identities in intercollegiate sport. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58, 1187–1210. PubMed ID: [21957855](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21957855/) doi:[10.1080/00918369.2011.605731](https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2011.605731)
- Symons, C.M., O'sullivan, G.A., & Polman, R. (2017). The impacts of discriminatory experiences on lesbian, gay and bisexual people in sport. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 20, 467–489. doi:[10.1080/11745398.2016.1251327](https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2016.1251327)
- Taylor, S.J., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Veri, M.J. (1999). Homophobic discourse surrounding the female athlete. *Quest*, 51, 355–368. doi:[10.1080/00336297.1999.10491691](https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.1999.10491691)
- Waldron, J. (2016). It's complicated: Negotiations and complexities of being a lesbian in sport. *Sex Roles*, 74, 335–346. doi:[10.1007/s11199-015-0521-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0521-x)
- Ward, K., Gott, M., & Hoare, K. (2015). Participants' views of telephone inter-views within a grounded theory study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 71(12), 2775–2785. PubMed ID: [26256835](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26256835/) doi:[10.1111/jan.12748](https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12748)
- Zeigler, C. (2015, March 11). Shannon Miller: I experienced blatant homophobia at Univ. of Minnesota-Duluth. *SB Nation Outsports*. Retrieved from <http://www.outsports.com/2015/3/11/8187605/shannon-miller-lesbian-hockey-coach>

Copyright of Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal is the property of Human Kinetics Publishers, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.