

Lesbian coaches and homophobia

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An introduction to homophobia within sport and coaching

The topic of sexual orientation within sport in the research literature is an area that has received much attention in the last two decades and within this body of work, the consensus among researchers is that the sporting context is often a homophobic environment for heterosexual and sexual minority groups (Anderson, 2005; Clarke, 1998; Greendorfer & Robinson, 1997; Griffin, 1998; Hekma, 1998; Iannotta & Kane, 2002; Jones & McCarthy, 2010; Krane, 1997; Lenskyj, 1997; Price & Parker, 2003). Discriminative language utilized by athletes and coaches (Anderson, 2005), derogatory initiation rituals and team songs (Price & Parker, 2003) as well as unfair hiring practices of athletic departments are some of the ways sexual discrimination shows itself in sport (Griffin, 1998). Particularly, within women's sport, the association between participation and sexuality has been extensively discussed (e.g. Griffin, 1992, 1998; Kane & Lenskyj, 1998; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009) for its impact on both heterosexual women and lesbians (Krane, 1996). Stereotypes and ideologies surround women's sexuality through their participation in sport, particularly in sports historically and socially defined as traditionally 'men's' sports due to the age-long myth that sport masculinizes women (Veri, 1999). For women to be perceived as non-feminine usually means to be thought of as being a lesbian (Caudwell, 2003). Consequently, for both athletes and coaches, gendered beliefs have created a sense of fear and stigmatization of lesbians within sport for both heterosexual women and lesbians themselves (e.g. Cox & Thompson, 2001; Griffin, 1998; Iannotta & Kane, 2002). To this end, homophobia in sport is a particularly insidious form of discrimination for how it can divide all women, regardless of sexual orientation (Clarke, 1998). Even now despite changing socio-cultural beliefs and acceptance of non-heterosexual identities, this means that sport and coaching contexts are often hostile and homophobic environments for women (Griffin, 1998). Researchers assert that sport is one of the most hostile social institutions towards lesbians (Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1992).

Symptoms and expressions of homophobia within women's sport are often discussed in terms of their outcomes, such as preferences for male coaches (e.g. Griffin, 1992), hyper-heterosexual and feminized media representations of women's sports (e.g., Krane *et al.*, 2004; Wright & Clarke, 1999), the female 'apologetic' (e.g., Felshin, 1974) or the prohibition of lesbian athletes or coaches from sport programmes and team selections (e.g., Galst, 2003). In the UK, while political and legal pressures, such as recent equality legislation, have forced sport governing bodies in the UK to recognize and advocate for (racial, gender and [dis]ability) diversity, the topic of sexuality remains poorly handled by sporting institutions (Brackenridge *et al.*, 2008).

A sizeable body of research into the heterosexist culture of sport exists, yet certain knowledge gaps remain, including a need to understand lesbian experiences of sport (Krane & Barber, 2003). The majority of research on sexual minority women in sport focuses on homophobia in sport. Generally speaking, this research demonstrates that homophobia is prevalent in women's sport (e.g., Caudwell, 1999; Eng, 2008; Kauer & Krane, 2006). Scholars have explained the prevalence of homophobia in the following ways: (a) Because sport typing is prevalent, many sports are associated with masculinity, therefore female athletes within male sports are deemed or perceived to be masculine (Kane, LaVoi, & Fink, 2013); (b) lesbianism is closely associated with masculinity (e.g., Caudwell, 1999; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Mennesson & Clement, 2003); and (c) disapproval of women athletes' challenge to gender ideals is often met with containment strategies such as labelling athletes as lesbian, using homophobia to discredit and limit women's sport or particular women athletes, or organizing sports around a gender binary rather than ability (e.g., Blinde & Taub, 1992; Griffin, 1998; Kane, 1995; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002). Sport is often conceived as an institution that generates and maintains unequal beliefs in physical gender dichotomization (Messner, 1992; Willis, 1982). As sports tend to be organized along the lines of separate 'men's sports' and 'women's sports' based on ideas of biological distinctions, this has perpetuated the idea of differences in athletic ability, often to the detriment of women and thus reinforced patriarchal ideas within sport and gender divisions (Kane, 1995). When women engage in sport, they often challenge these beliefs on masculinity and femininity, and it is discomfort with this challenge that fuels homophobia (e.g., Griffin, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002). There are many ways that women in sport then deal with this association between their participation in sport, the lesbian label and homophobia. For sexual minority women, the response is often non-disclosure of sexual orientation, silence, or erasure of a significant other and a meaningful aspect of life, all which (re)produce remaining 'in the closet' and discussion of sexual orientation in sport a taboo subject for many lesbians (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Eng, 2008; Hekma, 1998; Kauer & Krane, 2006). Yet, many knowledge gaps still remain regarding lesbian experiences in sport and in particular, homophobia in sport. Based

on a recently commissioned Scottish review into sexual orientation in sport, Brackenridge *et al.* (2008) found that while 25 per cent of the research literature on sexual orientation was focused on lesbians, only 3 per cent of research literature examined lesbian *experiences* of homophobia. Within this literature, the theme of identity featured most prominently was in relation to 'women and femininities' (11 per cent) rather than lesbians (7 per cent). This is in comparison to 21 per cent of literature exploring masculinity and identity, and 3 per cent of research within the area of gay men and identities. This leaves us with a limited understanding of and narrow scope pertaining to the lives of women playing in and leading sport related to sexuality and gender. One aspect of lesbian experiences within sport that remains significantly under-researched is the issue of lesbian coaches' experiences and homophobia.

The experiences of lesbian coaches and homophobia

Within the literature accounts of lesbian coaches and their experiences of discrimination related to sexual orientation are rare. In a 2008 review of sexual orientation literature, only 2 per cent of articles at the time were related to accounts of lesbian (physical education) teachers and coaches (e.g. Clarke, 1998; Griffin, 1992; Harris & Griffin, 1997; Iannotta & Kane, 2002; Krane & Barber, 1995; Woods, 1992). In addition, the majority of this 2 per cent of the literature pertained to experiences of lesbian physical education teachers rather than sports coaches. In addition, the very few studies that do exist on the experiences of lesbian coaches are multidisciplinary rather than a programme of systematic and sustained research. Instead, related to the issue of homophobia and lesbian coaches, the literature tends to focus on the views *towards* lesbian coaches by parents or athletes (e.g. Cunningham & Melton, 2012, 2014), the views of coaches (whose sexual orientation is not the focus) towards LGBT athletes (e.g. Skogvang & Fasting, 2013; Vargas-Tonsing & Oswalt, 2009), or the views of women coaches in general towards homophobia and the fear of being labelled as a lesbian (e.g. Griffin, 1998; Kilty, 2006; Thorngren, 1990; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). In total, there are four studies within the literature that primarily focus upon the narratives and experiences of lesbian sports coaches: Griffin (1992), Iannotta and Kane (2002), Krane and Barber (1995) and my own work (Norman, 2012, 2013). Three of these studies are from a North American perspective and one from a UK context. Thus, not only are the subjects discussed within the literature covering lesbians, sport and homophobia narrow but also in geographical context.

Outside of these Western nations, there is an absence of research and literature specifically focusing on lesbian coaches. A further limitation to this small body of work is that there is either the focus on collegiate level

coaching (from a North American context) or what is referred to within the UK as ‘high performance’ coaching, that is elite or master level coaching. Therefore, there is no work that addressed, for example, participation / recreational / beginner level coaching, or youth / junior level coaching. In regards to the lack of writing into women coaches, homophobia and youth sports, this may be because a high proportion of these coaches at this level are often mothers of the athletes and are thus presumed to be heterosexual. Alternatively, many women coaches are young coaches at junior level, and so remain under the radar of ‘lesbian suspicions’. Overall, perhaps the absence of stories of the personal lives lesbian coaches in itself is a telling indication and reflection of the homophobic climate of many sporting organizations, institutions, systems and governing bodies. Certainly, for the UK context the lack of urgency and desire towards viewing sexual diversity as a policy imperative, within most sporting governing bodies and organizations (Brackenridge *et al.*, 2008) is documented. Yet, as Veri (1999) and Thorngren (1990) both argue, it is homophobia itself that remains the most powerful deterrent to women from joining or remaining in coaching positions. Given the global underrepresentation of women in coaching positions, the need to understand the impact of homophobia on those among the most affected – lesbian coaches – is an ongoing and pressing issue for both researchers and policymakers. In the following section four major academic studies pertaining to the experiences of lesbian sports coaches are summarized, and the story and experiences of Sarah, a lesbian coach currently working within a major sport in England, is presented.

A summary of existing research: the experiences of lesbian coaches

Pat Griffin’s work about lesbians, homophobia and sport is renowned and groundbreaking. Of relevance to this chapter is Griffin’s (1992) account of the identity-management strategies of lesbian US collegiate coaches. Motivated by the sense of hostility and conditional tolerance of many US college athletic departments, Griffin (1992) spoke to lesbian collegiate coaches and professional athletes about the ways in which they managed their sexual identity (Griffin, 1992). As a consequence of this, a continuum of identity-management strategies was devised, based upon the stories of the coaches and athletes, to encapsulate the decision-making processes that lesbian sports women may go through each day in choosing whether to disclose or hide their identity (Griffin, 1992). The strategies ranged from ‘completely closeted’ whereby an individual hides their lesbian identity from all others in their athletic environment, to ‘publicly out’ in which the individual will openly share their sexual identity to others in the athletic context (Griffin, 1992, p. 135). In addition, Griffin documented how the lesbian coaches she interviewed managed their sexual identity within the

athletic context, with strategies such as acting homophobic, having 'special friendships' with another woman in which the relationship was conceived as just a close friendship, forming exclusive 'secret clubs' with other lesbians, being either prudent and proud or out and proud (pp. 147–153).

Within the accounts of the identity-management strategies devised by lesbian coaches, Griffin (1992) concluded that some coaches had found a 'middle ground' in which they could thrive within their athletic departments as long as they did not coerce others to confront issues pertaining to sexuality (Griffin, 1992). Griffin (1992) coined this experience as a 'glass closet', describing the unique challenges and issues facing lesbian coaches in coming out. The risk of losing jobs and sponsorships often outweighed the pressure by lesbian sport fans and activists to act as a public role model in being open about their sexual orientation (Griffin, 1992). Since this seminal work, other scholars have argued that the concept of 'being out' and linguistically being open as to one's sexual orientation is not necessarily the primary vehicle for social change (Iannotta & Kane, 2002). If this assertion is true, significant implications exist for the creation and appraisal of effective strategies for challenging homophobia (Iannotta & Kane, 2002). In addition, Iannotta and Kane (2002) argued an identity-management continuum may also unintentionally support a victimization narrative of lesbian experiences in sport by asserting only particular types of strategies will enable coaches to push for social change.

In response to their criticisms of the previous body of knowledge surrounding personal narratives of lesbian athletes and coaches – particularly the work of Griffin (1992), Krane (1996) and Riemer (1997) – Iannotta and Kane (2002) sought to examine the 'sexual stories' of intercollegiate coaches and the variety of strategies related to the performance of their sexual identity. As a move away from a theme of 'victimization', narrow strategies of being out, and identity performance as a way of challenging homophobia, Iannotta and Kane (2002) endeavoured to challenge and reconstruct existing models of identity performance in order to create greater space for resistance and agency. Based on interview data with 13 lesbian collegiate coaches, Iannotta and Kane (2002) explored the ways in which the coaches revealed and disclosed their sexual identity whilst simultaneously resisting homophobia through this use of both linguistic and non-linguistic strategies. As a consequence of the interviews with the lesbian coaches, Iannotta and Kane (2002) contended how individuals conceptualized their sexual identity performance was not congruent with the categories outlined in Griffin's (1992) identity-management continuum but rather, sexual identity was more 'non-linear, fluid and contextualized' (p. 347). Of note is the term 'radical normalization' coined by Iannotta and Kane (p. 364), to conceptualize the 'normal' and discrete process through which the participant coaches created climates of tolerance within their teams and athletic departments. The radical normalization involved 'everyday' coming out strategies by the lesbian coach

participants such as visibly telephoning partners, not hiding pictures of partners in one's office or home, inviting athletes' *partners* to social activities, engaging with athletes on sensitive matters, and establishing inclusive team cultures (Iannotta & Kane, 2002). Radical normalization brought to light broader and more numerous strategies through which lesbian coaches challenged homophobia within their immediate athletic contexts and promoted inclusivity. Conversely however, radical normalization may also be a form of the female apologetic – women coaches and athletes are just fitting in with, rather than challenging, cultural norms which could have great potential to shift deeply embedded gender ideologies and create greater changes to women's sport (Iannotta & Kane, 2002).

In the third study Krane and Barber (1995) examined lesbian coaches' identity tensions and experiences of the heterosexist and homophobic sporting environment within a North American context. Applying social identity (SI) theory to the experiences of US collegiate colleges who self-identified as lesbian, Krane and Barber (1995) sought to understand the decisions, actions, and experiences of the participants who belonged to a minority and marginalized group within sport. Utilizing SI for its emphasis on social context, explanation of the process of identity development and behaviour through social and self-categorization, Krane and Barber (1995) interviewed 13 coaches who varied in their degree of being open about their sexuality. The participants' accounts revealed the continual negotiations between their social identities of being 'coach' and 'lesbian': the coaches continually monitored, managed and negotiated their sexuality within restrictive homophobic and heterosexist social norms. To challenge this, the coaches employed a number of what could be conceived as defensive strategies, such as 'seeking protection, compartmentalizing their lives and remaining silent' (Krane & Barber, 1995, p. 79). As a result, participants often viewed the coaching profession as 'restrictive and unfair' for their perception that if they did not comply with the social norms, they would feel less productive (Krane & Barber, 1995, p. 79). The study was also revealing for its illustration of the complex social setting of the coaching profession. Yet, the use of SI did not illustrate how these coaches' senses of identities were developed, a significant flaw for other researchers exploring homophobia and how to enact social change. Furthermore, psychological approaches to understanding the identification of individuals with minority group status can place too much emphasis on the individual. Any overarching 'structural or allocational impediments' that support a culture of homophobia and heterosexism can go unexamined (Ingham, Blissmer, & Wells Davidson, 1999, p. 240).

In light of criticisms of previous work into lesbian coaches and homophobia, such as the emphasis on the individual and not structural factors, on sexual identity and how coaches can 'manage' their own identity, the most recent research examining the experiences of lesbian coaches and the only study from a UK perspective is my own research (Norman, 2012, 2013). Utilizing

a sociological approach, the research was grounded in the need to elicit a more in-depth comprehension of homophobia. Through deconstructing women's day-to-day experiences of professional coaching and examining how their lives are individually organized along the relations of power, sexual orientation, and gender, I attempted to connect the macro structure of sport to the micro by examining the everyday inferiorizations that take place within the professional and organizational contexts of lesbian coaches' lives. This approach fits nicely into LaVoi's Ecological-Intersectional Model proposed in [Chapter 1](#).

Utilizing interviews with ten lesbians who coach in a professional capacity within the UK, I introduced the concept of 'everyday gendered homophobia' to demonstrate that homophobia is not a global concept but has different connotations and implications for women. The experiences of the lesbian coaches interviewed highlighted numerous structural practices that served to restrict the coaches' ability to fully be themselves within their profession, and limited their opportunities to undertake professional development which resulted in coaches feeling invisible, unsupported and un-championed by their organizations. Such practices included inflexible or gendered professional development opportunities, apathetic stances towards issues of equity, equality and diversity, inadequate socio-cultural coach education, and a culture of 'unspoken truths' (Norman, 2013). The participants' stories of their everyday lives as sexual minority women contained themes of: negotiation and feeling underestimated, trivialized, and marginalized through having their sexuality suppressed or problematized by structural practices that appeared 'normal' and difficult to identify. For example, in highlighting some of the inequalities that lesbian coaches experienced, male privileges within the UK coaching system were highlighted. These included greater cultural value attached to their leadership and ability to coach, their gendered identity and ability to go without scrutiny, and a greater quality in professional development opportunities (Norman, 2012).

It is within these interviews, that I met Sarah (not her real name), a full-time, elite, professional coach who self-identified as lesbian. At the time of research, Sarah had recently left her post as head coach of one of the national junior squads in her sport but was also a head club coach in another sport. Her interview was one of the most illuminating discussions in the research as she described the tensions and negotiations that lesbian coaches often have to experience as not just women coaches, but gay women coaches. Sarah's story detailed the intricacies and subtleties of everyday incidents of homophobia intersected with disability (her partner had recently become disabled through a sporting injury) and mental health issues (as a result of her partner's accident, Sarah had a nervous breakdown). In short, Sarah's story is one of intersectionality. In the following section, excerpts from our interview are presented.

Sarah's story: living with disability, mental illness and homophobia

LEANNE: How do you feel your identity as a woman affects your coaching experiences?

SARAH: I find it, within [one of my sports], hugely difficult because I've just done three seasons with a male team and I'm the only female coach that I've come across in that environment, working with the men's teams. So ranging from abuse from opposition players to[wards] my own players about being coached by a 'bird' or a girl, to opposition players being abusive to me and umpires not taking me seriously, 'oh, you're just some player's dolly bird'. That's quite difficult. In terms of my [governing body], I think they're quite derogatory towards their women coaches and I think they pay them lip service. The coaches I have worked with, once you have proved you can coach, they have no problem with you, they treat you as an equal and I have never had any difficulties with my colleagues on a coaching front. But as a governing body, I found it very difficult.

LEANNE: How do you feel your identity as a gay woman affects your coaching experiences and professional life?

SARAH: Within [one of my sports], the guys have absolutely no problem. We are a large club and there are a lot of gay women in the women's section of the club and in fact, all five of the men's teams are coached by women, which is unusual! Three of us are gay so that's not an issue ... Several of them presume I'm married because I wear a wedding ring and they are surprised, but not bothered, when they realize that my partner is a woman. It's not an issue within the club.

LEANNE: How about [at the club of your other sport]?

SARAH: It has been issue to a few parents and I was informed by the governing body that I had to be more particular over the children's code of conduct because I was gay.

LEANNE: How then have you been received, as a gay woman, by the governing body?

SARAH: The coaches I have worked with, predominantly male, didn't know for the first four years and then four years ago, my partner had a massive stroke playing [sport], got hit in the neck and tore the carotid artery so is quite profoundly disabled. Obviously that had an impact on me and I couldn't turn up to the next training camp I was supposed to be running ... From a governing body level, I was told I couldn't let it affect my job, and they're really sorry for me but if it was going to

affect my job or if I wasn't go to show up, there were always other coaches that were available to take my place. So it was a really difficult time and they were really not interested in me as a person as long as I did my job and regularly informed [me] that I had to be very careful about being gay around all these young girls. What are they trying to imply, I don't know! I believe there is an implication that they think I would do something inappropriate or that gay women coaches could potentially be inappropriate with young female players, which I find unbelievably offensive.

LEANNE: Is there any support from your governing body to do with sexual diversity?

SARAH: Not that I've ever heard of. I would like to say 'get on with it, it's not an issue, we have no problems' but I suspect that its more. Men's [sport] is still considered, very 'old school', very fuddy duddy, we're trying to make our way in that organization ... You just feel they wouldn't want to rock the boat by addressing these issues. I know other clubs who have actively advertised in the *Pink Paper* and other publications for Australians, New Zealand, South Africans who may want to play a bit [of my sport]. Unofficially, they've been told by the head of [our governing body], women's section, that that's not really appropriate. But never officially, [just] 'not quite the image we want'.

LEANNE: Would you like to see support offered?

SARAH: What I would prefer them not to do is say to me as a coach an add-on, 'Here's your child protection policy and oh and don't forget because you're "that way" make sure you're not on your own with any of the girls.' I don't think there needs to be that add-on. We adhere to the child protection policy and actually that covers all of those sorts of things that might occur. If I choose to go to a match and my partner chooses to come with me, I would be hugely respectful> I'm not going to sit [on the side] and be bored and hold her hand and snog her. I'm not going to do that and I wouldn't expect any of my male coaches, if their wives come to watch sometimes, to do anything differently.

LEANNE: You describe your club as an 'open club'. How do you think your athletes respond to that?

SARAH: I think it makes them feel much more a part of it, included rather than excluded. We've not lost a parent and a child from a club because of the nature of the sexuality of a lot of the players, whereas before we did. Just because suddenly the parents would be absolutely horrified, and their prejudices

[would come out], 'Oh my god my little girl has just spent the last four weekends with those two in their car and I don't approve so I'm going to have to take my child out'. Often it's not the child; the child has no problem with any of us because we would never do anything in front of the kid anyway. It's often the parents and their perception. Having been much more open and much more relaxed, it's not an issue. A more open attitude has benefited us as a club and it's benefited the whole community. Men have lost players because we've amalgamated with them but we're a much stronger club.

LEANNE: Going to back to what you discussed earlier when you experienced mental health difficulties, how did you experience coaching at that time and with a disabled partner?

SARAH: For my partner, she got hit, tore her carotid artery, was in intensive care for a very long time and I was told that she would never walk or talk again. After a few years of intense recovery, she decided she wanted to do something based around her sport but she wasn't mobile enough at that point. A lot of the time she would still have to use her wheelchair. So she thought she would manage one of the lower teams. I thought they were just being nice to her, just putting up with her but in fact, the team were absolutely brilliant. Other people, so the umpires would come across to talk to the captain and [my partner] would be sitting in her wheelchair, and they would say 'Is the old dear alright?' and the captain would go 'no, this is our coach'. Really dismissive, looking over her head and I became much more aware of that. The reason why I've given up coaching [one of my sports] as opposed to coaching [my other sport] was that [sport] was much more supportive of my mental health problems and my disability.

LEANNE: How did they then interact with you?

SARAH: I obviously had been ill for a while and I really got that feeling that they weren't interested, 'I needed to do my job, I needed to take these girls [certain places], I needed to make sure I turned up this tournament, I needed to behave. Why was my face like thunder?' Well, it was because I was quietly falling apart and I hadn't had the energy left to hide it whereas perhaps I had held it in and played the game for a period of time. I asked not to do a junior tournament, it was a nothing tournament, but they needed an England tracksuit there and I asked not to do it and they said 'you're not entitled to holidays because you're self-employed' and I said 'well, actually I have to go into hospital'. They said 'well you haven't told us you've got an injury' so I said 'well actually I'm going into a mental health facility' [and

they said] ‘well we don’t think it’s appropriate you work with the players’. So that was how I lost my job, in an email, ‘it’s not appropriate you work with players if you are going into a mental health facility’.

LEANNE: Have they ever discussed it with you since?

SARAH: No, no contact.

Sarah’s story demonstrates the connection between the personal and the structural; that a focus on lesbian coaches and their experiences should not just be about the individual but rather, their lives are influenced and related to the structural context in which they work. It is important too to take an intersectional approach to this subject area because, as Sarah’s narrative highlights, the experiences of lesbian coaches are accumulations of their sexual identity intersected by gendered ideologies and other relations of power that become salient in various contexts and at different times. For Sarah, her coaching experiences were often impacted by her identification as a woman with an illness; at times, it was more salient as a gay woman with a disabled partner. Sarah experienced sexism but these incidents were often connected with negative perceptions of her sexual identity and mental health. Stories such as Sarah’s therefore evidence the need for a more in-depth, multilevel approach to understanding the issue of homophobia for lesbians (and indeed, all women) in coaching.

Suggestions for future research

Whilst building on the few but important studies that already exist pertaining to the experiences of lesbian coaches, researchers should endeavour to move away from an exploration and management of lesbian identities in sport towards examining alternative ways of uncovering, challenging, and overturning homophobia within sport. The issue of ‘identity’ also proliferates the wider literature related to women / femininities as well as lesbian experiences of sport. Given the political significance of ‘identity’ and for its potential to be facilitated as a means to gain cultural, political, and economic recognition for social minority groups, a focus on exploring identity is justified (Carrington, 2007). However, critical explorations of the limitations of identity are still warranted (Carrington, 2007). Related to examining lesbian coaches’ experiences, poststructuralist approaches, outlined in [Chapter 13](#), are a fruitful avenue to pursue in order to push researchers to consider the meaning of the term ‘identity’. A sole focus on lesbian identities may lead to an overemphasis on the individual (Sykes, 1996) and consequently, sporting organizations, governing bodies, and those responsible for the governance of sport and coaching may escape scrutiny for the ways in which they construct and privilege idealized sexualities and other cultural identities. The story of Sarah is evidence for how

her experiences were co-constructed by the actions, norms and values of the organization for which she coached. Sarah experienced discrimination as a lesbian coach in relation to the practices of the institutional setting. In this way, identity and discrimination should not be conceived as a set of measurable outcomes, but rather a *process* (Essed, 2002).

A second suggestion for future research would be a greater focus on not just macro ‘acts’ of discrimination, such as unfair hiring practices of athletic departments. The recent case in the United States of Belmont University and the ousting of their lesbian head women’s soccer coach for her public disclosure of her plans to start a family with her partner, is demonstrative of the discriminative practices that do exist (Jaschik, 2011). However, while these stories are newsworthy and commensurate of examination, sociological analyses of individual lives must start with an understanding of everyday lives (Douglas, 1974). This is not to downplay the significance of such discriminations experienced by sexual minority groups. It is in our everyday lives that reveal what discriminations and injustices are all about, rather than the most extreme incidents – it is the ‘trivial’, normalized practices that impact personal experiences the most and enable us to connect individual lives to the structures that shape these experiences. It is often in these everyday practices and incidents that coaches can also contribute to changing the sporting culture to be more acceptance of diversity in relation to sexual orientation, as Iannotta and Kane (2002) demonstrate with their concept of radical normalization. Other than my own research (Norman, 2012, 2013) the subject of the ‘everyday’ in the lives of lesbians is absent within the literature. But how individuals construct their sense of selves is significantly affected by the discourses that circulate within their everyday lives, such as families and communities (Sykes, 1996).

Working towards recruiting, developing and retaining more women in the coaching profession

The target stakeholder group for the following suggestion is those who implement policies and practices that relate to coaching. The purpose of the strategy is to make the coaching profession more attractive, welcoming and nurturing one for minority groups – in this case lesbian coaches. An alteration in gender relations and beliefs around sexual orientation is needed if the experiences of the coaching profession for sexual minorities are to be reformed and improved. Understanding the impact of an individual’s sexual orientation on their professional experiences is relevant, we should not endeavour to silence or erase an individual’s identity but rather the negative meanings and implications attached to the label of ‘lesbian’ need to be redefined, such as ‘predator’, ‘paedophile’, ‘butch’ or not feminine (Caudwell, 2003; Norman, 2012, 2013). Whilst attitudes towards sexual minorities may have become more inclusive, persistent gendered and homophobic ideologies remain

within sport and coaching, scaffolded by cultures of ignorance that underpin the structural practices of policy makers.

The leadership of decision makers is crucial to the implementation of strategies to create a more inclusive and respectful treatment of social minority groups within the coaching profession (NCAA, 2012). Valuing diversity comes from the top and these values are then more likely to be integrated into the organization and filter through to the staff, coaches and athletes (NCAA, 2012). The first step towards inclusivity is that sporting organizations need to learn more about issues to do with diversity, in this case, sexual orientation and gender. There needs to be the recognition that LGBT coaches are vital people within the workforce and that they need to be supported and championed, like any other person, even if they have not identified themselves (NCAA, 2012). A change in coaching practice and organizational expectations is required towards ethical professional standards and behaviours, for example, evidenced in a clear code of professional ethics. This is in addition to revised organizational policies and responsibilities towards non-discrimination. More positive methods of recruitment of coaches also need to be implemented to encourage a more diverse workforce.

However, a crucial initiative is a broader educational programme for coaches that includes mandatory, frequent professional development workshops for coaches on inclusion and respect. These workshops could also be extended to governing body staff. Within these training workshops, there needs to be a more comprehensive discussion of all forms of difference. Within this, it should be explained and shown who the marginalized groups in sport are and how their oppression is systematic through the interacting forces of sexuality, gender, race, class (Birrell & McDonald, 2000) and disability. Currently in the United States, the NCAA hosts an annual educational and professional development Inclusion Forum for member institutions, but attendance by administrators and coaches is 'opt in' rather than mandatory. Additionally, 'Coaches Corner' is a website that provides resources for coaches and administrators in women's sports to address LGBT discrimination run by the US campaign group 'Br{ache the Silence' and the NCAA inclusion office. The new initiative 'Campus Pride Sports Index' is also a US-based initiative, aimed at establishing a national standard of LGBTQ and ally inclusive policies, programmes and practices related to collegiate athletics and recreation. The index also provides an innovative measurement and benchmarking tool that will enable campus leaders and members of the LGBT Sports Coalition to evaluate LGBTQ-friendly athletic environments. In Canada, the 'Speak Up! Speak Out!' campaign is an initiative to make sports welcoming for participants from sexual minorities in conjunction with the ongoing work of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) who are active in the education of sporting organizations and coaches to make sport more welcoming of sexual diversity. Socio-cultural education of coaches plays a crucial role in helping

women, as well as other minority social groups, to understand the causes and organization of their oppression. However, a greater inclusion of such education begins with a change in the priorities and strategic directions of policy makers of sport in relation to diversity. This may help to engage more women coaches to join and want to progress in the profession, regardless of their sexual orientation, as they feel supported and valued.

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