

2015

The 'Other' Colour Barrier of Sport: The Role of Hegemonic Masculinity in Leaving the LGBT Community on the Sidelines of Sport

Evan Klim

The University of Western Ontario, eklim@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/si>



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Klim, Evan (2015) "The 'Other' Colour Barrier of Sport: The Role of Hegemonic Masculinity in Leaving the LGBT Community on the Sidelines of Sport," *Sociological Imagination: Western's Undergraduate Sociology Student Journal*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/si/vol4/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Sociological Imagination: Western's Undergraduate Sociology Student Journal* by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact jpater22@uwo.ca.



The University of Western Ontario

Undergraduate Journal – The Sociological Imagination

Volume 4: Issue 1

***The 'Other' Colour Barrier of Sport:
The Role of Hegemonic Masculinity in Leaving the LGBT
Community on the Sidelines of Sport***

Author: ***Evan D. Klim***

Journal Editor: ***Kyle Carmelo Militello***
2015 Term

Abstraction

In "The 'other' colour barrier of sport," I examine how hegemonic masculinity operates to keep members of the LGBT community on the sideline of sports by way of homophobia. I argue that this barrier that exists today for the LGBT community is similar to other historical barriers that have excluded other marginalized groups from participating within the social institution of sport (most notably for African America athletes like Jackie Robinson). Accordingly, through positive exposure to LGBT athletes, education, and the promotion of tolerance and acceptance of others, the homophobic subculture within sport can be dismantled to allow these athletes to 'come out and play.'

The 'Other' Colour Barrier of Sport: The Role of Hegemonic Masculinity in Leaving the LGBT Community on the Sidelines of Sport

EVAN D. KLIM

How many openly gay athletes can you name that have hit a home-run in baseball, scored a goal in hockey, or won a championship in a professional North American sports league? Trick question: the answer is none! Within the social institution of sport, gender norms and practices police how athletes conduct themselves on- and off-the-field. This compulsory gendered order leaves little room for personal autonomy for the athlete – as sport (like other social institutions) is used to reinforce and perpetuate gendered hierarchies throughout society. By way of various mechanisms and tactics that are used to reinforce these norms, sexual minorities from the LGBT community (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered, and others) have been excluded from participating in sport as they are perceived to be 'inferior,' 'deviant,' and 'weaker' to their heterosexual counterparts by way of homophobic actions (verbal and physical). The homophobic subculture in sport is described in this paper as 'the 'other' colour barrier of sport' because of how the LGBT community is represented by 'the Rainbow flag' – made up of six different colours to represent the Gay Liberation Movement.

Although this barrier exists today for LGBT athletes, similar barriers have existed throughout history that have denied certain groups from participating in organized sports. However, these barriers were dismantled when individual athletes challenged the hegemonic order within sport that previously denied them access to organized sports. For example, African American athletes in the mid-20th century (1930s-1950s) challenged racist beliefs of inferiority and weakness by showing how non-white athletes were able to compete against the 'superior' white athletes. African American athletes like Jackie Robinson (who I discuss later), as a result, became known not only as individuals who broke the colour barrier of their sport, but also for their athletic ability.

In contrast to how African American athletes dismantled the colour barrier of sport by disproving the racist beliefs that isolated them, I argue that the 'other colour barrier' of sport that exists today for LGBT athletes can be dismantled through positive exposure to LGBT

athletes who could discredit the homophobic belief system that has restrained them from participating openly in organized sports with heterosexual athletes. The paper will be divided into five sections. First, I examine sport as a social institution and its role in society, including how it is used to reinforce the status quo in relation to social norms and values. Second, I analyze the gender power structures that exist between these different identities – including how this power structure is maintained. Third, I look into how homophobia is used in sport to reinforce society's perception of masculinity and femininity – including these practices have kept LGBT athletes out of sport. Fourth, I illustrate how the LGBT community's lack of involvement in sport can be related to how racial minorities (i.e. African Americans) were excluded from organized sports until they debunked the racist beliefs that previously held them back. Finally, I argue that positive exposure to LGBT athletes can help to re-socialize individuals within sport to be more accepting towards LGBT athletes (open or closeted) and how sport, with the promotion of these virtues, can be used as a springboard for social change in the Gay Liberation Movement.

The Role of Sport as a Social Institution

Sport plays an important role in North American society because of how it can be used to reinforce ideas that a given society believes in. Coakley and Donnelly (2009:3) define sport as “institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external reward.” In other words, sport is seen as ‘physical’ and ‘competitive’ activities which are organized by leagues who set certain rules to a given activity performed by the athlete. Kidd (2013:559-60) also argues that sport is a tool used to empower individuals by allowing them to earn social validation or praise for their involvement in it. Furthermore, Kidd (2013:559-60) asserts that sport also promotes a healthy lifestyle for the individual and encourages them to forge long- lasting friendships with their teammates.

According to the functionalist school of thought, which looks into how social institutions are able to maintain stability within society, sport is seen as an institution that promotes social order while also reinforcing the values and norms a society hold to be true. Here, rules are created by governing bodies to ensure individuals are playing fairly while working towards a common goal as designated by those making the rules (Coakley and

Donnelly 2009:28). Sport is seen as a valuable institution that reinforces the dominant values and beliefs of a given society while maintaining social order by the use of rules and regulations (which act as laws to which all players must obey in order to participate) (ibid.). However critical theorists take a different approach to sport as see it as an institution used by the powerful to reproduce and reinforce the status quo in society (ibid.: 29). In other words, sport emphasizes conformity—thus producing docile bodies that will obey rules on- and off-the-field. In this paper, gender norms and practices are examined to see how sport reproduces these aspects of social reality.

Gender and Hegemonic Masculinity

First, gender is not to be confused in this paper with one's biological sex. Gender, according to Messerschmidt (1997:4), is a social construction that is malleable, complex, and one that varies from individuals within different social settings. In other words, gender exists outside of the individual and is used as a 'guideline' or 'script' to a given performance the individual wants to engage in—which is either a masculine or feminine performance. This view on gender performativity is in line with Butler's (1999:170 & 173) theory on gender, where she argued that the individual's gender performance is delimited by societal expectations and norms which compels the individual to act according to the dominant perception (or ideal) of a given gender identity – even if the performance does not reflect the individual's true identity. This creates the illusion of a gender core that exists within the masculine-feminine binary (ibid.:173).

Gender practices, as a result, are embodied within social institutions—which is used to reinforce relations of power between men and women. Through one's biological sex, a gender performance of either masculine (for men) or feminine (for women) is argued to be compulsory— since a performance of either identity is assigned to the individual at birth through their socialization (Rich 1996:130-131). "Compulsory heterosexuality," as argued by Rich, is put in place as a way to constrict individual autonomy by imposing a heteronormative gender onto the male or female subject (ibid.:141). However as many theorists have acknowledged, defining masculinity and femininity is problematic as each gender identity intersections with other social categories like race, class, sexual orientation – this then creates hierarchies within each gender identity (Messerschmidt 1997:3).

First, we must understand that the relationship between gender identities is a relation of power and domination of one group over the other. Much like how we would understand the master-slave dialectic, Messerschmidt (1997:9) argued that the subordinate identity (femininity) is that which is subject to the dominant groups' construction of the other (i.e. how men define what is not-feminine). Connell (1995:71) defines masculinity as "a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage their place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture." In other words, masculinity is defined as a gender performance maintained through social actions and social norms that perpetuate a gendered order between men and women.

As a result, hegemonic masculinity acts as a 'guidelines' to define what 'successful' manhood is in our society. In turn, this downplays the 'unsuccessful' performance of masculinity (McCann et al. 2009:202). But as mentioned earlier by Connell (1995:170), true manhood (or the ideal version of masculinity) is not attainable to all men [the same can be said for our perception of womanhood]. To ensure our understanding of gender remains intact, hegemonic masculinity is used by men as a mechanism that simultaneously enforces the domination of certain aspects of the gender identity (depending on the setting), while reinforcing the subordination of women (or lesser men within the gender hierarchy) in society (Connell, 2008:133).

An example of how hegemonic masculinity is used can be illustrated by looking at how homophobia is used to bolster heteronormative masculinity. Homophobia, according to George Weinberg (in Plummer 2006: 123), is defined as "[the] fear or hatred of homosexuals [and other sexual minorities]." Through this fear, as argued by McCann et al. (2009:202), homophobia is "the main organising principle of our cultural definition of manhood" as 'failed men' are perceived as a threat to hegemonic masculinity because of their over-emphasized feminine characteristics (and over-emphasized masculine qualities for 'failed women'). Because of this perceived threat to our understanding of gender performance, different signifiers (verbal or physical abuse on the lesser group) are used against individuals who are seen as "failed" women or men to reinforcing our perception of gender (ibid:203). The next section of this paper will analyze the role homophobia has within the social institution of sport.

“I hated all the guys who were doing sports.” *Sport and the Role of Homophobia in Maintaining Hegemonic Masculinity*

As argued by Coakley and Donnelly (2009:81), agents of socialization influence athletes within the social institution of sport. Here socialization is defined as “[the] process of learning and social development, which occurs as we interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which we live” (ibid.: 80). In other words, socialization is an on-going process for individuals as one is constantly learning and interacting within one’s perception of social reality. Here the individual interprets social reality through the lens that their agents of socialization have provided for them. In sport, agents of socialization (whether significant or generalized others) can draw individuals to participate in sport—like coaches, teammates, and others, or by discourage them playing in a sport entirely. This section seeks to look into why members of the LGBT community do not participate in organized sport.

According to Clarke (1996:149), “sport was designed by men for men; traditionally it has been regarded as the arena for boys to learn how to be ‘real’ (heterosexual) men.” Sport, therefore, is a masculine institution which enables men to maintain power within society – as they create the rules, determine what the norms are, and facilitate the participation of certain people within sport (ibid.). The feminist movement emerged to challenge hegemonic masculinity in sport, among other social institutions, by advocating that women should be able to participate within this institution (Kidd 2013:556). Allowing women to participate in sport did not mean that hegemonic masculinity dismantled – women today still have fewer opportunities than men to participate in organized sports (not to mention, they are in separate leagues from men) (ibid.:558). As argued by Connell (2008:134), hegemonic masculinity is able to make concessions to various groups without disrupting the domination of men in society.

Is hegemonic masculinity really threatened when subordinate groups organize and ask for equality in certain aspects of social reality? Yes. Those who represent hegemonic masculinity, according to Kidd (2013:558), feared that marginalized groups (in this case, women) would be seen as ‘equal to men’ if they could participate in institutions within the public realm that they formally could not. The idea of females competing against males in

sport would challenge hegemonic masculinity since the power relation between the two identities would be nullified – as it would suggest that because women could compete against men, they could also challenge masculinity as the dominant gender identity. As a result of this perceived threat, hegemonic masculinity employs (obvious and subtle) techniques to reinforce men's dominance in society. Therefore, masculinity is able to adapt to change that might upset the established gender order (Connell 2008:134).

According to Anderson et al. (2012:428), men in sport are meant to be seen as “tough, aggressive, courageous, and able to withstand pain.” Because men feel the need to uphold this image imposed to them through the cultural imaginary, they employ various techniques within sport to support this perceived norm. Homophobia, for example, is used to stigmatize individuals who are perceived as or are gay, while simultaneously promoting the heteronormative standard that sport as an institution wants to defend (ibid.:432). Within young adolescence, according to Plummer (2006:124), young men who are late bloomers or act gay (by either having certain feminine characteristics or by focusing on school work instead of sport, for example) are the targets of homophobia – as their ‘dominant peers’ perceive them as ‘inferior males’.

Gays or lesbians (athletes and non-athletes, younger and older), not surprisingly, are fully aware of the homophobic sub-culture that exists in sports as gay slurs are commonplace in the locker-room or on-the-field (TSN Special: ReOrientation). Professional athletes (who are seen as role models in our society) have also voiced their hatred towards members of the LGBT community for not conforming to the hegemonic gender norm. As a result of this irrational fear which is kept alive through abusive social practices, members of the LGBT community choose not to be involved in sport whatsoever because of how it is portrayed as an unwelcoming environment to them.

Through qualitative research, researchers have been able to document examples of homophobia in sport. This research is important to analyze because it allows those affected by homophobia in sport to share their experiences and discuss how they coped as ‘closeted’ homosexuals within this unwelcoming environment. An example from Plummer (2006:126) documents what one individual would do, as a young boy, to avoid PE: “I would forge notes... make up conditions. Everything, I just hated it... Hated all the other guys that were

doing sport because they were idiots that I had nothing in common with... the stigma bounced onto me.” In this example, this formerly closeted individual would engage in different strategies to ensure no one would find out about his sexual orientation – including forging notes and faking illness in order not to have to face those boys who would bully him for being perceived as gay (as he was not openly gay). As a result, the participant decided to avoid sport entirely as the environment was too hateful to him as a closeted young man at the time.

Lastly in the case of professional sport, Esera Tuaolo, now a retired National Football League (NFL) player who ‘came out’ in 2006, was a closeted gay athlete who experienced conflict between the masculine image he wanted to uphold as a football player and his hidden life off-the-field. In People Magazine, Tuaolo shared his experience as a professional athlete who was ‘in the closet.’

The coaches would call us sissies when we didn't play well.... Every day, I walked into the fear that if I slipped up... After one night of partying, I came home drunk and depressed... I forced open a window. I didn't jump, but I was convinced life would be easier if I were dead.

In this instance, even though Tuaolo was paid to play a sport he loved and was good at, he used alcohol and drugs to help cope with the psychological pain he felt for not being able to open up to his teammates, who treated him like family. From Tuaolo’s story, one can imagine the suffering he went through in this homophobic environment he called ‘work.’

As demonstrated in this part of the paper, closeted members of the LGBT community realize that homophobic slurs like ‘faggot,’ ‘sissy,’ ‘dyke’ and ‘pussy’ are common place within the world of sport. These words are a part of the homophobic sub-culture that exists within amateur and professional sport which reinforces the hegemonic gendered identities for males and females. In these cases, the dominant gendered norms and practices remain intact because members of the LGBT community are afraid of being harassed or discriminated against for not conforming to the heterosexual norm.

“The Jackie Robinson Effect:” *How Racial Minorities Dismantled the ‘Colour Barrier of Sport’*

To me, one of the main reasons that sport engages in homophobic actions and practices is because there is currently no openly gay athlete in the NFL, National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball Association (NBA), or Major League Baseball (MLB) which are considered to be 'The Big Four' North American sport leagues. Although there has been closeted gay athletes within professional sports, there is no openly gay athlete who can start the conversation to help eliminate homophobia in sport and in our society today.

Much like how the LGBT community has been denied equal access to sport, other marginalized groups have been excluded from sport throughout history. The 'colour barrier of sport' that existed for black athletes—which was created because of racism and xenophobia, to me, can help us better understand the 'other colour barrier' that LGBT athletes face today. For this section, I compare the literature pertaining to the 'colour barrier of sport' that existed for racial minorities (i.e. African Americans) to that of the 'other colour barrier' of sport that exists today for members of the LGBT community.

Racism, as defined by Dyerson (2008:224), is the belief of "superiority of people of European descent over all other groups in every aspect of human performance, intellectual, moral, and physical." This belief has historically led to the creation of social policies that were designed to discriminate against racialized groups to ensure they would not be able to participate in various social institutions (for example, the right to vote or the right to an education) – thus reinforcing their subordination within society (Ball et al. 2013:234). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, guided by social activists like Martin Luther King Jr. and others, sought to remove these racist policies and practices that impeded black people from having the same opportunities and liberties as their white counterparts (ibid.: 235).

In the case of sport, 'scientific theories' from the 1870s to 1930s claimed that the 'superior' white European race had a higher level of intelligence and athletic ability than the 'primitive' black African race (Dyerson 2008:228). The claim that nature had made some races more superior than others was accepted by the scientific community and, as a result, influenced public policy that ensure the dominate group in society (in this case, white men) would be able to maintain power within society by way of systemically denying African Americans the same opportunities to that of white Americans (ibid.:231-232). However these 'scientific claims' of inferiority would be challenged when black people began to assimilate

into various social institutions like sport. In this case, athletes like Jackie Robinson were trailblazers for African Americans in the civil rights movement, as these athletes reached worldwide recognition for their athletic ability as ‘coloured’ men – thus challenging ‘scientific claims’ of inferiority.

Jackie Robinson became the first African American to play professional baseball in 1947, thereby breaking the ‘colour barrier of professional sports’ (Dorinson 2012:55). Although Robinson still experienced racism within professional baseball in his career, his contributions to his team (the Brooklyn Dodgers) was celebrated by his teammates who would ‘go to bat’ for him like they would for a white teammate who would be bullied by others (ibid.). Robinson was also a dominant athlete in his field – winning the National League MVP award in 1949 and playing a decisive role in the Dodgers World Series win in 1955 (ibid:56). Through ‘the threat of a positive example,’ Robinson was able to challenge racist beliefs in society (at the macro level) by illustrating how they were able to compete against the ‘superior’ and ‘stronger’ white men who imposed barriers which denied them equal access to sport. I call this “The Jackie Robinson Effect”–as the ‘threat of a positive example’ was able to challenge racist beliefs in institutions (in this case, sport) which allowed for positive social change to occur within other institutions for racial minorities.

When comparing racial minorities to sexual minorities in sport, a couple of key comparisons can be made. First, much like how racial minorities were held back by racist social practices, the LGBT community is currently denied equal access to sport and other institutions by heteronormative masculinity and its practices which keep the status quo intact (Plummer 2006:124). Second, racism and homophobia are both used as mechanisms to belittle ‘subordinate’ groups in society – while reinforcing the domination of the superior group by way of hegemonic practices which stabilizes the relationship between the dominant and the subordinate group in society by way of controlling cultural conceptions of the subordinate group to reinforce the belief of inferiority (ibid.:123). For example, the words ‘nigger’ and ‘faggot’ can be almost interchangeable when you consider the effects these words can have on the subordinate group that is subjected to them. According to Charles R. Lawrence III (in Chamallas 2013:180):

When racial insults are hurled at minorities, the response may be silence or

flight rather than a fight... it is a product of several factors, all of which reveal the non- speech character of the initial pre-emptive verbal assault... Fear, rage, shock, and flight all interfere with any reasonable response. Words like “nigger”... and “faggot” produce physical symptoms that temporarily disable the victim... there is little (if anything) that can be said to redress either the emotional or the reputational injury.

As shown in this quote, the individual who is subject to these words begins to internalize these words along with their meaning - thus reinforcing their subordination in society.

The underlying difference between racial and sexual minorities is that one is an identity that the subject discloses publicly (possibly many times)—making it a discreditable stigma because the individual manages this information; while the other is an identity the subject does not disclose themselves—thereby making it a discredited stigma as it is known to others visually (Goffman 2007:48). Here, society categorized Robinson as a ‘black man’ (as race is a social construction), whereas someone who is gay would have to come out and tell others about their sexual orientation—then they are categorized as gay. Therefore much like how racial minorities felt unwelcomed in the world of sport because of the negative stigma associated with their skin colour, the LGBT community feels constrained by gender norms and practices which discourage them from ‘coming out’ as gay athletes because of the negative stigma associated with homosexuality in society (Anderson et al. 2012:432). In response, I ask: how might social change occur to allow sexual minorities the opportunity to participate in organized sports with the fear of being stigmatized as inferior or ‘not fit for sport?’

“The Jason Collins Effect”: *How Sport can be used as a Springboard for Social Change for the LGBT Community*

As illustrated in the previous section, racial minorities have in the past been excluded from participating in sport and other social institutions because of racist beliefs which imposed a barrier denying them equal access to these institutions. For members of the LGBT community, homophobia poses a similar barrier to their involvement within social institutions. Accordingly, the Gay Liberation Movement has advocated for legal protection, respect, dignity, and the right to be ‘open’ as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and other gender identities without fear of being harassed or discriminated against for not conforming to

gender norms and practices (Ball et al. 2013:249).

A criticism of hegemonic masculinity, according to Anderson (2011:252), is that Connell analyzes the power relation between and within gender identities at the macro level of analysis and does not consider how the relation of power can be challenged at the micro level-which can lead to social change. In response to this criticism, Anderson's (ibid.) research on gay athletes documents how the Gay Liberation Movement and its demands for equal access and opportunity to various social practices has gained traction within society as there are decreasing levels of cultural homophobia – even within sport at the micro level of analysis. This claim made by Anderson are supported by quantitative research which illustrates how Americans have changed their attitudes towards homosexuality in society. For example in 1996, 26% of Americans were in favour of same-sex marriage; this number went up to 53% in 2011 – thus illustrating how society is slowly changing previously held beliefs and attitudes towards homosexuality (in the same way society has slowly changed their racist beliefs towards racial minorities) (Ball et al. 2013:250). To what this change in attitudes can be attributed will be discussed shortly.

However according to The Sports Network in their short documentary called *ReOrientation*, homophobia is still prevalent in sport: the locker-room is still a homophobic environment because of how 'casual homophobia' is used to stigmatize homosexuals as 'lesser men.' According to Patrick Burke (in *ReOrientation*) (co-founder of "You Can Play," an organization that seeks to eliminate homophobia in sport), 'casual homophobia' (for example, saying 'that's so gay') is used in our society to mean how something or someone is perceived as 'lesser,' 'inferior,' or 'irrational.' Because of this homophobic environment, there is currently no gay athlete within the four major North American sports leagues willing to 'come out' out of fear of being subjected to homophobic acts.

However the NBA did have an openly gay athlete for a brief moment from 2013-14. Basketball player Jason Collins became the first openly gay professional athlete in North America when he came out in an article in *Sports Illustrated* (SI). Collins (with Lidz 2013:38), a 34 year old black male, explained he "endured years of misery and [had] gone to enormous lengths to live a lie" as straight man within the homophobic environment of sport. The article in SI goes through Collins' life course (upon discovering he was gay) and also

shares his experiences within professional sports and how he went to great lengths (like Tuaolo) to protect this 'double life' as a 'closeted' man.

Collins (ibid.:40) described himself as an aggressive player on the basketball court, one who was willing to sacrifice himself for his team in order to win games – and therefore did not want his sexual orientation to be a distraction for the team. This idea of how Collins perceived his sexuality as a distraction to the team's overall performance is in line with Goffman's (1990:81) work on teams, where he argued that individuals within teams (not necessarily team sport) might feel estranged from themselves. In this instance, Collins carried out a 'heterosexual' performance that was not his true self. Collins argues that he had no choice but to remain 'closeted' within professional basketball as he could have been subjected to homophobia for deviating from the perceived heteronormative masculine norm of sport (ibid.).

Nonetheless, Collins 'came out' shortly before he retired from professional basketball – as he only played 22 games in 2014 after announcing he was gay. There is a couple of reasons as to why Collins did not play longer after 'coming out.' First, he was seen as past his prime in professional sports (he was 34 when he 'came out'). Second, I believe none of the basketball teams in the NBA wanted to have to deal with the baggage associated with Collins as an openly gay player who was not a high-impact player play for them (seeing that Collins played a minor role within basketball at the center position, making his position replaceable). However as the first openly gay athlete within professional sport, he was able to challenge hegemonic masculinity within sport for a brief time period as an 'openly' gay player.

When analyzing how individuals change their perceptions of homosexuality, McCann et al. (2009:203) argued that individuals can grow out of their homophobic attitudes throughout the life course: a positive experience with someone who is openly gay can lead to one challenging one's previously held homophobic attitudes. Because adolescence and early adulthood can be "characterized by conformity, peer pressure and group culture," the role of hegemonic masculinity is more pronounced and prevalent in these early stages of personal development – where anyone who deviates from heteronormative masculinity can be subject to homophobia (ibid.:207). However once this period of early development passes, this norm becomes less important to the individual because they feel less pressure to conform to this

perception of masculinity (ibid.). Here, individuals are more likely to change their attitudes towards homosexuality, especially when the individual's ideas of masculinity are challenged by 'good examples' of gay individuals who are not defined by their sexuality, but by their merit or abilities (ibid.:208). As explained by one of the participants in McCann et al.'s study who changed their previous held homophobic beliefs after having a positive experience within someone who was gay, "by that time I knew he was homosexual. We had a meeting and I was very confident on what he could bring... Sexuality didn't matter at all. I assessed the situation, and it did not matter" (ibid.).

Plummer's (2006:127) research on homophobia in sport found similar findings where one of his participants earned social status from others after achieving success in sport: "[the homophobia] dropped off dramatically after Year 10 because I won the swimming championship, and that gave me status. That shocked the pants off everyone... it gave me sporting status." I call this "The Jason Collins Effect" where, much like "The Jackie Robinson Effect," 'the threat of a positive example' can challenge homophobic attitudes in social institutions like sport which can lead to positive social change within other institutions for sexual minorities. Here a gay athlete can challenge gender norms and practices by showing how individuals, regardless of sexual orientation [or regardless of race for racial minorities], are fully capable of competing in sport and even be rewarded for their achievements. However, even though Collins was not a "Jackie Robinson-like" athlete who dominated his sport, Collins, like Robinson to black people, can be seen as a role model to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and others as he helped paved the way for their future involvement in sport by disproving stereotypes of inferiority when compared to straight athletes.

To help eliminate the homophobic sub-culture that exists in sport today, I propose three strategies. First, educating athletes about the effects of homophobic language, including the impact these words have impacted 'closeted' athletes, is important to helping to eliminate homophobia in sport. According to Patrick Burke (in ReOrientation), 'casual homophobia' in the locker-room and on-the-field is used by athletes who might not be homophobic – but use homophobic slurs mindlessly without understanding the impact of these words. By educating individuals about the meaning of these words and their impact, this can help to eliminate these words entirely within sport the same way the word "n*****" is seen to be eliminated

from public discourse (hence, self-censorship). Anderson (2011:259) furthers this claims made by Burke by arguing that the homophobic language in the locker-room is so common place that individuals tend not to associate the words with sexuality, but associate these words to mean something 'lesser.' The elimination of these homophobic slurs in sport, can help to make the institution more inclusive to the LGBT community.

Second, positive exposure of LGBT athletes can not only challenge hegemonic masculinity by providing role models for closeted gay athletes, but it can also mean that others might begin to question their own perception of what it means to be a man or woman. For example, if a highly skilled professional athlete (like a Lebron James in basketball, or a Sidney Crosby in hockey) 'came out,' would people's perceptions of said athlete really change? As demonstrated by Anderson (2011:257), teammates are now more supportive of fellow teammates regardless of their sexual orientation: "...they got to know me before I came out. But they have been amazing. Absolutely nothing has changed since I came out . . . I should have come out earlier." 'Closeted' athletes should be encouraged to 'come out' to their teammates if they believe that they would still have their back and protect them from unwanted slurs and attention.

Lastly, the promotion of tolerance and acceptance will ensure LGBT athletes feel safe within organized sports. Connell (2008:142) suggests that a more integrated approach to socializing boys and girls, that is inclusive to both sexes, would help to debunk ideas of gender superiority – while promoting acceptance of others. This relates to McCann et al.'s (2011:216) claim that "once [individuals] move beyond these spheres [characterized by high conformity to gendered norms and practices], their contact with diverse ideas expanded, and [is] often followed by a development of more tolerance towards diversity." Accordingly if individuals are able to live their true self without fear of being discriminated against or harassed, individuals would be more likely to realize their full potential within society and its various institutions.

Conclusion – *"If you can play, you can play"*

This paper examined the barriers that exist to members of the LGBT community when it comes to the social institution of sport. Hegemonic masculinity, as the dominant gendered

identity, is argued in this paper to ensure that various social institutions, including sport, maintain the gendered order in society, including the domination of men over women and other marginalized groups. As a result of hegemonic masculinity and its influence on social institutions, members of the LGBT community have been excluded historically from sport because of the homophobic environment that exists within sport. Whether it be gay slurs or physical abuse, sport is seen as a hyper-masculine culture where individuals need to prove their masculinity by putting down those who are perceived as 'failed' men. However as I have demonstrated, marginalized groups throughout history have been able to challenge hegemonic practices in order for them to participate within various social institutions. Whether it be the right to vote or the ability to participate in the public sphere, various groups have fought for equal access to various institutions – including sport. Similar to how black athletes challenged racist beliefs of inferior by outrunning or outhitting white athletes, LGBT athletes need to take that next step and 'come out' to prove that they can compete against heterosexual athletes (as examples in this paper has shown that they are capable of doing so).

Within our society, individuals should be free to express their true self and pursue their own pleasures without fear of being casted as 'deviant' by use of racist or homophobic slurs. The 'other colour barrier of sport,' therefore, represents a new challenge to our dominant beliefs on gender norms and practices. Much like how racist beliefs have been decreasing over the years to allow black people to progress within various social institutions, barriers facing the LGBT community can be broken by positive LGBT-inclusive education, promoting acceptance, and increased tolerance of others (regardless of sex, gender, race, etc.). These suggestions act as guidelines for the LGBT movement in general, where the end result could be more than just sexual minorities 'coming out to play.'

References

- Anderson, Eric. 2011. "Updating the outcome: Gay athletes, straight teams, and coming out in educationally based sport teams." *Gender & Society* 25(2): 250-268.
- Anderson, Eric, Mark McCormack, and Harry Lee. 2012. "Male team sport hazing initiations in a culture of decreasing homophobia." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 27(4): 427-448.
- Butler, Judith. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Ball, Terence, Richard Dagger, and Daniel I. O'Neill. 2013. *Political Ideology and the Democratic Ideal* (Ninth edition). Toronto, ON: Pearson.
- Chamallas, Martha. 2013. *Introduction to Feminist Legal Theory* (Third edition). New York: Wolters Kluwer.
- Clarke, Gill. 1996. "Queering the pitch and coming out to play: Lesbians in physical education and sport." *Sport, Education and Society* 3(2): 145-160.
- Coakley, Jay and Peter Donnelly. 2009. *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies* (Second Canadian edition). Toronto, ON: McGraw-Hill.
- Collins, Jason and Franz Lidz. 2013. "The Gay Athlete." *Sports Illustrated* 118 (19): 34-41.
- Connell, R.W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkeley, CAL: University of California.
- Connell, Raewyn. 2008. "Masculinity construction and sports in boys' education: a framework for thinking about the issue." *Sport, Education and Society* 13(2): 131-145.
- Dorinson, Joe. 2012. "Great figures in black baseball: Jackie Robinson revisited" *Black ball* 5(2): 51-60.
- Goffman, Erving. 2007. *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Goffman, Erving. 1990. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. Toronto, ON: Doubleday.
- Kessler, Mario. 2011. "Only Nazi Games? Berlin 1936: The Olympic Games between sports and politics." *Socialism and Democracy* 25(2): 125-143.
- Kidd, Bruce. 2013. "Sports and masculinity." *Sport in society* 16(4): 553-564.
- McCann, Dominic Pól, Victor Minichiello, and David Plummer. 2009. "Is homophobia

inevitable?: Evidence that explores the constructed nature of homophobia, and the techniques through which men unlearn it.” *Journal of Sociology* 45(2): 201-220.

Messerschmidt, James W. 1997. *Crime as structured action: Gender, race, class, and crime in the making*. Thousand Oaks, CAL: Sage.

Plummer, David. 2006. “Sportophobia: Why do some men avoid sport?” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 30(2): 122-137.

Rich, Adrienne. 1996. “Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence.” In *Feminism and Sexuality: a reader*, edited by Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott, 130-143. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

The Sports Network. TSN Special: ReOrientation. YouTube (uploaded by Walter P. Chavez).
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OY0tECJ3esE>>

“Gay Man in the NFL.” *People Magazine*. March 6, 2006. Accessed online.
<<http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20062928,00.html>>