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## CHAPTER 9

# Sexualities, Genders, and Bodies in Sport: Changing Practices of Inequity

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The social realm of sport is particularly well positioned to examine the ways in which sexuality and gender intersect. This chapter will interrogate how sporting bodies have been sorted and categorized and how our tendency to rely on rigid categories of gender and sexuality has affected the lives of many who participate in sport. As will be suggested, critically examining the concepts of ‘sexuality’ and ‘gender’ opens up the possibility of demystifying some taken-for-granted assumptions that help produce and reproduce practices such as harassment, discrimination, and inequities in sport. We conclude this chapter with some recommendations for progressive change in relation to lesbian, gay, and transgendered athletes.

### CATEGORY CRISIS

In recent years there has been a shift in thinking about how we understand our lives as lived in what has been called the ‘postmodern condition’. Many of the previously dominant foundational theories of sociology, or ‘grand narratives’ as they are sometimes known, have been challenged on the grounds that they are too rigid, exclusionary, or simply no longer relevant in a rapidly changing and complex world (Lyotard, 1989). Their legitimacy has also been called to question on the basis that they benefit some people at the expense of others. Gender and sexuality are two such social categories that are based on a rigid *binary* relationship (i.e., masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual) in which one of the pair is privileged, legitimized, and valued over the other—specifically, masculinity over femininity, and heterosexuality over homosexuality.

Gender and sexuality are actually much more complex social constructions. Moreover, and critically, they play an important role in processes of social regulation

and control (Foucault, 1980). In response to these entrenched relations of power, 'queer theorists' are now developing critical analyses that disrupt the way binaries have been employed. In doing so, they seek to create spaces where these categories are changed. While the breakdown, or 'queering', of tidy and normative binaries may seem uncomfortable to some, the discomfort may provoke a renegotiation of gender and sexualities that might help erode social inequalities based on sexuality and gender.

Feminist Trinh Minh-Ha has pointed out that 'despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak' (1989: 94). For example, while gender is often neatly divided into masculine and feminine groupings within contemporary conventional wisdom, it is unable to encompass other gendered possibilities such as 'transgender' and 'intersex'. In response to this, theorists such as Judith Butler (1990) propose alternative, progressive ways of thinking about gender. She argues that, rather than being a binary, gender is a performance—a 'doing'—that can vary within an individual from context to context and from one moment to the next. The performativity of gender situates it as a dynamic and on-going social construction. This type of thinking resists the assumption that there is something 'natural,' or true or false, about any gender.

Similarly, sexuality is often assumed to rest within two binary categories—heterosexual and homosexual. Such a neat division suppresses the multiplicity of sexual desires in a way that favours and legitimates heterosexuality as 'normal' and marginalizes homosexuality as 'deviant' (Foucault, 1980; Butler, 1990). Further, this simplification of desire into two seemingly opposite categories fails to accurately capture the diversity of how real people might engage in erotic pleasure.

While humans have been engaging in same-sex relations for thousands of years, the term 'homosexual' is actually a relatively new term coined by German sexologist Richard von Kraft-Ebbing in his 1886 book *Psychopathia Sexualis*. As the Latin title of the book reveals, the term 'homosexual' was coined to pathologize same-sex love and sex as deviant when measured against the 'norm' of heterosexual sex. Thus, Kraft-Ebbing believed homosexuality to be a perversion, a disease, and an inherited vice. More recent analyses are far clearer on the extent to which heterosexuality and homosexuality are social and institutional constructs. As Richardson (1996) has suggested, 'if we accept that "the sexual" is always seen through social interpretation, then the sexual is not something that can be separated from the social but is rather that which is produced by it; it is the social organization of knowledge that establishes meanings for the sexual' (10). Thus, because the category 'homosexual' is a social fabrication originally invented to label gays and lesbians as deviant, it is now important to re-examine and challenge the history of discrimination and the inequities which are embedded in the sexual binary.

Examining the way we have historically classified homosexuality as deviant or sexuality in 'crisis' is part of the broader project of postmodernism—a 'crisis' is defined by those who profit from what is considered 'normal'. Behaviour that is considered normal, however, has always been subject to change. It is continually renegotiated; the margins of 'acceptable' behaviour, sexual or otherwise, shift over time. In the same way that many people in North America automatically put on seatbelts when they get into a car—a behaviour which was not common thirty years

ago—the degree of discrimination against gays and lesbians is arguably lessening over time, if only gradually.

In sum, a critical analysis of the way in which we have come to know the social world around us can lead to the collapsing of some categories, and the rebuilding of others. By far, one of the greatest barriers that gays and lesbians face regarding full and equal participation in both amateur and professional sport is discrimination based on homophobia. In examining the intolerance of non-heterosexual practices, this chapter will point to the various ways that sexuality is implicated in everyday inequities in sport and athletics.

## SEXUALITY, GENDER, AND SPORT

While we believe that it is important to collapse the binary categories of masculine and feminine and heterosexual and homosexual, it is first important to recount the history of how the categories have been employed to prevent gay men, lesbians, and transgendered people from fully participating in sport.

In Britain, organized sport in the nineteenth and early twentieth century became more popular in response to a perceived growing ‘feminization’ of men (Mangan, 1981). Public schools were numerically dominated by female teachers, and many men were away at war, thus creating a ‘crisis’ in masculinity.<sup>1</sup> The response to this ‘crisis’ was the demand for more male bonding through activities like sport and male-only social groups such as the Boy Scouts (Kimmell, 1996). A renewed popularity of social and sporting clubs that excluded women was a part of the broader renegotiation of gender at this time.

During Victorian times it was considered normal for middle-class women and girls to live their lives predominantly within private spaces such as the home. As a result, their access to the public spaces such as the workplace or sporting clubs was restricted. Women were also seen as fragile and delicate (Dowling, 2001). It was thought that all the energy of young women should be focused on their ‘natural’ childbearing and childrearing capacities. Any distraction from this focus, especially in the form of physical activities such as sport, would potentially harm their bodies and likely result in unhealthy or even deformed children (Strong-Boag, 1988).

Mythical fears about possible damage to reproductive capacity caused by physical activity no longer haunt women in sport, although there remain vestiges of that way of thinking such as when during the 2006 Winter Olympic Games female competitors began downhill ski races further down the course than their male counterparts. Despite feminist gains for women in the twentieth century (Rail, 1998), women who participate in physically rough and high-risk sport are still commonly seen as ‘unfeminine’ and their (hetero)sexuality is often considered suspect. It is at this point where gender and sexuality converge and become intertwined. More successful athletes tend to be either hyper-heterosexualized, with their femininity emphasized by the media—for example, tennis player Maria Sharapova—or their gender identity and sexual orientation put to question—for example, tennis player Amelie Mauresmo (Koivula, 1999). The goal for an individual woman to do well in sport is eclipsed by the stigma of having to continually defend or publicly discuss how one is gendered and/or sexually defined.

When *hegemonic* (or the dominant view of) femininity is seemingly transgressed through sport, it is often assumed that heterosexuality is similarly in question. If someone is perceived as being 'unfeminine' they are also assumed to be lesbian (Lenskyj, 2003). Such transgressions of hegemonic femininity tend to have negative social consequences. Of course, while women engaging in sport may contest an ideal femininity, this does not automatically imply that all women athletes are lesbian. *Homophobia* demands that both heterosexual and lesbian women in sport be continually accountable for their sexuality. Griffin (1998) notes that:

Reactions to the lesbian bogeywoman create an atmosphere in which lesbian coaches, athletes and athletic administrators devote enormous energy not only to athletics, but also protecting themselves from potentially career-threatening discrimination and prejudice. (92)

The social stigma of possibly being thought of as lesbian causes some girls and women to resist participating in sports (Fusco, 1995). Furthermore, the popular media regularly reinforce the perception that women should not have strong bodies, and that their bodies should continually be sexualized (Koivula, 1999). Given this representation, young female athletes may be cautious about working out 'too much' lest it impact the perception of their sexuality. Further, those athletes, coaches, or Physical Education teachers who identify as lesbian often fear being 'outed' and the consequent homophobia that it might cause (Khayatt, 1992).

## HETEROSEXISM IN SPORT

The normality of heterosexuality is occasionally challenged and usually reinforced by sport. Because assumptions about 'appropriate' gender and desire is so interwoven with the public performance of sport, the presence of lesbians, gay men, and transgendered people in sport challenges some of the foundational social functions of sport. Griffin (1995) outlines five functions of sport:

- a) defining and reinforcing traditional conceptions of masculinity, b) providing a context for acceptable and safe male bonding and intimacy, c) establishing status among other males, d) reinforcing male privilege and perceptions of female inferiority and e) reifying heterosexuality. (54–5)

Sport helps to reinforce the dominant definitions of masculinity through the exclusion of 'others'—gay men, women, and some of those who are physically challenged. Sport offers an outlet for men to bond around the exclusion of others and, in so doing, it solidifies the status and privilege of men over women, straight over gay and lesbian. These five functions make visible the connections between gender, privilege, sport, and sexuality while pointing to the inequities that sport produces and reproduces.

Gay male athletes are in a unique position to undercut the way that sport and heterosexual masculinity are linked to securing gender and sexual privilege because they are able to disrupt the assumed unity among men in the sport arena (Pronger,

1990, 1999, 2002). By conforming to gendered expectations of male athletes, some gay men can ‘pass’ as straight, while at the same time interrupt the way sport is supported by the powerful authority of heterosexism.

While homophobia is often evoked to police gender transgressions, the presence of lesbians and gay men in sport challenges all of Griffin’s five functions of sport and, therefore, is often seen as threatening to both gender and sport as a heterosexual social space. Not unlike the homophobia that is present in other male-dominated domains such as the military (Bérubé, 1990), homophobia in sport works to protect the privilege of a small group of men by carefully policing the membership and definition of men and masculinity. As illustrated in Box 9.1, even the biological sex of women athletes has been called into question in order to regulate and control socially constructed femininity.

### BOX 9.1: CHROMOSOMAL GENDER TESTING OF ATHLETES

During the Cold War there was concern by Western countries and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that, in order to win more gold medals, the Soviet Union and East Germany had male athletes compete as women. To address this worry, and a greater gendered fear that women athletes might exceed men’s records, it was decided in 1968 that all women competitors—and only women—would have their *chromosomes* tested to establish that they were chromosomally women, that is, that they possessed an XX chromosome.<sup>2</sup> Tests established that *some* of the female athletes had a chromosomal make up of XXY. The unusual appearance of an unexpressed Y chromosome indicated, as far as the IOC was concerned, that the athletes were not ‘officially’ women and could not, therefore, compete against other women, despite the fact that they had female genitalia. Canadian Olympic athletes such as fourteen-year-old Nancy Garapick, who won double bronze in the 100- and 200-metre backstroke at the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal, were included in the chromosome testing of women. Until the abolishment of these tests in 2002 all women athletes competing in the Olympic Games had to have their chromosomes tested and were obliged to wear a badge when in the Olympic Village that indicated whether or not they were women.

This public, testing, marking, and scientific regulation of gender is just one example of the degree to which biological sex is an unreliable measure of gender. Gender may not always correlate to sexed bodies in the way we have come to assume they should. Furthermore, chromosomal testing of gender in competitive sport demonstrates how much we depend on gender to mark differences between athletes and to separate the achievements of men from the achievements of women.

## HETEROSEXUALIZATION IN SPORT

Because of the threat that gay and lesbian athletes pose to how sport helps to maintain and reproduce heterosexuality and masculinity, the popular media often focus

on the femininity of the female athlete over her athletic accomplishments (Harris and Clayton, 2002). Women who challenge gender 'norms' are regularly subjected to objectification and sexualization of their bodies as a strategy to limit the degree to which they may transgress hegemonic femininity via athletic excellence (Quinn, 2002).

The popularity of a number of controversial calendars of nude female athletes—often created for fundraising purposes—has created debates regarding whether or not the sexualization of women in sport is yet another way of trivializing women's athletic accomplishments. For example, to ease the financial burden of international travel created by a decrease in athletic funding, the Canadian Senior Women's National Rugby Team posed semi-nude for a calendar in 2005. In another example of the heterosexualization of female athletes, after Quebec hockey goalie Manon Rheume became the first woman (in 1991) to play in an exhibition game for the Tampa Bay Lightning of the National Hockey League (NHL) she was invited to pose in the nude in *Playboy Magazine*. Not everyone may be critical of female athletes who pose naked, yet the re-positioning of public attention away from how women athletes contest rigid hegemonic femininity reinforces heterosexual privilege. Similarly, gold medallist Cassie Campbell of the Canadian Women's Olympic Hockey team is regularly featured in the media with a particular focus on her feminine appearance.

Women in sport are under the gaze of men, and sexualized female athletes are highly marketable—mostly to men. Thus, it is telling that in 2002 *Sports Illustrated*/CNN decided to cancel the publication of *Sports Illustrated Women* on the basis of the argument that a target audience of only women would not be able to generate enough revenue for the magazine to be profitable. In catering to the seemingly financially profitable gaze of men, many women athletes have to negotiate a highly sexualized sporting environment. Women athletes, especially those who compete in more 'traditionally masculine' sports, face a heterosexist climate and the potential of sexual harassment by coaches (Brackenridge and Fasting, 2002, 2004; Hargreaves, 1994). Due to the airing of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *Fifth Estate* investigative segment on female athletes' allegations of sexual 'misconduct' by male coaches (a rowing coach in Ontario, two volleyball coaches in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and a swimming coach in New Brunswick), greater attention to abusive relationships between male coaches and female athletes ensued. However, since the well-publicized case of Rachel Marsden's suspicious claims of sexual harassment against her swim coach at Simon Fraser University in 1997, the media have been cautious of how they report on claims that have not yet been brought before the courts. This, in turn, creates a greater silence about sexual harassment and greater pressure for women athletes to comply with heterosexualized femininity.

## PAYING FOR IT: ATHLETIC SPONSORSHIP AND FUNDING FOR LESBIAN AND GAY SPORT

Rather than concentrating on their exclusion from sport, many women have historically resisted male control of their athletic lives (Lenskyj, 1986). Research has shown that during the past century women were not simply the passive subjects of male power within the sport realm (Birrell and Cole, 1994). Through the foundations of

women's sporting clubs, teams, and leagues across Canada, women actively resisted men's control and found ways to create and participate in sport for women (Hall, 1996). Despite the social punishments for engaging in sport that might threaten femininity and/or assumed heterosexuality, Canadian women have been competing in sport and breaking records as well as gender stereotypes. Due to a somewhat greater media exposure of women's sport, more and more young women are willing to risk gender non-conformity for the pleasure and personal gain of competing in sport.

While women athletes still receive less funding and less media coverage than men, there has recently been some growth in the recognition of the achievement of women in a variety of sports. When women's athletic achievements are high, or if they contrast to the achievements of men, the media tend to focus on women's sports as a remarkable accomplishment, as opposed to the coverage of men's athletic performances as *ordinary* and *expected*. For example, the Canadian Olympic gold medal win against the American women's hockey team at the 2002 Salt Lake City Games was widely broadcast and covered by the media—that same year the Canadian Men's Olympic Hockey team lost to the US. There was also a media flurry when Annika Sorenstam competed against professional men golfers in 2003. Similarly, because of the seeming contrast to gendered expectations of women, paralympian athlete, Chantal Petitclerc, has received growing media attention since setting the Canadian records in the 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, and 1500m wheelchair events. During the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens, Greece, Petitclerc set three new world records and a paralympic record.

Yet for lesbian athletes, professional or amateur, neither the sporting arena nor the media typically offer a warm welcome (Lenskyj, 2003). There are only a few 'out' lesbian professional athletes in Canada, such as boxer Savoy Howe, and former coach of the Canadian National Women's Hockey team, Shannon Miller, because many still fear anti-lesbian discrimination. Indeed, there is a precedent for such fear among women athletes, both in Canada and elsewhere. For example, Betty Baxter, a Canadian volleyball coach and former captain of the Canadian Olympic volleyball team in 1976, was fired as the head coach of the national program in the early 1980s due to speculation about her being lesbian.

Professional athletes are often dependent on funding from corporate sponsors. However, sponsors tend to distance themselves from athletes who are, or are assumed to be, lesbian or gay. Mark Tewksbury, who won a gold medal for Canada in the 100-metre backstroke at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, had a six-figure contract for motivational speaking cancelled by a financial supporter who considered him to be *too* openly gay. Czech-born tennis champion Martina Navratilova also shares a long history of being overlooked by potential sponsors who have chosen to distance themselves from her public image as a lesbian athlete. Yet, Navratilova has recently become a spokesperson for a San Francisco travel company that is aimed exclusively at gays and lesbians in order to make the issue of lesbian and gay athletes more visible, and to address discrimination by athletic sponsors.

In sum, for most competitive gay athletes, *coming out* often results in the loss of financial sponsorship and endorsements, and can jeopardize a gay or lesbian's elite/professional athletic career.



## MEASURING UP: GAY MALE ATHLETES

Not unlike the homophobia experienced by lesbians, gay men face similar forms of discrimination. Due to the history of organized sport developing from a fear of 'feminization', and because masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity, sport has become a site where masculinity is taught and repetitively practiced. In mandatory Physical Education (PE) classes in public schools, at sporting competitions, and in the locker room, student bodies are 'sorted' and refined according to hegemonic male standards. While PE has undergone pedagogical changes over the last twenty years to attempt to focus more on fitness and less on competition, it is difficult to deny the connection between institutionalized schooling and gender conformity (Davison, 2000a, 2000b; Messner and Sabo, 1994). Symbolically, sport has been, and remains, one of the 'last bastions' of heterosexual masculinity and, thus, of the operation of power over other men, women and the environment (Frank, 1990).

The 'ideal' masculine body is groomed in most sports to epitomize some of the highly valued masculine qualities such as strength, muscularity, endurance, tolerance of pain, speed, and coordination. The cultivation of hegemonic masculinity is, then, located *in* the body, and is articulated *by* the body. For example, sport encourages men to take up space in aggressive and domineering ways (Whitson and MacIntosh, 1990). Organized team sport, for example, incorporates the assumption that through competition, strength, and athletic skill one of the two teams will overpower the opposing team and 'win'. In gendered and social relations outside of sport, a similar position is adopted where particular 'masculine' ways of acting, speaking, and moving in the world are valued more than feminine ways of being and knowing; admittedly, however, this process is diverse and complex. Through sport, the body is disciplined to promote and defend hegemonic masculinity. In many sports where men and women compete separately, masculine bonding through gendered sameness and exclusion protects hegemonic masculinity for athletes who are put in a position to which they may feel obliged to support the gendered 'team'. As such, the performance of masculinity through sport creates the illusion that 'masculinity' is a 'natural' state bestowed on men rather than something that is worked on, continually negotiated, and defended (Frank, 1994, 1997).

It should be understood that the manipulation of the physical body through sport is not problematic on its own. What is problematic is the way in which hegemonic masculinity is rigidly applied to the male body in sport to effectively inferiorize not only the bodies of many women and girls, but also the bodies of men and boys who are not able to 'measure up' to a standard that conveys masculine privilege (Davison, 1996, 2000a). The physical body, then, becomes a critical factor for individual men and boys in reaching for gendered expectations and retaining masculine privilege. As Box 9.2 illustrates, some boys and men have embraced masculinity in psychologically and physiologically unhealthy ways.

In the same way that masculinity is measured against femininity, it is also positioned in opposition to homosexuality; that is, when a male is referred to as being 'masculine' he is generally assumed to be heterosexual. Because of the binary structure of both gender and sexuality, femininity and gay men represent a threat to

hegemonic masculinity and masculine privilege. 'Masculinity' can be said to be that which is not feminine or homosexual. This is why homophobia works to regulate erotic desires among men (Messner, 1992). Thus, gay men in sport are often feared, distrusted, and stigmatized. For example, a well-known former coach of the Boston Bruins publicly stated that a gay man could not play in the National Hockey League (NHL). Such a statement makes it clear that gay men are not welcome in the NHL, and that the hetero-centric environment of professional hockey is still under the illusion that all gay men are effeminate or unathletic.

### BOX 9.2: THE ADONIS COMPLEX

With the growth in popularity of men's fashion and health magazines in the 1990s a large parallel industry developed at the same time to additionally profit from men's insecurities about their bodies. Bodywork has grown rapidly among men and boys in response to concerns over the shape, form, and musculature of their bodies, and to other corporeal issues such as shame and fear over hair loss or erectile dysfunction. In the 1980s public gyms with a wide variety of fitness machines were relatively uncommon. Yet by the 1990s gyms and fitness centres became commonplace in most North American cities and continue to be frequented by men and women of all ages. While an unhealthy subservience to hegemonically feminine body ideals has produced a growth of body image and eating disorders in young women, in the late 1990s sociological, psychological, and medical research discovered that hegemonic masculinity also created some unhealthy body image 'side effects' in men and boys. Recent research has documented that some men, both gay and straight, have developed anorexia or bulimia, and even more men and boys have developed what has been called 'reverse anorexia' or 'Bigorexia' (Pope et al., 2000).

When measuring up to the cosmetic demands of hegemonic masculinity or competing in sport, many men and boys now actively construct a hyper-masculine physique through weight-training. Despite working out in the gym for several hours per day and subsequently gaining muscle mass, some boys and men continue to see themselves as thin. The dissatisfaction with the shape of their physical body leads some males to even more intensive exercise, or to the temptation to use anabolic steroids. The 'disconnect' between the physical body and the psychic construct found among those afflicted with reverse anorexia arises from gendered and athletic expectations, and a greater social focus on the muscular body as a desired physical shape. Gender is central to erotic desire (Pronger, 1990) and the heightened objectification of the male physical body, in both the media and organized sport, together with the pressures of conforming to gendered and sexual ideals, can produce unhealthy body images that may damage psychological and physical health.

Homophobia and sexism are regular occurrences in male locker rooms (Curry, 2002). Stories told about heterosexual 'conquests' and anti-gay slurs are commonplace and establish the space as unwelcoming of both gay men and effeminacy. In

a homosocial space where naked bodies are on display, there is a greater need to fortify masculinity and to police sexuality (Davison, 2000b). The lack of privacy in men's changing rooms and communal showers prevents the potential for a slip from homosociality to homoeroticism. Of course, the spectacle of men's bodies on display also makes the locker room a very erotic place for some men. However, the tension between homosociality and the regulation of compulsory heterosexuality in the locker room often creates an intense atmosphere of male bonding, misogyny, homophobia, and desire. The pressure to conform to a rigid heterosexual standard can create a tension that can be both painful and pleasurable at the same time.

### BOX 9.3: CHANGES IN THE CHANGING ROOM

Many people believe that gender is body-dependent and body-specific. That is, biologically male bodies confer masculinity and biologically female bodies confer femininity. However, this is not always the case; babies can be born with indistinguishable sex characteristics. Some people believe that their gender does not correlate with their body and therefore they perform gender inconsistent with their biological sex (Bornstein, 1994, 1998). Others undergo sex reassignment surgery to attempt to match gender and biology in 'traditionally' acceptable ways, and some people parody gender by performing as drag queens or drag kings (Volcano and Halberstam, 1999).

Transgender bodies radically rupture traditional notions of two separate and opposing genders. Thus, being transgendered can create conflict in the sport environment, which tends to actively promote hegemonic masculinity and rigid gender performances. For example, sport often creates separate spaces for male and female athletes to compete, and therefore reinforces gender differences based on biological differences. Incorporating transgendered bodies into sport would require that the foundations of sport be reconsidered.

While transgendered athletes potentially occupy an important position to sport and gender reform, the lived realities of being transgendered and competing in sport involve daily struggle, harassment, humiliation, and sometimes violence. For example, changing rooms are almost always segregated according to biological sex differences. Transgendered athletes who do not conform to a distinct gender binary are excluded by the signs on the door, and often by the athletes behind the doors. Now that the International Olympic Committee has decided to permit transgender competitors it is time for other sporting venues, clubs, gyms, and schools to begin to rethink the simplistic gender divide in sport and begin to create safe spaces for transgendered athletes.

While some men may find the rule-bound structure of sport to be a psychologically safe place to connect with other males—within a context that maintains clear boundaries (Frank, 1990)—not all men thrive in this environment. The desire for friendship and bonding is conflated with an alliance against any influence which

might threaten male superiority and pride—women, gay men, people of other races, short men, fat men, disabled men, etc. For example, in 2004, NHL player and St. Louis Blues forward, Mike Danton, was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison for his role in a murder-for-hire plot. The plan to murder his agent was reported to have been connected a long history of intimidation of Danton by his agent regarding his promiscuity and alcoholism. This high-profile sport controversy is a further example of the way that sport is implicated in the negotiation of dominance-based versions of masculinity that can be harmful to others who are not defined within its narrow gender parameters.

While sport creates many friendships, it can also separate men and boys. Many men fear humiliation, exclusion, or the violence of other men if they fail to conform. This is especially true if one's gender performance, body, or sexual desire do not correspond to hegemonic masculine expectations, as Box 9.3 demonstrates.

## THE GAY GAMES

While the number of professional athletes who have 'come out' as gay or lesbian is growing, there is still a very 'chilly climate' in professional and non-professional sport for lesbians and gay men (Lenskyj, 2003). Tom Waddell, an American Olympic decathlete, attempted to address the inequity and discrimination of lesbian, gay, and transgendered athletes by creating a gay-friendly Olympics. However, the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) objected to Waddell's use of the term *Gay Olympics*—they claimed that it infringed on their exclusive use of the word 'Olympic'. The decision by the USOC to take legal action against Waddell over the use of the term *Gay Olympics* is a clear example of institutional and systemic homophobia. The USOC did not choose to sue those who started the Special Olympics for disabled athletes, the Police Olympics, or even North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine's Dog Olympics! Yet, the USOC legally fought Waddell all the way to the United States Supreme Court, and upon winning the right to forbid Waddell from using the word 'Olympic' with the word 'Gay', then attempted to force Waddell to pay \$100,000 for legal expenses. While the legal battle continued until 1987 (shortly before Waddell died of AIDS), Waddell and many others participated in the first Gay Games in 1982 in San Francisco. Gay Games I included 1,350 athletes from 12 countries competing in 17 different sporting events. Successive Gay Games have increased in both the numbers of participants and the number of events. By 1994, Gay Games IV in New York City included 11,000 athletes from over 40 countries competing in 31 events. Canadian figure skater Mathew Hall won gold at the 1994 Gay Games IV. The event's popularity continues to grow: the sixth Gay Games in Sydney in 2002 involved over 11,000 athletes from 70 countries competing in 33 events.

The popularity and success of the Gay Games is a testament to the need to address the climate of homophobia in athletics and sports. In their mission statement, The Federation of Gay Games states:

it is a fundamental principle of the Federation of Gay Games that all activities conducted under its auspices shall be inclusive in nature and that no individual

shall be excluded from participating on the basis of sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, political belief(s), athletic/artistic ability, physical challenge, age, or health status. (Federation of Gay Games, 2003)

It would seem like such a goal would be embraced by everyone, and yet the need for the Gay Games points back to the way that homophobia and heterosexism are woven through cultural understandings and gendered practices to the extent that discrimination against gay, lesbian and transgendered people is rarely seen as problematic by those who are not on the margins. The Gay Games has both raised awareness about gay, lesbian, and transgendered athletes, and has played an important role in disrupting categories that allow some people to remain comfortable and privileged at the expense of others.

## CONCLUSION

Sport is a social site where gender is performed and sexuality is regulated. By promoting hegemonic masculinity, men's sport systematically excludes women, and actively encourages homophobia. And yet, despite the inhospitable sporting environment, many gay men, lesbians, and transgendered people continue to play significant roles as athletes and activists. As hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality are renegotiated, gay pride is celebrated, and gays, lesbians, and transgendered people gain more legal rights internationally, there remains a need for a greater recognition of the inequities that some athletes face which prevents equitable participation in sport.

There is an urgent need for teacher educators and Physical Education teachers to acknowledge the ways in which dominant understandings of gender and sexuality act to exclude some people from sport. Furthermore, it is necessary to critically examine the oversimplification of the binary categories discussed in this chapter in order to engage with the complexity of the lived practices of gender and sexuality. Addressing the ways in which the categories we use are limited and exclusionary will require institutional and professional changes in the form of policy reformulation. As gender and sexuality has been renegotiated over time, sport no longer needs to remain the gatekeeper of *acceptable* gender. Just as sport was racially desegregated in North America in the mid-twentieth century, sport will likely benefit from the talents of gay, lesbian, and transgendered athletes in the future.

## NOTES

1. Note how the absence of men is a 'crisis' but the absence of women or the invisibility of lesbians and/or gay men is not seen as problematic.
2. Although Princess Anne, a member of the British royal family competed in the Equestrian event at the 1976 Montreal Olympics, she was exempt from the mandatory testing because it was not seen as fitting for a Royal to undergo chromosome testing.

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## RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

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H. Lenskyj, *Out on the Field: Gender, Sport and Sexualities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003). Using case studies from Canada, the United States, and Australia, *Out on the Field* critiques the liberal feminist response to women and sports and provides a radical feminist analysis of the 'chilly climate' for lesbian athletes. Lenskyj demonstrates that despite feminist activism and decades of research into women and sport, the playing field is still not a safe place for lesbian athletes.

H.G. Pope, K.A. Phillips, and R. Olivardia, *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession* (New York: The Free Press, 2000). The relatively new phenomenon of 'reverse anorexia' for men is examined in this text. Chapters address obsessive gym/work-out practices, the rise of body image culture, young men, gay men, and women's perspectives on men and body image disorders.

E. Anderson, *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity* (Stony Brook, NY: SUNY Press, 2005). This book examines a broad range of intersections of sport, sexuality, and masculinity. Through interviews with several professional and amateur athletes across various sport disciplines, Anderson addresses homophobia, coming out, gay stigma in sport, and offers suggestions for strengthening gay athletics.

B. Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality and the Meaning of Sex* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). Pronger interrogates the way gay sexuality is understood, and illustrates how sex, sexuality, masculinities, and sport are woven through with contradictions and desire for athletics. A philosophy of sexuality is applied to bodies as a social site to re-examine the erotics of sport.



P. Griffin, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians, Homophobia and Sport* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1998). As a former athlete and coach, Griffin examines the many ways that discrimination impacts the lives of lesbian athletes, how they are marginalized in sport, and how dedicated athletes are transforming sport. The scope of this book includes the negotiation of identity of lesbian athletes, the complexities of Christian evangelicals in sport, and a concluding chapter that offers many resources for readers to begin to challenge discriminatory stereotypes against lesbian athletes and women in sport more broadly.

### RELEVANT WEBSITES

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The Men's Bibliography. Available at <http://mensbiblio.xyonline.net>. The Men's Bibliography is an online bibliographic resource for readings on men and masculinities categorized by subject, including information on fatherhood, masculinity, homophobia and appearance issues.

The Federation of Gay Games. Available at <http://www.gaygames.com/en/>. The Federation of Gay Games includes information about the upcoming games, local events, an archive of press releases, and a history of the Federation that describes its goals and purpose.

The Project to Eliminate Homophobia in Sport. Available at <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/1234.html>. This website coordinates seven national organizations as they work to create a society that will respect all athletes regardless of gender identity. The site outlines the four main goals of the project and provides details as to how people can become involved.

Lesbians in Sport. Available at [http://www.lesbian.com/sports/sports\\_intro.html](http://www.lesbian.com/sports/sports_intro.html). Lesbian.com is a resource for information on a wide variety of issues ranging from family planning to spirituality to disabilities. The site also provides links to various national organizations, employment opportunities, and similar sites.

The International Foundation for Gender Education. Available at <http://www.ifge.org>. While not specifically about sport, this site promotes the 'understanding and acceptance of **All People**: Transgender, Transsexual, Crossdresser, Agender, Gender Queer, Intersex, Two Spirit, Drag King, Drag Queen, Queer, Straight, Butch, Femme, Homosexual, Bisexual, and Heterosexual.'

### GLOSSARY TERMS

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**Binary:** A situation possessing only two possibilities, which are often in contrast.

**Chromosomes:** Rod-shaped entities found in the nucleus of a cell that appear when a cell divides and which carry the genes that determine heredity. Humans have 46 chromosomes, two of which determine sex characteristics. Biological males *usually* have an X and a Y chromosome and biological women *usually* have two X chromosomes.

**Come out:** The individual choice of gay and lesbian persons to make their sexuality public. Because heterosexuality is seen as normative, the sexuality of straight people is always already 'out'. 'Coming out' for gay and lesbian people is rarely a single act but often occurs over and over again in a variety of contexts due to both the assumption of heterosexuality and the social stigma of not being 'straight'.

**Grand narratives:** All-encompassing theories such as marxism, liberalism, or humanism that aim to explain the nature of current social conditions and a path to progress.

**Hegemonic:** A dominant set of beliefs that is mutually agreed upon, but is not total and uncontested. It is usually connected to 'common-sense' understanding and, therefore, it is not easy to challenge.



**Heterosexism:** The systematic and systemic valuing of heterosexuality as normative in a way that prevents other sexualities from being seen as legitimate.

**Homophobia:** An irrational fear of gays and lesbians that furthers the regulation of heterosexuality as normative.

**Postmodern condition:** A theoretical condition arising out of a philosophical critique of 'modernist' and enlightenment ideas about knowledge and reality. Postmodern theory attempts to account for the contemporary condition where people are surrounded by mass reproduced images, multiple subjectivities, and the fracturing of identity.

**Sexual harassment:** Any unwanted sexual attention, physical or verbal, which reinforces unequal power relations.

**Transgendered:** A state of being gendered outside of the masculine/feminine binary. Not all transgendered persons undergo sex reassignment surgery.

#### CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

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1. In what ways are gays and lesbians seen as a threat to sport?
2. How might coaches and/or Physical Education teachers address homophobia?
3. In what ways might the sexuality of straight athletes impact sport? Would these be positive or negative impacts?
4. How might a coach or Physical Education teacher accommodate the needs of transgendered athletes/students?
5. What are some other ways that sexuality and gender impact athletes' lives?