Sexuality Matters in Physical Education and Sport Studies

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Sport-crazy Australia embodies in the public imagination a ‘fair go’ ethos, giving everyone an equal opportunity to participate regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or religion. At the same time, sport can be seen by others to be the last bastion of male power, which can make sport participation difficult for those perceived to be or who are gay or lesbian. Homophobic attitudes and discriminatory behavior are also prevalent in other public settings, especially in schools. We examine the nature and impact of homophobia, especially on young people; then we discuss examples of curriculum materials and intervention strategies that can be used by teachers to promote sexuality inclusive teaching and learning in university or college level physical education and sport studies programs.

Politicians and other public officials often tout sport as the ‘great equalizer,’ the activity that cuts through gender, race, or religious boundaries to unite people around a common interest. However, others (Kell, 2000; McKay, 1991) decry it as myth. For all the celebration of women’s advances in sport and the growing recognition of Indigenous athletes, the mainstream sport environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) participants is still a difficult one (Brackenridge et al., 2006; Griffin, 1998, 1992a, 1992b; Lenskyj et al., 2002; Burroughs et al., 1995). The same can be said (Pitts et al., 2006; Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell, 2004; Hillier et al., 1999, 1998, 1996) for GLB people in schools, workplaces, and other public settings. While many school policies outlaw bullying, and some provide support for same-sex attracted students, there is still a long way to go to make schools safe for all students.

This paper begins with an examination of the nature and impact of homophobia, especially on same-sex attracted youth and GLB adults in an Australian context.1 We then explore homophobia, which is linked to heterosexism and hegemonic masculinity, and how to address it in sport and education. The paper also describes examples of policy statements, curriculum materials, and intervention strategies designed to promote more inclusive teaching and learning in university level physical education and sport studies programs. The aim is not just to help make teaching and learning more inclusive to GLB students and staff, but also to help prepare all students in physical education, sport counseling, exercise science, coaching,

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and sport management to work more effectively in settings of social and cultural diversity, in Australia and elsewhere.

**Impact of Homophobia**

Homophobia can be defined as prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence that are based on fear, distrust, dislike, or hatred of sexual minorities encompassing gay men, lesbian women, bisexuals, and transgender persons. It is often linked to heterosexism, which is the widespread and often unquestioned assumption that heterosexuality is the natural and the only legitimate form of love, partnership, marriage, or sexual relationship. This view of heterosexuality underpins the gendering process, in which there are thought to be two natural sexes and genders and one normal sexuality (i.e., heterosexuality), leaving all others (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual) as deviant (Sears, 1997).

Gilbert (2000) claims that there are four main interconnected areas in which homophobia exists in society: institutional homophobia, cultural homophobia, interpersonal homophobia and internalized homophobia (Gilbert, 2000). Institutional homophobia encompasses the many forms of discrimination against GLB people that comes from government (legislation and policy), businesses (rights, entitlements, etc.), and other institutions such as churches, education, and sport (Gilbert, 2000). For instance, in 2007, the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) found 58 pieces of Federal legislation related to financial and work related benefits that discriminated against GLB people (HREOC, 2007). This legislative discrimination was present in areas such as employment, workers compensation, taxation, social security, veteran’s affairs, health care, family law, superannuation, and aged care, creating significant disadvantage for same-sex couples. This form of discrimination has been markedly decreased with a change in Australian Federal Government in 2008 from the conservative-leaning Liberal to the social democratic Labor Party.

Cultural homophobia encompasses the everyday cultural messages, standards, and norms that celebrate and naturalize heterosexuality, at the same time rendering GLB sexuality as inferior or deviant, if not invisible. This comes through the dominant stories and images of the media as well as in educational materials and curricula (Gilbert, 2000). Interpersonal homophobia refers to the ways people who are homophobic act this prejudice out—with jokes, taunts, exclusionary behavior, verbal harassment, and discrimination, as well as by violence, murder, and rape (Mason & Tomsen, 1997, pp. 15–30). Internalized homophobia results from a GLB person internalizing the pervasive negative messages within society about being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. As a result of accepting a marginalized identity, GLB people may lead double lives to avoid being ‘outed.’

**The Cost of Homophobia: The Australian Context**

Research within Australia dealing with the extent of discrimination and abuse experienced by same-sex attracted young people, as well as GLB and transgender adults, began to appear in the late 1980s. For example, Mason and Tomsen (1997) documented the research on discrimination, violence, and harassment experienced by gays and lesbians during the late 1980s and first half of the 1990s within Australia.
and across a number of settings including education, the police force, the criminal justice system, and public places.

Hillier, Warr, & Haste (1996) investigated the factors pertaining to sexual health behaviors, knowledge, and issues of rural young people in the state of Victoria. Eleven percent of their participants identified as nonheterosexual. The researchers found that gay and lesbian people were highly stigmatized within the rural setting and that this hostile environment made it necessary for young same-sex attracted youth to stay in the closet. In addition, Hillier et al. (1996) found that these young people had very little support from family, friends, and school and little if any access to information on sexual health and safe sex.

Researchers dealing with issues related to same-sex attracted young people in Australia claim that while many feel good about their sexuality, large percentages experience regular abuse and discrimination that has an adverse impact on health and well being. In a survey involving 750 males and females, aged 14–21 from across Australia, Hillier, Harrington, Dempsey, Beale, Rosenthal, & Walsh (1998) found that nearly 33% believed they were unfairly treated or discriminated against because of their sexuality; 44% had been verbally and 16% physically abused, with school and sport events indicated as prime sites of abuse. Respondents indicated that abuse had a profound effect on health and well-being. While 33% of respondents did not suffer abuse because they kept their sexual identity hidden, most monitored their behavior closely out of fear of being ‘outed’ and subjected to abuse.

Six hundred men and women, mainly in the 20–40 year age group, including gay men and lesbians from Indigenous, Asian, Middle Eastern, and western suburbs (Sydney) backgrounds, participated in a survey sponsored by the Attorney Generals Department of New South Wales (2003). The purpose of this survey was to assess hostilities toward gay men and lesbians. 85% of respondents had experienced harassment or violence at some time; 75% reported changing behavior to avoid homophobic harassment; and 50% reported negative impacts ranging from stress and anxiety to isolation and depression.

In a follow-up to Hillier, et al. (1998), Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell (2004) found that while an increasing number of respondents (74%) felt good about their sexuality, nearly 38% felt unfairly treated or discriminated against because of sexuality (compared with 33% in 1998); 46% had been verbally abused (compared with 44% in 1998); 13% physically abused (compared to 16% in 1998); with 74% reporting school as the prime site of abuse. Those abused fared worse on every indicator of health and well-being, and were more inclined to self-harming behaviors.

Pitts, Smith, Mitchell, & Patel’s research (2005) was one of the most extensive studies on the health and well-being of GLB, as well as transgender, and intersex individuals living in Australia. In a survey of over 5000 people, aged 16–92, Pitts et al. showed that young people fared worse than their older counterparts on several measures of health and well-being. For example, 67% of participants indicated that fear of prejudice and discrimination caused them, at times, to modify their behavior in particular environments to avoid disclosing their sexual identity, a situation found to be more common for younger participants and for participants in any age group in rural areas. Verbal abuse tended to be more prevalent in urban areas, while threats of violence or physical attack were more apparent in rural areas. The self reported health status of participants was worse for younger people compared with the general Australian population, and the prevalence of depression related
conditions (49% of men; 44% of women), including suicidal thoughts, was higher among younger than older participants in the study.

The literature we have cited to this point paints a troubling picture of the lives and health of GLB people in Australian society. It is additionally troubling that schools were identified by researchers as a prime site for, not a haven from, homophobic discrimination. The researchers cited also identified sport as a significant site of discrimination, which may prompt many Australians to realize that sport is not the ‘great equalizer’ that it is often made out to be. We address this paradox in the following section

**Homophobia and Sport**

Griffin (1998) provides a useful typology to understand the sporting environments within which GLB athletes train, compete, and socialize. While Griffin conceptualized it in light of lesbian sport experience within the United States of America (USA), there is much to recommend her notion of ‘climates’ (hostility, conditional tolerance, and inclusion) as useful metaphors for understanding homophobia in sport, education, and other settings.

Hostility, discrimination, and harassment characterize Griffin’s first ‘climate.’ It is one in which GLB participation in sport, whether their identity is concealed or not, is thought to be a major and unwanted problem. In this context, to even be suspected of being gay or lesbian is dangerous. Pronger (1990a) reinforced the hostile climate in sport for GLB people when he said

> I am aware of no scholarly research that shows mainstream sport to be a significantly welcoming environment for sexual minorities. The fact is that mainstream sport continues to be overwhelmingly hostile to explicit lesbian and gay presence. (p. 224)

The second of Griffin’s ‘climates’ is conditional tolerance—the acceptance of GLB identity and lifestyle of others, including team-mates or club members, as long as it remains out of the public view (1998). Such collaborative denial means that heterosexual sportsmen and women do not really have to question the nature of systematic prejudice experienced by their gay or lesbian team-mates. This places GLB individuals once again in the position of having to continually monitor their appearance and social relationships to maintain a heterosexual team and sport image.

The most affirming ‘climate’ for sporting lesbians and gay men is inclusion and openness. On this account, coaches, administrators, and players welcome diversity in the sexual orientation of their athletes and colleagues. They open up a dialogue on the limiting and harmful impact of homophobia, and they provide the leadership to ensure that inclusive policies and practices are effective. Griffin’s research reveals only a few sports organizations that could be characterized in this manner.

Other research supports the view that sport is a largely hostile setting for gay and lesbian athletes. Part of the reason for this is thought to be sport’s link to hegemonic masculinity—an aggressive and domineering masculinity that is reproduced, reinforced and valorized within mainstream institutions such as sport (Connell, 1987; Messner & Sabo, 1994; Rowe & McKay, 1998). The most celebrated sports, such as football and rugby, provide men with an arena to prove their masculinity
and thus their differences from women. Accordingly, gay men and all women are considered suspect and inferior in this gender order of sport (Rowe & McKay, 1998).

In general, homophobia creates ‘hostile’ or ‘conditionally tolerant’ environments for lesbian and gay sportspersons, especially at the elite and professional levels where the glare of the media and the opportunities for fame and financial rewards are greatest (Andersen, 2005; Demers, 2006; Griffin, 1998; Rowe & McKay, 1998). The day-to-day challenges and stresses on these sportspersons can hurt their performances, enjoyment, career prospects, and monetary rewards, forcing most to remain deeply closeted. The first publicly gay professional soccer player from the Netherlands, who waited until his retirement to ‘come out,’ described his experience of sport in the following terms:

The soccer world is a heterosexual world. Macho behaviour and women predominate. Whenever soccer players are together they get vulgar, they talk about women and having sex. As a young boy I felt uncertain in that context. That’s why I didn’t want my fellow players to know it. Eight hours a day I passed. I couldn’t do anything else. (as cited in Ellings, 1998, p. 6)

Another retired elite footballer, from the National Football League (NFL) in the USA, revealed some of the major pressures at play that maintained a culture of silence concerning homosexuality and kept him in the closet. For Esera Tuaolo these included potential injury and violence:

The one thing I could never do was talk about it. Never. No one in the NFL wanted to hear it, and if anyone did hear it, that would be the end for me. I’d wind up cut or injured. I was sure that if a general manager didn’t get rid of me for the sake of team chemistry, another player would intentionally hurt me, to keep up the image. (as cited in Freeman, 2003, p. 155)

In a review of qualitative studies within the UK, North America and Europe on the nature and extent of homophobic bullying in sport, Brackenridge, Rivers, Gough, & Llewellyn (2006) concluded that homophobic bullying . . . is used as a weapon to encourage conformity to a hypermasculine sporting ideal and to vilify those who deviate from it. For girls, homophobic bullying is used as a weapon to discourage sporting engagement and achievement. In both cases, the government’s aim to ‘drive up’ participation is thwarted. (p. 138)

In spite of research efforts elsewhere, there is no research on the experiences of GLB peoples in Australian sport.

The politics of homophobia in mainstream sport has a negative impact on all participants. It can begin with the schoolyard bullying of nonathletic boys, or the disparaging labeling of athletic girls as ‘tomboys’ or athletic women as ‘butch.’ Young men denigrate the feminine and the gay, employing jocular and derisive put-downs that associate male weakness with being a woman or ‘poofter.’ For Andersen (2005), this type of policing ensures that boys and men do not transgress gendered space (sport especially in this context) or orthodox masculine behavior, thus maintaining the gender order. Some young men even resort to violent gay bashing to avenge what they perceive as an affront to their manliness and heterosexuality.
In a study in Midwest USA on the attitudes of male and female heterosexual college athletes and non athletes toward gay men and lesbians, Andersen, Butki, & Heyman (1997) found male athletes to be the most homophobic, especially toward gay men. Messner and Sabo (1994) found that some coaches use sexist or homophobic taunts as a motivational and team building tool. Coaches who employ these tactics prey on the vulnerabilities of gender identity and sexual development of boys and young men to create or reinforce antigay feelings and behaviors. Messner & Sabo (1994) suggested that it is through the denigration and expulsion of the feminine and the gay that heterosexual masculinity is collectively constructed by coaches.

Despite the social advances for women in sport and a greater social acceptance of lesbians in many Western societies, the use of the ‘butch’ label is still a ploy to preserve traditional gender boundaries, control sportswomen, and stigmatize lesbians (Lenskyj, Hemphill & Symons, 2002). The myths that lesbians have a ‘mannish’ unfair advantage (Griffin, 1998; Kell, 2000), that they are sexual predators and poor role models for young girls (Griffin, 1998), and that they have infiltrated and control sport teams and organizations (Burroughs, Seebohn, & Ashburn, 1995; Griffin, 1998) act to maintain conventional gender boundaries.

From a review of the literature and interviews with lesbian coaches and athletes residing in Canada, Demers (2006) observed that the team environment can be relatively open for lesbians, with team mates being tolerant and accepting as long as the existence of lesbians is kept within the team. Otherwise, it could tarnish the team’s image and reputation (Demers, 2006). Similarly, sport organizations can insist on ‘feminine’ codes of dress and behavior for female athletes; and female athletes may pose for ‘heterosexy’ calendars, the effect of which is to reinforce traditional images of gender and sexuality.

Andersen (2005) points out that at a time when many social institutions are more mindful of the rights of GLB people, men’s team sport in particular remains “steadfast in its production of conservative gender orthodoxy” and institutionalized homophobia (p. 65). For Andersen (2005) there are three interwoven factors responsible for this:

The first is that sports are a near-total institution in which athletes find it difficult to escape a single-minded way of viewing sex and gender. The second is that sports are a segregated institution that prevents heterosexual men from hearing the narratives of women and gay men. The third is that the institution of sport is a closed-loop system in that it lacks critical self-examination. (p. 66)

This rigidity in sport is telling, as numerous big businesses in the USA and Australia provide same-sex partner benefits, have antidiscrimination policies inclusive of GLB and transgender people, and provide diversity and equal opportunity training sensitive to the challenges GLB people face in the workplace (Obear (2000); Munoz & Thomas (2006)).

Based upon the review of literature, we conclude that sport is a setting where those with homophobic attitudes can create a hostile climate for many gay athletes, especially in team sports, and, at best, a conditionally tolerant one for lesbian athletes. Participation in sport, with its embedded hegemonic masculine culture, can be made difficult, unhealthy, and even dangerous for young men and women who do not produce appropriate heterosexual credentials. When coded in this manner, sport may discourage newcomers or drive out current participants who are, or who are
perceived to be, gay or lesbian. The research supports the view that people in sport (athletes, spectators, officials, reporters, etc.) sport still has some way to go to realize claims about its connection to health, character-building and participation for all.

**Homophobia in Australian Universities**

Researchers have found that secondary schools and sport are prime sites for homophobic discrimination and abuse. People in Australia participate in sport largely in schools and in community settings with school-age peers, so the pressure to conform to heterosexual norms may be pervasive. This culture may be reproduced in tertiary level studies, especially for academic staff and students in physical education and sport related programs of study. However, there is limited research on homophobia in Australian universities, and little or nothing on the experience of homophobia of students and teachers in physical education and sport-related programs of study at this level.

The results of the Gay Men and Lesbians Against Discrimination (GLAD) survey (1994) conducted in Victoria, Australia indicated that 29% of lesbians ($n = 492$) and 26% of gay men ($n = 510$) faced discrimination at Victorian universities. The instances of discrimination were grouped into four types: being refused education, being harassed during education, being pressured out of a course or institution, and being given antigay or antilegion material (GLAD, p. 9). Notably, 47% of those respondents under the age of 20 reported being harassed during their education, as did 21% of those aged between 20 and 29.

The successor to GLAD, the Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (VGLRL), conducted a follow up survey (2000) on the discrimination experienced by GLB and transgender people in the state of Victoria. Of a sample of 929 participants, 84% reported experiencing at least one form of discrimination or abuse. The forms of, and percentages of those experiencing, discrimination were as follows: harassment and assault in a public place (75%), in employment (48%), in education (31%), in the provision of goods and services (28%), in medical treatment (27%), in police and law enforcement (20%), in parenting (16%), in club membership (14%), and tenancy (11%). Similar to the predecessor study, those under the age of 30 were found to be more likely to report discrimination related to education. One conclusion drawn from this report is telling:

Problems for GLBT people with regard to education centered around ill treatment when enrolled in schools and tertiary courses rather than refusal of entry up front. A lack of affirmation of same-sex relations, homosexuality and gender issues within schools and university curricula contributed to feelings of low self worth and invisibility of GLBT people. (VGLRL, 2000, p. 53)

In a study of the cult of masculinity in engineering courses in Australia, McLean, Lewis, Copeland, Lintern, & O’Neil (1996) found that joking behavior prevalent among students aimed to create a sense of belonging and allegiance to the group. However, the often sexist or homophobic nature of the jokes made it clear who was excluded; the jokes upheld masculine taboos against self-revelation, softness, and sensitivity; and they reinforced heterosexual norms of intimacy.

The little research that has been conducted on homophobia in schools deals mainly with lesbian physical education teachers at the secondary level in the UK,
Canada and the USA. For example, Squires & Sparkes (1996), Clarke (1999, 2004), Sykes (1998), and Woods (1992) studied the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers. Each of these authors revealed the lengths to which lesbian teachers went to conceal their sexual identity from colleagues and students. These authors described how deep the closet can be for lesbian teachers and the impact being in the closet can have on teaching and learning culture. For example, GLB teachers may be fearful or reluctant to develop honest rapport with staff and students, and avoid questions by students and issues in the classroom having to do with sexual orientation. As a result, this can reinforce the heterosexual status quo in the school culture and curriculum.

There is only one reported study of homophobia in physical education and sport related programs in Australian higher education. In a pilot study on attitudes and behaviors in one Australian Physical Education and Human Movement related program, Lewis, Ma Rhea, & Symons (1999) reported that gender, sexual orientation, experience, and knowledge had an influence on student attitudes to gay men and lesbians. Survey results of 100 first year students indicated a high level of homophobia, mostly among the heterosexual male students, and lower levels of homophobia among students who had previous personal contact with same-sex attracted people or who had same-sex sexual experience.

As part of the same study, interviews with teachers indicated a poor understanding of the meaning of gender or sexuality inclusive curriculum, little or no support for inclusive curriculum policy by the institution, and insufficient skills to deal effectively with stereotyping and homophobic, sexist, or heterosexist comments in classroom situations. One participant revealed the scope and personal impact of being accidentally ‘outed,’ which included threats of violence in class and exclusion from sporting and social activities out of class.

There is clearly a need for more research to establish the scope and impact of homophobia in Australian universities. With what is known about homophobia in secondary schools, sport, and the community at large, it may be the case that university programs related to physical education, exercise science, and sport studies are likely to be hostile or conditionally tolerant of GLB teaching staff and students. Programs and resources to redress homophobia and discrimination in sport and in schools are emerging, but little has been done either to apply these in university settings or create new programs and resources that do.

**Addressing Homophobia in Sport and Schools**

While discrimination and abuse based on sexual orientation is illegal within Australia, educational programs are still crucial for attitudinal and behavior change in workplace, sport, school, university, and community settings. This is especially important for the health and well being of same sex attracted youth, who at present tend to be an ‘at-risk’ group in terms of the pernicious effects of homophobia. Several programs that are designed to redress homophobia in sport and education are cited below.

Leading women’s sports organizations within the USA and Canada have taken important steps to address homophobia in women’s sport. For example, the website of the Women’s Sports Foundation in the USA features educational
materials and resources (www.ittakesateam.org) that challenge homophobia. The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) circulated a position paper (2006) on homophobia to all sports organizations within Canada. The authors of this position paper cited the policies and programs of the Canadian Commonwealth Games Association during the 2006 Commonwealth Games, which provided a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for GLB and transgender team members, as an example of ‘best practice’ in this area (CAAWS, 2006, p. 4).

The research cited above (Hillier et al., 1996, 1998, 2004; GLAD, 1994; VGLRL, 2000; Attorney Generals Department of New South Wales, 2003; Pitts et al., 2006) reframed the issue of same-sex attraction in Australia. That is, the discourse is shifting from a conventional moral one, which limited the capacity of people working in education, health, and youth work to address discrimination and health issues, to one of safety and human rights (Hillier & Mitchell, 2004). As a result, there has been an increase in political support and funding for programs addressing homophobia and other forms of discrimination that have an impact on GLB health and education.

In 2003, the Victorian State Government funded the establishment of Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV) and its ongoing operations. GLHV conducts research, develops educational resources and programs, and advises the government on broad health matters effecting GLB and transgender peoples within Victoria. GLHV has three staff, limited resources, and an extensive brief in the traditional health sector (Victorian Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay and Lesbian Health, 2003, p. 36). In addition, projects are now being funded through State and Federal Governments as well as health bodies such as VicHealth to support same sex attracted youth in rural areas, to develop school curriculum and public sexual health materials related to same-sex attracted youth and adults, and to train workers in the mental health field on issues affecting same sex attracted youth (Hillier & Mitchell, 2004).

As part of a broad antidiscrimination and harassment free sport program, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) published one of the first educational resources in this area: Harassment-free sport: Guidelines to address homophobia and sexuality discrimination in sport (2000). This resource is available on the ASC website and provides sports organizations with an outline of their legal obligations, policy, and procedural guidelines, as well as problem solving scenarios that illustrate and address homophobia and sexuality discrimination.

A number of state bodies and academics provide training and resources to address homophobia in secondary schools within Australia. The Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, in conjunction with staff from GLHV, provides some of the main training programs in Victoria. The educational resource authored by Ollis, Mitchell, Watson, Hillier & Walsh Safety in our Schools: Strategies for Responding to Homophobia, is informed by Hillier et al.’s (1998) research on same-sex attracted youth within Australia, and has been used in these teacher training programs. Another program to challenge homophobia within Victorian and Tasmanian schools is ‘Pride and Prejudice’ (Witthuas, 2002). The main resource developed for the state of New South Wales secondary schools is Yes You Are: A guide to educating young people and adults about healthy relationships, sexual diversity, and antihomophobia (Gilbert, 2000).
While there is a legal obligation to provide a nondiscriminatory environment for GLB sports participants within Australia, there is no funded research and few educational resources in this area. There is much more to be done by sport governing bodies to raise awareness and to train coaches, teachers, and managers to make the most effective use of the available educational resources in schools and the community. University level physical education, exercise science and sport studies programs could also benefit from an injection of resources and leadership to help graduates redress the malicious effects of homophobia. After all, it is from the ranks of these graduates come the future physical education teachers, sport psychologists, coaches, and sport administrators.

Shifting From Inclusive Policy to Inclusive Practice

The promotion of inclusive teaching and learning practices can be more effective if explicit university policy statements that relate to equal opportunity and antidiscrimination back it up. Universities will have or should have policies that make it illegal to discriminate against students and teachers on the basis of sexual orientation, along with gender, age, disability, marital status, race, ethnicity, religion, or physical features. Moreover, procedures would need to be in place for students and teaching staff members to address complaints about alleged breaches of these equal opportunity and antidiscrimination policies.

Against the backdrop of equal opportunity and antidiscrimination legislation, there are a number of policies and practices that can be used by coordinators and teachers to ‘normalize’ sexual diversity in the curriculum and to help to redress homophobic discrimination. To ‘normalize’ sexual diversity in the curriculum is to recognize and include otherwise invisible or marginalized GLB people and issues into policies and procedures. For example, reference to GLB staff members and students, and to diversity and inclusion in general, can be made in a University’s statement of aims and core graduate attributes. GLB people and issues can likewise feature in codes of behavior, curriculum content, and intervention strategies. Taken together, they can help inform a ‘whole-of-university’ approach to promoting safe and inclusive teaching and learning settings.

University Aims and Core Graduate Attributes

In order for policies to be more than simply a legal code, they have to live and breathe in the educational culture at the faculty, department, program, course, and unit of study level. This can begin with statements of University aims, such as the following:

- To recognize and encourage diversity awareness among students and in the communities graduates will serve.
- To maintain a leading role as a local/global leader in culturally and diversity competent learning, research, and service in physical education, exercise science, coaching, sport counseling, and sport management.
- To promote a teaching and learning environment that is free from discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status, race, ethnicity, religion, or physical features.
Keeping in mind that approximately 6–11% of the overall population is GLB, there is likely to be a similar percentage among the ranks of teachers and students at a university and in physical education and sport studies related programs within it. It is one thing to include ‘sexual orientation’ in equal opportunity and antidiscrimination policy. Yet, it is another to acknowledge GLB identified people as part of the social and cultural fabric of the university population and of the communities within which graduates in physical education and sport related programs will work.

In the last decade, universities in Australia, North America, and the United Kingdom have developed programs to ensure that all students graduate with a set of generic professional competencies, or core graduate attributes. In addition to discipline specific knowledge and skills, core graduate attributes tend to include the professional knowledge and skills related to communication, critical thinking and problem solving, independent and collaborative learning, as well as ethical conduct and multicultural awareness.

On this latter attribute, an awareness of, and sensitivity to multicultural issues is important to the well-rounded education of undergraduate students. It is equally important to ensure that the ‘multicultural’ umbrella is broad enough to cover a range of diverse social and cultural groups. Multiculturalism usually refers to diverse racial, ethnic or language groups, but there is no reason that it cannot be expanded to include GLB people and communities.

As a result of university policy statements and programs that acknowledge and respond to GLB individuals as an integral part of the overall university community, GLB students, as well as teachers, should expect to be able to learn and teach in a safe and supportive environment. Moreover, any student, gay, lesbian or straight, who expects to work professionally in ‘people-oriented’ professions such as teaching, coaching, sport counseling, exercise programming, and sport management, should expect to be culturally competent that is, able to respond sensitively and effectively to GLB people, issues, and community practices.

Protecting the rights and welfare of GLB students and teachers, as well as promoting cultural competency on GLB matters, should not depend solely on the efforts of a handful of gay, lesbian, and human rights advocates at a particular university. Rather, inclusive teaching and learning is an education issue, one for all members of the University community, GLB, or straight, to address. In other words, it means providing an educational setting and experience that supports all students, from across all social and cultural backgrounds.

**Codes, Curriculum, and Interventions**

Many university or college level teachers incorporate and address issues of gender, race and ethnicity in the physical education and sport studies curriculum and in classroom practice. However, the issue of sexuality, or sexual orientation, is an especially sensitive one owing to the high levels of homophobia evident in mainstream culture. As a result of the inability or unwillingness by teachers, sexual orientation may remain invisible in the curriculum and classroom. The reasons for this, according to Harrison, Hillier, & Walsh (1996), include: concern about dealing with high levels of anger and prejudice related to it; saying the wrong thing which will further alienate gay and lesbian students; vulnerability to students’ assumption about their own sexuality (i.e., remaining silent on issues of sexuality for fear of
being stigmatized as gay or lesbian); and concern about reactions or lack of support from colleagues.

It is one thing to have a set of institutional policies in place that will acknowledge the existence, and protect the rights and welfare, of GLB students and teachers. Yet, it is another thing to change the culture of learning and teaching, especially if homophobia and other forms of discrimination plague it. This requires providing university or college teachers with the resources and support to confidently challenge homophobia, perhaps even their own, as a barrier to full participation in learning activities. Below are examples of student codes of behavior, curriculum content, and intervention strategies that can help promote diverse, inclusive and safe learning settings for students and teachers.

One method of ‘setting the tone’ for teaching and learning is to make explicit a code of behavior. This may involve establishing up front certain ground rules for participation in a unit of study. It may involve teacher-directed prescriptions or proscriptions similar to the following:

Mutual respect and courtesy is important. When a lecturer, guest, or student is speaking to the class or asking a question, all other class members are expected to listen. When speaking to the class or asking a question, class members should avoid the use of discriminatory language (i.e., abusive or offensive comments related to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnic background, physical or mental ability, political or religious views).

However, students may be more inclined to support a code of behavior that they have had a hand in creating. An alternative method is to promote student ownership of the code of behavior. This approach means refraining from stating up front key values (e.g., respect, courtesy) and prescribed or proscribed behaviors. Rather, a student-centered approach could start with a more open-ended question such as “What do you think makes for a good learning environment?” Below are examples of how students might respond to this question:

- Supportive group
- Equality
- Being ‘fearless’ about expressing views
- Accepting different views
- Exposure to new ideas and perspectives
- Respecting others
- Mix of ideas and personalities
- Interesting and engaging topics and activities
- Resources and support from teacher
- All contributing
- Accepting different views.

The teacher can facilitate further discussion and refinement of the student responses until the group reaches a consensus on key themes.

Students can be then asked by the teacher the following question: “In light of the features of a good learning environment you have identified, what type of
ground rules do you think should exist in the group?” Below are examples of what students may come up with in terms of ground rules:

- Be open to new perspectives and ideas
- Be ‘fearless’ about expressing our views
- Expect that others will ask for reasons to support our expressed views
- Listen actively to each other, even if you don’t agree
- Respect different (informed) perspectives
- Most of all, no personal put-downs
- Don’t ignore people or interrupt when they speak
- No ‘isms’ (e.g., racism, sexism)
- Provide constructive criticism
- Respect each other
- Maintain friendly and comfortable environment; socialize well
- Respect each other’s confidences (“what’s said in the room, stays in the room”).

When then asked how breaches of the code should be dealt with, students may respond in the following manner:

- For someone to made gently aware they had said something inappropriate
- Deal with incidents immediately and personally—apologize and move on
- The tutor or seminar leader should handle things sensitively
- The class or the tutor should point out how an offending comment or behavior is in breach of the code
- Talk through issue of offensive comments or behaviors to see where everyone is coming from.

Developing a student-owned code can be a useful tool for the ongoing effectiveness of the class, and it acts as a normative standard to refer to in cases of inappropriate behavior. It is educationally sound, for it measures student conduct against the group’s negotiated and agreed-upon code, rather than against a teacher-imposed code or a more legalistic policy document. It is also general enough for the teacher and student to handle homophobic remarks and behaviors, if and when they arise.

Inclusive curriculum will acknowledge diverse social and cultural groups and issues in lecture, tutorial, readings, assessment tasks, and other teaching and learning practices. In addition to themes such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, and disability, sexual identity will also feature in teaching and learning activities. A sexuality diverse and inclusive curriculum in physical education and sport studies could include the following:

- GLB rights as a research paper topic in an ethics or legal issues unit of study
- The Gay Games, alongside the Olympics, the Commonwealth Games and Masters Games, as an example of global sport and event management
- GLB examples in lectures and tutorials related to health and human development (e.g., safe sex, same-sex parenting, identity, and well-being)
- GLB examples when discussing the cultural competence required of exercise therapists, fitness leaders, sport counselors, coaches, physical education teachers, and sport managers
• Homophobia as a lecture/discussion theme, along with racism and sexism, as a barrier to participation in sport and physical activity
• Readings related to theorizing sexuality and hegemonic masculinity in sport
• Readings with first-person narratives to sensitize students to the lived experience of homophobic, sexist, and other forms of discrimination.12
• Panel discussions or guest lectures by GLB athletes, teachers, or sport managers to illustrate their ‘real-life’ experiences in sport and physical education
• The use of case studies and ‘hypotheticals’ that highlight the nature and consequences of homophobic discrimination and allow students to devise policy, procedural and social justice responses
• Field experience placement opportunities with government, university, or community organizations dealing with antidiscrimination, equal opportunity, equity and social justice, and human rights.

The inclusion of GLB related issues and topics into the curriculum need not be seen as exclusively a gay or lesbian rights issue. Rather, it is to ‘normalize’ GLB people and issues, that is, to include them in the cultural mix of people and issues that are addressed as part of the everyday practice of teaching and learning.

Homophobic, as well as racist or sexist, remarks or other discriminatory behaviors can create an intimidating and hostile environment that can affect students’ capacity to participate and learn. Students can read a teacher’s indifference to offensive and discriminatory behaviors as tacit approval. Open challenges by teachers are sometimes necessary, but they can backfire if not handled in an educationally sound manner. For example, one strategy is ‘name and shame’ a student for making a homophobic or other discriminatory remark in class. In this case, the remark is identified as discriminatory and the student is threatened with follow-up disciplinary action.

While some situations may warrant a zero tolerance approach of this kind, others may not. It takes a lot of effort on the part of teachers to establish trust among students so that they feel comfortable enough to express their views. Reading the riot act for what might be a naive and impetuous comment of a young student might be counterproductive, closing down the very lines of communication that teachers work so hard to create and maintain.

Below is a case study from the Walsh, Symons, & Hemphill (2006) booklet Getting Over It: Homophobia, Sport and University Education that provides an alternative type of intervention.

In a discussion about sport and the media, a male student makes a comment about how good a particular sport commentator is. Another student in the seminar fires back the comment: “Yeh, but I heard he was gay!” After a short burst of laughter among other students, the tutor notices some reluctance on the part of the first male student to defend his comments.

Rather than ‘read the riot act’ that is, single out the perpetrator and declare the comment offensive and discriminatory, the tutor sees it as ‘teaching moment,’ and asks questions along the following lines:

• What do think makes a sport commentary an excellent one?
• Accuracy of facts? Animated style? Enthusiasm? Knowledge of the game?
• Can you think of other examples of other men or women you might think are excellent sport commentators or journalists?
• What benefits can you see to having a variety of commentary or journalistic styles?
• Once the tutor is satisfied that the discussion has shifted to educational grounds, he or she may conclude with a comment to the following effect:

Now that we have established a number of criteria as to what constitutes excellence in sport broadcasting or journalism practices, does any of it have to with whether the broadcaster or journalist is male or female, gay or lesbian?

This approach makes it clear to the perpetrator and the class as a whole that issues of gender or sexuality are irrelevant when it comes to professional competencies (p. 15).

Of course, it may the case that the perpetrators ‘don’t get it,’ and a more direct intervention is required. If so, then the first step is simply to remind the offender that his or her behavior needs to comply with the group’s agreed-upon code of behavior.

However, there may be situations requiring a more direct approach, including both legal and student/staff welfare considerations. The following case study from Walsh, Symons and Hemphill (2006) illustrates this.

A gay male student reveals his sexual orientation to another class member in confidence. However, word spreads and the gay student is generally treated like an outcast and excluded from social activities during his physical education studies. During one tutorial class the topic of sexuality and sport is discussed and the hostility of a very homophobic class member is evident, with verbal threats and physical posturing directed at the gay student. In the words of the victimised student,

He was in the classroom, with the rest of all his mates there and everything, and he sort of jumped up and down and said ‘if I ever found a poof in this class—I will beat the hell out of him’ and he was up out of his seat, like red with rage and sort of coming at me at this point. The [tutorial] leader had to stand up and sort of put herself between him and me, so I was on the verge of being physically attacked just because I pulled him up and questioned what he was saying in terms of sexuality and all that sort of thing. He was right over the edge. He was enraged.

In this situation, the aggressive student must be told that his behavior is unacceptable, and that it must cease immediately. The aggressive student should be instructed that his conduct is in breach of the University’s code of conduct, and further action will be taken. No further discussion will be entered into during the class, and the student should be required to leave.

If the student does not comply, ask another student to use the class phone to request assistance by Security personnel.
The next obligation is to the student who has been threatened who may require follow-up support. In private the student could be encouraged to contact the University’s Student Services if counseling support is thought to be needed.

The remaining students may need a debriefing session where students can talk through the concerns that they may have as a result of the incident. It should be made clear to all students that the behavior was unacceptable and that efforts will be undertaken to ensure safe learning environments. Incident report statements may need to be taken, and the tutor should provide contact details of the University’s Student Services if a class member should require additional support at some later stage.

The incident should be taken up with the Head of School/Department and dealt with according to the appropriate University policies and procedures (e.g., Discipline, Grievance, Anti-Harassment).

Violent behaviour is unlawful and the student who was attacked could take action and report it to the police. (pp. 16–17)

In some situations, the implications of a homophobic action extend even further, requiring an even more comprehensive, but equally direct approach. A further case study from Walsh, Symons, & Hemphill (2006) illustrates this.

A physical education student on a teaching placement is coaching a girls’ netball team at a secondary school. Over the weekend she is seen by students walking down the street holding hands with a woman. On her return to the school on the Monday the supervising teacher at the school tells her she can no longer coach the team as parents have complained about her on the basis of her being a lesbian, and that she “shouldn’t be allowed to have such close contact with young girls.” There were no complaints about her work performance before this. The student is extremely upset, leaves the school immediately and returns to the University.

First, the school’s Principal needs to be advised of what has happened. A meeting with the Principal, the supervising teacher, the student teacher and the University’s Course Coordinator should be arranged to discuss the issue.

At this meeting the Equal Opportunity Act can be raised, and strategies discussed as to how the student teacher will be supported by the school.

The student teacher, if she wishes, should be given the option of returning to the school or being found an alternative school for her teaching placement.

The student teacher should be made aware by the Course Coordinator of the availability of counseling support at the University.

The student teacher is made aware of her rights to make a complaint to the Equal Opportunity Commission.
The Principal from the school may have to follow up the concerned parents. If that is the case s/he should explain discrimination legislation, the student’s rights, and the school’s obligations under that legislation. (p. 18)

These are but a few cases that university or college teachers can use to create and maintain inclusive teaching and learning practices in the context of university or college level Physical Education and Sport Studies programs. To be effective, though, this requires a ‘whole-of-University’ approach. In addition to clear policy statements and the provision of teaching and learning resources, professional development is required at the School or Department level to ensure that managers and teachers have the skills and support to develop a sexuality inclusive curriculum and to intervene effectively to redress the problem of homophobia and other forms of discriminatory behavior.

**Conclusion**

We have identified sport and education settings as sites where homophobia is prevalent, with deleterious consequences for the health and well-being of GLB athletes and students, as well as coaches and teachers. Students from a sporting background who enter university or college level programs in sport science, exercise rehabilitation, sport psychology and counseling, coaching and teaching, and sport management, may reproduce the heterosexist norms that perpetuate discrimination and deep closets for GLB students and teachers.

The attempt to overcome homophobia through inclusive curriculum in university education is not just a matter of legal compliance with equal opportunity and antidiscrimination legislation, although it does just that. Neither is it simply a matter of GLB rights, although it contributes to their more fulsome inclusion in society. Moreover, addressing the problem of homophobia needs to avoid being seen as simply an exercise in political correctness, which often leaves untouched implicit bigotry.

Rather, the premise of inclusive policy, curriculum and teaching, and learning practices is that sexuality matters—to the identity, health, well-being, and educational development of students and teachers, whether GLB or straight. The policies and practices outlined above are designed to help university managers, course coordinators and teachers provide safe and inclusive environments for all students and staff. They are also designed to help prepare sport and physical education graduates who are more sensitive to social and cultural diversity and better prepared to address homophobia and other forms of discrimination in schools, sport, and the community.

Yet, there is a lack of research on homophobia in tertiary level physical education and sport studies programs and the effect it can have on the health, wellbeing, and educational experience of students and teachers. Further research is needed to bring the issue of homophobia and other forms of discrimination to light as both an educational and a workplace health and safety issue. In so doing, it will provide the evidence to inform and bolster the efforts of those who are attempting to overcome discrimination through the promotion of sexuality inclusive policies and practices.
Notes

1. ‘Same-sex attracted’ is the term used in the context of young people, as many are still working out their sexual identity. According to Hillier et al. (1996) and Lindsay et al. (1997), it is estimated that about 8–11% of young people in Australia are same-sex attracted. A more stable sexual orientation, that is, the affections and sexual desires of a person for a particular gender that is fixed as a unitary identity of straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual, is usually worked through during adulthood. For the sake of simplicity, the familiar terms gay, lesbian, and bisexual will be used; however, we acknowledge that there exists considerable fluidity in identity making (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex).


3. Acting on the Australian HREOC report, the recently elected Federal Labor Government enacted The Same Sex, Same Entitlement Bill, which was passed into legislation on November 24, 2008, which removes discrimination against same-sex couples from 85 federal laws (Harrison, Nov 24, 2008). However, same-sex couples will continue to be prevented by law to marry in Australia, and in most states they cannot adopt children.

4. The responses from the media, sports administrators and general public to the accusation by Denise Annettes that she had not been selected to play for the Australian women’s cricket team that was touring New Zealand in 1995 because she was a heterosexual, illustrates and supports the myth that lesbians have disproportionate power in women’s sport. See Burroughs et al. (1995) for a full account of this episode. The treatment of tennis player Amelie Mauresmo by her main competitors and the media during the 1998 Australian Open finals is illustrative of the myth of the lesbian as superathlete with an unfair advantage.

5. IBM was the major sponsor of the 1st Asia Pacific Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Human Rights Conference held in Melbourne in January of 2008, which was part of the Melbourne Outgames. See Obear (2000) and Munoz & Thomas (2006) for examples of best practice business organizations and programs that are inclusive of GLB and transgender workers.

6. See: Sears (2005) for an overview of research, policy, and practice on GLB and transgender issues in education in the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan, China, and New Zealand.

7. See also: Griffin (1991, 1992a, 1992b) and Sparkes (1994). Griffin (1998) documents the variety of strategies lesbian college coaches and athletes use to manage their identity within their everyday sporting and professional lives. Many cover their lesbian identity by avoiding references to significant personal relationships, being vague about their personal life, and by not associating with other lesbians or discussing homophobia and heterosexism in sport.

8. The survey used in this pilot was the same one developed by leading homophobia researcher Gregory Herek (1994), used by Andersen, Butki, & Heyman (1997) and adapted for Australian participants by Andersen.

9. Antidiscrimination and sexual harassment legislation at the State level within Australia is inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity, although it varies in its application from state to state. Areas in which this law applies include: accommodation, employment, education, the provision of goods and services, and sport.

10. In 2009 Caroline Symons secured the first small research grant from the main health promotion body in Victoria to investigate the GLB sport experience in this state.

11. In 2005 Caroline Symons pioneered an educational forum for mainstream sport in the state of Victoria (“Come Out To Play”), which was sponsored by Victoria University, the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, and Sport and Recreation Victoria. Two panel presentations and two interactive workshops were held over a two-year period. While the program proved to be well received and had enthusiastic leadership, it has yet to be institutionalized in community education programming.

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