

Sport, Masculinities, and Heteronormativity

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Abstract: Since its foundation in the late-19th century, sport has traditionally been charged with socializing boys and men into an environment in which they are expected to exhibit physical toughness, emotional stoicism, and the rejection of anything deemed to be feminine—including homosexuality. In the 21st century, however, attitudes toward homosexuality and its presence in sport have improved. This chapter draws upon research from a range of sports to outline this shift in attitude. It also discusses dominant theoretical perspectives—hegemonic masculinity theory and inclusive masculinity theory—and how these have evolved over recent years—as well as some of the ongoing debates which pervade the field, including where further research is required.

Keywords: Sport; homosexuality; masculinity; heteronormativity; sexuality; inclusive masculinity; hegemonic masculinity.

Men's competitive team sports have traditionally been a social institution principally organized around the political project of defining certain forms of masculinity as acceptable, whilst simultaneously denigrating other, often posited as weaker, forms of masculinity (Curry, 1991). Sport associates boys and men with masculine dominance by constructing identities and sculpting their bodies to align with dominant notions of masculine embodiment and expression. Accordingly, boys and men who participate in competitive sports, and particularly team sports, have long been expected to exhibit, value, and reproduce traditional notions of masculinity (Anderson & Magrath, 2019). Central to this process has been the deployment of homophobia, which has pervaded men's team sports to a high degree (Hekma, 1998; Pronger, 1990; Wolf-Wendel, Toma & Morphew, 2001); so much so that, in the 20th century, very few gay and bisexual athletes came out of the closet, at any level of play.

Over the past three decades, however, attitudes toward homosexuality have improved considerably across the Western world (Keleher & Smith, 2012; Twenge, Sherman & Wells, 2016; Watt & Elliot, 2019). Additionally, despite frequent claims to the contrary, much in sport in recent years has also undergone a significant transformation with regard to equality, diversity, and inclusion. Indeed, a plethora of scholarly works—both in the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK)—have countered outdated assumptions that team sports continue to act as a bastion of homophobia (Adams & Anderson, 2012; Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016). For example, numerous studies have documented increased acceptance of gay athletes at all levels of competition, alongside growing support for their social and legal equality (Anderson, 2011a; Cashmore & Cleland, 2012; Magrath, 2017a, 2018).

As sporting cultures continue to embrace social change, there has been a significant increase in elite-level lesbian, gay, and bisexual (hereafter LGB) athletes who have publicly come out of the closet (Billings & Moscovitz, 2018; White, Magrath & Morales, 2020). Rather than rejection and ostracism from sport—as has historically been the case—these athletes have been embraced, celebrated, and propelled to stardom as symbols of sport's ongoing transformation towards inclusion. Gay male athletes such as Jason Collins, Michael Sam, John Amaechi, and Robbie Rogers all represent evidence of this change. While this change has not occurred universally—for example, overall numbers of 'out' bisexual athletes

remain disproportionately low (Magrath, Anderson & Cleland, 2017) and issues for trans athletes remain subject to more complex challenges (Anderson & Travers, 2017)—there are many markers that the sports industry has nonetheless evolved from its toxic past into one where the default position is seemingly one of acceptance and inclusion (Magrath, forthcoming).

In this chapter, we explore the historical relationship between sport, masculinity, and sexuality. We first discuss sport's role in masculinizing boys and men during the process of industrialization, before outlining its cultural significance in the 1980s—when cultural homophobia in the Western world reached an apex. We then present a range of research documenting how, since the turn of the millennium, sport has become increasingly inclusive of sexual minorities.

In the next sections, we outline how the decline of cultural homophobia has facilitated a shift in paradigm: where Connell's hegemonic masculinity was once the dominant theoretical perspective, changing patterns of masculinity have resulted in scholars turning to Anderson's conceptions about inclusive masculinity. Finally, we discuss some of the ongoing debates in the field of masculinity and sport—including under-researched areas—before concluding with some directions for future research.

Issues

The Foundations of Sport, Masculinity, and Homophobia

Although the invention of machinery and transportation necessary for industrialization began in the early-1700s, the antecedents of most of today's sporting culture can be traced to the years of the second Industrial Revolution—the mid-1800s through early 1900s. It was around this time that the organization, regulation, and codification of most dominant sports occurred (Guttman, 1978). At that time, sport—largely men's competitive team sports—was thought to instill the qualities of discipline and obedience necessary in dangerous occupations (Rigauer, 1981). Factory workers, in particular, were required to sacrifice their time and health for the sake of earning wages at a level required to support their dependent families. Predictably, in service to industrialized interests, participation in sport was thus taught to boys to reinforce the value of self-sacrifice (Anderson, 2009).

Importantly, the gender segregation conventions of that time enabled sport also to play an important role in 'masculinizing'—and 'remasculinizing'—boys. Given the emergence of an apparent 'crisis' of masculinity (Anderson & Magrath, 2019)—one characterized by fears that boys were becoming overly-feminized due to an overbearing mother and absent father—men were forced to demonstrate the vibrancy of their heterosexuality by aligning their "gendered behaviors with an idealized and narrow definition of masculinity" (McCormack & Anderson, 2014, p. 114). According to Kimmel (1994), idealized attributes here included repressing pain, concealing feminine and homo(sexual) desires and behaviors, all the while committing acts of violence against oneself and others. Sport, therefore, was a solution to a perceived social problem. Sports historian Neil Carter's seminal work, *The Football Manager*, for instance, argues that sport provided a "clear hierarchical structure, autocratic tendencies, traditional notions of masculinity and the need for discipline" (2006, p. 5). Early modern sport was, perhaps unsurprisingly, epitomized by high levels of violence from participants and spectators alike (Young, 2019).

Because of sport's historical role in facilitating normative masculine ideals, men who played sport were not thought likely—or even possible—to be gay. Thus, sport has served to privilege not all men, but rather, more specifically, heterosexual men (Anderson, 2009). The exclusion of gay men and women—the latter of whose participation was denounced as

uncivilised—has historically led sport to promote and celebrate an orthodox form of masculinity (Anderson, 2009).

Sport and Heteronormative Masculinity

Academic investigations of sport and masculinity expanded in the 1980s and 1990s. It was during this time that Dunning (1986, p. 79) famously labelled sport a “male preserve,” while Messner and Sabo (1990) described it as an institution created by men, for men. At this time a broad range of inquiry began to focus on how sport contributed to a socially desired gendered identity, and the received presentation of the athletic male body as an idealized and orthodox symbol of a dominant form of masculinity (Kimmel, 1994).

Male athletic subcultures have served to reinforce an ideology of male superiority, by way of projecting hegemonic ideals. Indeed, it has traditionally been through participation in competitive team sports. Whitson (1990), for example, argued that “demonstrating the physical and psychological attributes associated with success in athletic contests has...become an important requirement for status in most adolescent and preadolescent male peer groups” (p. 19). Thus, he argues, sport has provided the opportunity for boys to *become* men.

This apparent ‘becoming’ would be typically characterized through displays of “fighting spirit” and a determination for sporting success. According to Pronger (1990), it might also include the demeaning of non-aggressive play as feminine. Sabo and Runfola’s (1980) seminal text, *Jock: Sports and Male Identity*, details the aggressive and abusive nature of team sport athletes. Athletes who successfully embody these abusive characteristics have typically referred to—in the US, at least—as “jocks.”

This included the subordination of women; Harry’s (1995) research on US male college students found widespread sexist and misogynistic attitudes. Moreover, Curry’s (1991) ethnographic research on male locker-rooms found that talk about women was dominated by sexual conquests and objectification. This talk was also essential to the establishment of “real men.” These behaviors begin at a young age. Fine’s (1987) research on Little League baseball shows that preadolescent boys must learn that they should feel (or express) sexual desire or girls. This is normally through the objectification of girls and women, through sharing pin-ups and pornography, and by presenting themselves as sexually active (see also Thorne, 1993).

Sport, Masculinity, and the “Awful Eighties”

As we examined in the previous section, sport has, typically, played a central role in socializing boys and men into a heteronormative environment. It is thus unsurprising that this reflected the broader cultural context. Indeed, the partial decriminalization of homosexuality in the UK in 1967¹—and its removal from the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) list of mental illnesses in 1973—resulted in a steady growth of homosexual visibility in Western cultures. By the mid-1980s, however, the advent of a new—deadly—virus, HIV, became closely associated with the gay community. The virus killed tens of thousands of gay men and this drew increased attention to homosexuals’ existence in larger numbers in the general population than earlier recognized (Anderson, 2009).

As a backlash built against the spread of HIV, the growing influence of fundamentalist Christian movements stirred up hatred against the gay community. Equally, this became entangled with the strong conservative politics of the times. This was especially palpable in the US, with ex-movie star Ronald Reagan’s Republican presidency. Reagan’s silence on the issue was indicative of his administration’s contempt for homosexuality (Bosia, 2013). Similar trends also emerged in the UK, with Reagan’s closest ally, Margaret

Thatcher, and her Conservative government's treatment of homosexuality as a threat to traditional British family values. This was best evidenced by the introduction of Section 28, in 1988, which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality in schools—effectively erasing any discussions whatsoever (McCormack, 2012).

Evidencing the broader cultural antipathy toward homosexuality around this time, social attitude surveys also demonstrate an increase in intolerant attitudes. The British Social Attitude Survey (BSAS), for example, showed that the number of adults who believed same-sex sex was either 'always wrong' or 'mostly wrong' increased almost 15 per cent—from 62 per cent to 76 per cent—between 1983 (when it was first asked) and 1987 (Watt & Elliot, 2019). In the US, these figures were even higher: Twenge, Sherman and Wells' (2016) analysis of this data shows that, in 1988, around 80 per cent of adults believed homosexuality was 'always wrong'. These data led Anderson (2009, p. 89) to conclude that "1987 or 1988 seems to be the apex of homophobia in both countries."

Owing to this toxic environment, sport at this time became an increasingly important site for boys and men to exhibit extreme forms of masculinity—serving to reduce the likelihood of being socially perceived as gay. Accordingly, research conducted around this time also confirmed sport's hostility to gay community. Curry (1991) found that, among the heterosexual athletes he sampled, "Not only is being homosexual forbidden, but tolerance of homosexuality is theoretically off limits as well" (p. 130). Similarly, Pronger (1990) wrote that the gay men he interviewed—all of whom were closeted—were "uncomfortable" with team sports and avoided them when possible. And in the Netherlands, Hekma (1998) found that "gay men who are seen as queer and effeminate are granted no space whatsoever in what is generally considered to be a masculine preserve and macho enterprise" (p. 2).

Elite-level athletes who came out during this time were, predictably, low in number. This was because, as Barret (1993, p. 161) wrote, "Most gay professional athletes keep their gay lives carefully hidden out of a fear that coming out will destroy their ability to maintain their careers." Those who did come out around this time received abuse from spectators, faced rejection from teammates, and found their career in tatters. This is likely best evidenced by British soccer player, Justin Fashanu, who, after coming out in 1990, saw his career deteriorate—eventually culminating in his suicide in 1998 (Magrath, 2017a). Thus, as we approached the end of the millennium, sport across the world continued to act as an adverse, dangerous, and inhospitable cultural milieu for LGB athletes.

Sport and Inclusivity in the 21st Century

Since the turn of the millennium, however, cultural attitudes toward homosexuality across the Western world have improved considerably. Drawing once again on social attitude surveys, we are, as Keleher and Smith (2012, p. 1324) argued, "witnessing a sweeping change in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men." For example, around two-thirds of American adults now believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society (Twenge, Sherman & Wells, 2016). Support for this view is seen as well in the most recent figures about UK adults, which shows that those who believe that same-sex sex is 'always wrong' is only 12 per cent. Data from the Pew Research Center has also consistently documented the advance of positive attitudes towards homosexuality across numerous Western countries². LGB people also now enjoy greater legal privileges than ever before. Since the Netherlands became the first country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2001, around 30 countries around the world now recognize same-sex unions. This includes most of the world's most powerful nations, including the US, the US, Australia, Germany, Italy, Canada, and France. In 2019, Taiwan became the first Asian country to permit equal marriage.

Despite frequent claims that sport is slower to embrace social change than wider society (e.g. Butterworth, 2006), the shift toward inclusivity has also been paralleled in the industry. In the first-ever research with ‘out’ gay athletes in mainstream, educationally-based sport, Anderson (2002) showed that these athletes had broadly positive experiences. Prior to disclosing their sexuality to teammates, these athletes reported that they were anxious about being socially excluded, verbally abused, and physically beaten. Post-coming out, however, these concerns were not realized for the majority of the sample; these gay athletes instead regretted not coming out sooner. When this research was replicated almost a decade later, Anderson (2011a) found even greater levels of social inclusion for gay athletes. This included a reduction of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” culture, inclusion of gay athletes in the team’s social activities, and the acceptance of same-sex partners in these events. Since Anderson’s pioneering studies on the inclusion of gay male athletes, there has been a growing body of research documenting similar levels of inclusion in a variety of sports (Adams & Anderson, 2012; Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016; Letts, 2020).

Support from heterosexual peers toward the presence of LGB people in sport has also improved considerably. Bush, Anderson and Carr (2012), for example, found that while athletic identity was connected with homophobia among undergraduate sports students upon arrival at university, that link eroded for those students upon leaving British higher education. Elsewhere, Anderson’s (2011b) research with a university soccer team in the American Midwest also showed that these young, athletic men were supportive of gay rights, eschewed violence both on and off the sports field, and enjoyed a close emotional bond with one another across gender identities. Magrath’s (2019a) research with working-class university soccer players documented similar levels of positivity and support; these men also shared a unique bond in that both their academic and athletic lives centered around soccer, allowing them to create a close-knit “support bubble.”

Research with elite-level heterosexual athletes also documents high levels of support for LGB counterparts. Magrath’s (2017a) research with elite young soccer players found that, unlike older research emanating from this level of play (e.g., Parker, 1996), these players were broadly supportive of homosexuality in sport and society, and espoused positive attitudes toward equal rights for same-sex marriage. Magrath, Anderson and Roberts (2015, p. 819) contend that, without direct contact with a gay teammate, this research “serves as a roadmap for when one of their teammates actually does come out.” Such positivity is also evident through the increased number of elite-level straight athletes willing to place on record their public support for LGB rights (Cleland & Magrath, 2020).

Even research on sports fandom—a demographic which has traditionally been stigmatized as homophobic—shows increasingly that tolerant attitudes towards homosexuality have become commonplace. Cashmore and Cleland’s (2012) large-scale quantitative research found that 93 per cent of fans were supportive of homosexuality in British soccer. These fans believed that a player’s on-field performance should be the only significant criterion on which they are judged. Magrath (2018) also found that, despite some of his sample engaging in chanting that featured animus towards homosexuality, they still maintained positive attitudes. And in the first-ever research with gay male sports fans, Magrath (forthcoming) shows that, despite concerns over soccer being a heteronormative environment, these fans felt that stadia had transformed into a more inclusive and safe space in recent years.

Similar findings are also evident in netnographic research on sports fandom. Indeed, despite the anonymity of online fans forums, Cleland’s (2015) analysis of soccer found largely positive discussions of gay athletes; the few posts containing homophobic sentiment

were actively challenged by other users (Cleland, Magrath & Kian, 2018). However, these findings are, typically, dependent on the sport under discussion. For example, in the context of American football, Kian, Clavio, Vincent and Shaw (2011) found homophobic posts went largely uncontested.

Finally, we note the effect of mainstream sports media in changing representations of homosexuality in sport. While sports media has traditionally erased discussions of male homosexuality, more recent analyses have become increasingly positive in their coverage of elite LGB athletes (Magrath, 2019b)—including NBA center Jason Collins (Billings & Moscowitz, 2018), American footballer (now retired) Michael Sam (Cassidy, 2017), and British diver Tom Daley (Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017). Accordingly, Kian, Anderson and Shipka (2015, p. 634) argue that “the institution of sport, and the sport media industry itself, are both adopting more inclusive perspectives concerning gay men.” These increasingly positive dispositions have also extended to the sports journalism workplace, which, despite remaining an overwhelmingly heteronormative environment, has been shown to be an inclusive space (Magrath, 2020). As this cultural landscape for LGB people continues to change, so too have the field’s dominant theoretical perspectives—as the next sections of this chapter now addresses.

Approaches

Hegemonic Masculinity

The first paradigmatic heuristic for understanding the social stratification of masculinity has been Raewyn Connell’s (1995) concept¹³ of Hegemonic Masculinity. Developed in the early 1980s, Connell’s work moved away from the simplicity of sex role theory in that it recognized the plurality of masculinities (see Connell, 1987). From a social constructionist perspective, Hegemonic Masculinity articulates two social processes. The first concerns how all men apparently benefit from patriarchy. In her influential text, *Masculinities*, Connell (1995)—famously—describes this as the “configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (p. 77). Lacking empirical evidence, however—as well as criticisms that Connell’s theorizing underestimates the complexity of patriarchy—has resulted in many scholars’ failure to engage in this element of the theory. Even adherents of this theory argue that the patriarchal aspect of her theory is not borne out by scholars (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Scholars have instead focused on Connell’s other theoretical contribution: conceptualizing how multiple masculinities are stratified within an intra-masculine hierarchy.

This hierarchy, Connell argues, is predicated on a gender order, one where certain men are privileged over others (and *all* men maintain power over *all* women). By conceptualizing this intra-masculine hierarchy, Connell (1987) and then again in (1995, p. 77) argues that an archetype—or *hegemonic* form—of masculinity is “culturally exalted above all other,” and is the “most honoured and desired” form of masculinity (2000, p. 10). Those who most closely embody this exalted form are afforded the most social capital. Underneath this exist three other categories: (1) *complicit*—this represents the vast majority of men who, despite having little connection with the hegemonic form of masculinity, still benefit from it in some way, (2) *marginalized*—this is said to categorize men subordinated by their race or class, and (3) *subordinate*—this refers to gay (or effeminate) men, who, according to Connell (1995, p. 79), are “the most conspicuous” form of subordinate masculinity. Accordingly, in this model, homophobia is a particularly effective weapon to stratify men in deference to a hegemonic mode of heteromale dominance.

While the intra-masculine hierarchy has been a model with great utility, hegemonic masculinity fails to accurately account for what occurs in a macro or even local culture of decreased levels cultural homophobia—which we have considered in the previous section of this chapter. Further, Connell’s model also only permits one form of masculinity to reside atop a social hierarchy. It also fails to explain the social processes in an environment in which more than one version of masculinity has legitimacy (Anderson, 2009).

In their reformulation of Hegemonic Masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) reaffirm that hegemonic masculinity presupposes the subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities, and that it continues to be predicated upon one dominating—that is, hegemonic—archetype of masculinity. While the attributes of this archetype can change, an essential component is that other masculinities will be hierarchically stratified in relation to it. Accordingly, hegemonic masculinity is incapable of explaining empirical research that documents multiple masculinities of legitimate cultural value (Anderson & McCormack, 2015; Magrath, 2017a; Magrath & Scoats, 2019; McCormack, 2012; Robinson, White & Anderson, 2019).

Such dynamics were not an issue in the 1980s when Connell developed her work, or in the 1990s when it was widely taken up in the literature. Indeed, at this time gay men faced extreme social marginalization (Herek, 1988)—especially in the conservative environments of sport (Curry, 1991; Pronger, 1990). But Connell’s theorizing has continued to face significant critique. Moller (2007) argues that the wide endorsement of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical concept has frequently led scholars to interpret patterns of hegemonic masculinity too easily. In other words, rather than *explaining* masculinity patterns, the concept’s dominance actually *obscures* them. There are also definitional issues with the concepts central archetypes—*complicit*, *marginalized*, and *subordinate*—which are only loosely explained in Connell’s work. And even after Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) reformulation of the concept, it continued to lack theoretical specificity, thus leaving little to distinguish it from the paradigm of social constructionism more broadly (Anderson & Magrath, 2019).

Perhaps most importantly, however, the decline of cultural homophobia over the past two decades—as we have outlined in more detail in previous sections of this chapter—mean that the heuristic of Hegemonic Masculinity fails to account for the varying masculinities that researchers have found flourishing without hierarchy or hegemony in numerous sporting (and non-sporting) contexts.

Inclusive Masculinity Theory

Given the changing nature of masculinities across most of the Western world in recent years, numerous scholars have critiqued Hegemonic Masculinity’s effectiveness in capturing the social dynamics of young men (Demetriou, 2001; Hearn, 2004; Howson, 2006; Moller, 2007). One of the most promising means of theorizing this shift has been through Eric Anderson’s (2009) Inclusive Masculinity Theory. While Anderson’s early research cited Connell’s scholarship (e.g., Anderson, 2002), he found her work increasingly incapable of explaining the reduction of homophobia, increased inclusivity of sexual minorities, and the reduction of homophobic discourse. Antecedents of this research emerged in Anderson’s (2005) research on American cheerleading, where he documented “two contrasting and competing forms of normative masculinity...orthodox [and] inclusive” (p. 337).

Central to Anderson’s theorizing is the concept of *homophobia*, which seeks to explain the power dynamics of heterosexual masculinities within a historical frame. It is best defined as a “homosexually-panicked culture in which suspicion [of homosexuality]

permeates” (Anderson, 2011b, p. 83). Anderson further argues that, in order for a culture of homophobia to exist, three social factors must coincide: (1) mass cultural awareness of homosexuality, (2) a cultural zeitgeist of disapproval toward homosexuality, (3) cultural disapproval of men’s femininity, as displaying these behaviors becomes closely associated with homosexuality.

In a Feminist Forum debate in the *Sex Roles* journal, McCormack and Anderson (2014) discuss three conditions through which a culture historically moves: (1) *homoerasure*—describing a severely homophobic culture, but one which fails to recognize the existence of homosexuality as a static part of their population, (2) *homophobia*—a combination of the acceptance of, and antipathy toward, homosexuality, such as Western cultures in the 1980s (e.g. Watt & Elliot, 2019), and (3) *inclusivity*—a culture in which homosexual stigma is minimal, and men are not required to alter their expression of masculinity (Anderson & McCormack, 2015).

Since its evolution in the field over a decade ago, Inclusive Masculinity Theory—and its associated concept, homophobia—has been prolific in its theorizing of contemporary masculinities. It has been used in hundreds of separate academic studies—primarily in sport, but also in other settings such as education (McCormack, 2012), the media (Kian, Anderson & Shipka, 2015), and the workplace (Magrath, 2020). It has, therefore emerged into a more adaptable heuristic tool in explaining the contemporary stratification of Western men. With this flexibility, it has helped to move standpoints from a vertical one (in Connell’s model of masculinity) to a horizontal one (in Anderson’s theory), as homophobia continues to decline. It has been so widely employed that, Borkowska (2018) has argued that the most recent phase of masculinities research—the “third phase”—should be described as “Andersonian” because this work has “moved away from the hierarchical order of social relations where men attempt to distance themselves from femininity or position themselves within the orthodox ideologies of manhood” (p. 3).

Evidencing these softer versions of masculinity, heterosexual boys and men are no longer bound by the rigid gendered practices of previous generations (e.g., Williams, 1985). Anderson and McCormack (2015, p. 223), for example, document how young, university-aged men are able to engage in “prolonged acts of homosocial tactility—namely cuddling and spooning” without the threat of homophobic policing (see also Anderson, 2011b). Moreover, in research with 145 British university men, 89 per cent had kissed another man on the lips. Aside from a show of celebration among sporting men, such displays were seen as simply demonstrations of love and affection for one’s close friends. Drummond, Filiault, Anderson and Jeffries (2015) also showed that while the figure was reportedly less in the Australian university context—only approximately one-third of those sampled—this assessment was still significantly higher than documented in previous research. And in the US, while 40 per cent of undergraduate men had kissed another man on the cheek, only 10 per cent had done so on the lips (Anderson, Ripley & McCormack, 2019). Academic work has also documented an expansion of heterosexual men’s same-sex sexual activity and, thus, a decline of the “one-time rule of homosexuality” (e.g., Anderson, 2008; Scoats, Joseph & Anderson, 2018).

An extension of gendered male behaviors is also notable through the development of emotionally open and intimate friendships—labelled by Robinson, White and Anderson (2019) as the “bromance.” Interestingly, men in this research even prioritized their bromantic relationships over their romantic ones. This was because these were deemed to have fewer boundaries and be more judgement free, thus allowing men to “push the margins of traditional masculinity” (Robinson, Anderson & White, 2019, p. 864). While most research

on the bromance has been restricted to university friendships, Magrath and Scoats (2019) show that these friendship bonds frequently continue years after graduation.

As with Connell's theorizing, Inclusive Masculinity Theory has also received critique from masculinity scholars. These have (1) mostly involved non-empirically validated statements that homophobia has not or is not declining, or (2) that the continued presence of heterosexism is just as extreme in its negative affect on people as overt homophobia, or that (3) Inclusive Masculinity Theory is not globally generalizable; and finally (4) that it does not account for patriarchy.

In 2016, Anderson and McCormack (2018) addressed these critiques in the *Journal of Gender Studies*. Here, they utilized numerous, international studies to refute (1) and showed that declining homophobia over the past three decades was sustained and profound. They also refuted (2) by drawing on a range of qualitative studies to show that gay (and bisexual) men's lives are dramatically improved now than they were in the 1980s due to the decline of hostile attitudes (see Anderson & McCormack, 2016). Since these critiques, the Theory has been applied in multiple international settings: including works in Asia (citation); Africa (citations) and non-Anglo European countries (citations). This work includes quantitative data, as well (Piedra, García-Pérez & Channon, 2017). Finally, Anderson and McCormack (2018) agree with (4) that Inclusive Masculinity Theory does not account for the reproduction of patriarchy, noting that, indeed, this was not at its creation, nor is it now, the purpose of the theory (see also Anderson & Magrath, 2019).

Debates

So far, this chapter has outlined how the relationship between sport, masculinity, and sexuality has undergone considerable change. However, there remain a number of debates and unresolved issues in the field, most of which center around the extent to which homophobia has declined in contemporary sport. Equality, diversity, and inclusion organizations—such as Stonewall (the UK's most notable LGBT rights charity), the National LGBTQ Task Force (one of the US's largest advocacy organizations), and numerous sporting equivalents (e.g., *Kick It Out*; *Pride Sports*; *Football v. Homophobia*)—frequently produce reports claiming that LGBT-phobia and discrimination remain endemic in sporting culture. In 2015, a project declaring itself as “the first international study conducted into homophobia in sport” claimed that there were “few positive signs in any country that LGB people are welcome and safe playing team sport.” This study was retrospectively published in 2020 in the *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* journal (Denison, Jeanes, Faulkner & O'Brien, 2020).

McCormack (2020) argues that such findings must be treated with caution because “significant flaws in the rigour of the research in the reports exist, in both methods and analysis. Overly generalised claims are then made” (p. 101). Some of these flaws—as has been previously identified by Anderson, Magrath and Bullingham (2016)—include: no age or jokester controls (particularly on Internet surveys), which has been shown to elevate levels of discrimination (see Li, Follingstad, Campe & Chahal, 2020); counting retrospective accounts of homophobia as current; targeting participants through associations that provide support for LGB people; collapsing and conflating transgender, gay male, bisexual, and lesbian results (see Sullivan, 2020); or making claims that pathologize LGBT people without comparing them to heterosexuals. Such studies are, therefore, best described as “‘hearts and minds’ stud[ies] of perceptions and fears, not necessarily reflecting empirical realities” (Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016, p. 5).

Other critiques of work documenting sport's changing relationship with masculinity and sexuality have pointed out that findings are primarily restricted to young, white, middle-class, university-educated men in the Anglo-American contexts studied (e.g., Adams & Anderson, 2012; Anderson, 2011b; Magrath & Scoats, 2019). While critiques based on race, class, and level of education may have initially appeared to be accurate, more recent findings beyond these demographics – in both sport and society more broadly – have shown comparable levels of inclusivity (e.g., Cashmore & Cleland, 2012; Magrath, 2017a, 2017b). Outside of sport, recent research with working-class boys and men (e.g., Blanchard, McCormack & Peterson, 2015; Roberts, 2018) also documents positive attitudes toward homosexuality, as well as softer and more inclusive forms of masculinity compared to older research (e.g., Nayak & Kehily, 1996). While research with non-white men in Anglo-American contexts has shown improved attitudes (e.g., Morales, 2018), other research still documents generally more conservative attitudes among these groups of men (Magrath, 2017b; Magrath, Batten, Anderson & White, 2020; Southall, Anderson, Nagel, Polite & Southall, 2011).

The social trend of declining homophobia is also evident among older generations of men (Twenge, Sherman & Wells, 2016; Watt & Elliot, 2019). Other research has indicated that there is both a generational and a cohort effect, occurring simultaneously (Keleher & Smith, 2012). Interestingly, however, despite evidence of attitudinal change across age cohorts, there remains an absence of contemporary research that examines the performance and construction of masculinity among men whose adolescence occurred in the 1960s and 1970s or for those men over 40. Only research by Anderson and Fidler (2018), which focuses explicitly on men over the age of 65, provides any insight into this cohort's acceptance of homosexuality—which, in comparison to younger men, is found to be severely more conservative and highly homophobic. More substantial research into these age cohorts remains lacking, however; and is thus required to develop the field of study further.

We also note that while sport has undergone significant changes in respect to declining homophobia, it still remains a largely heteronormative environment. Indeed, the macho culture of the locker-room—and sports as a whole—has resulted in the need for LGB individuals to adapt their behaviors. White, Magrath and Morales's (2020) analysis of gay male athletes' coming out stories on Outsports³, for example, documents how, prior to coming out, they espoused an identity predicated on masculine stereotypes. Magrath's (forthcoming) research on gay male fans also shows that they adopt a "straight image" whilst in stadia, in order to reduce the risk of homosexual suspicion. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that heteronormativity, despite its implicit privileging of heterosexuality, does not equate to homophobia. However, while this dynamic remains difficult to tackle, research is needed to assess how much this could be a contributory factor in the relative lack of elite-level LGB athletes.

Alongside this, however, Anderson, Magrath and Bullingham (2016) also propose a number of hypotheses to explain the lack of out, elite-level male athletes (see also Ogawa, 2014). These include (1) the *silence* hypothesis—that gay male athletes *do* exist, but simply remain closeted during their athletic careers (or longer), (2) the *non-participation* or *non-existent* hypothesis—that gay men simply avoid sports, and prefer instead to participate in other locales, (3) the *international* hypothesis—that gay athletes' participation in international competitions, which are held in countries where attitudes toward homosexuality remain conservative in comparison to the West, make coming out a problematic proposition (as we discuss in the next section), and (4) the *generational* hypothesis—where younger athletes are put-off coming out due to concerns that influential figures within their

organization (most of whom are older) may espouse less progressive attitudes toward homosexuality.

Global Challenges

Earlier in this chapter we noted how the majority of research on sport, masculinity, and sexuality are predominantly restricted to studies in the UK and the US, and, to a lesser degree, Australia and Canada. While social attitude survey data continues to show that attitudes toward homosexuality across the Western world are improving, some sports research in Europe continues to observe homophobic attitudes and/or behaviors. In research with Spain's first-ever out gay team sport athlete, Victor Gutiérrez, Vilanova, Soler and Anderson (2018) show a general acceptance, but also the continued presence of discriminatory language. In Italy, Baiocco, Pistella, Salvati, Ioverno and Lucidi (2018) concluded that gay men reported more frequent bullying, and were, therefore, more likely to drop out of participation in sport. And in Germany, Kaelberer (2020) argues that tackling endemic homophobia has yet to be a priority in German sport. This is thus important evidence that declining homophobia is an uneven social process.

We also know from some – albeit largely anecdotal examples – that, despite a paucity of scholarly research – that other countries' cultural disapproval of homosexuality is also paralleled across much of the sports world. The 2018 FIFA (men's) soccer World Cup in Russia, for example, saw the Mexican Football Federation (FMF) fined and threatened with expulsion for their fans' continued use of the word 'Puto'—a homophobic epithet referring to a male sex worker (see Rodriguez, 2017). The previous year saw Russian politicians' claims that the virtual soccer game, *FIFA*, should be banned in the country due to its apparently illegal promotion of "gay propaganda" in the form of a rainbow-colored kit in support of English sport's anti-homophobia movement. July 2020 also saw Russian politicians seeking to ban same-sex marriage after a constitutional change that defined marriage as a male-female union only.

Outside of Europe and North America, while there is some building evidence of changing notions of gender (e.g., Hasan, Aggleton & Persson, 2018; Hu, 2018), research on sport, masculinity, and sexuality is scant. However, we know that LGB people face significant challenges in countries that are socially conservative or are entrenched in religiosity. For example, Hamdi, Lachheb and Anderson's (2017) examination of gay athletes in Tunisia concluded that, "Same-sex sexual relations are religiously taboo and legally prohibited. There is [therefore] no public discourse about homosexuality in sport in this context" (p. 688). Other notable publications include Shang and Gill's (2012) research on LGB athletes in Taiwan, which show continued evidence of hostile sporting cultures and *de facto* sanctioned normalization of homophobic language. And, more recently, research in Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan has shown that sports coaches were more likely to espouse positive attitudes toward homosexuality if they had worked with an LGB athlete (Tseng & Kim-Wai Sum, 2020).

These studies are therefore an important reminder that declining cultural homophobia can vary according to gender, age, education, religion, race, geography, socioeconomic status, and other variables (Keleher & Smith, 2012). These studies also serve as a reminder of the importance of further research investigating the contemporary relationship between *global* sport, masculinities, and sexualities. For instance, while some research has started to examine attitudes toward homosexuality in sport outside the West, we know little about changing (or not) patterns of masculinity—and whether or not this has also followed a more inclusive trend. The importance of this research cannot be underestimated, and we therefore call on scholars to include this in their future research agendas.

Conclusion

As we have evidenced throughout this chapter, there has been an undeniable shift toward the acceptance and inclusivity of sexual minorities in contemporary sports culture in Anglo-American societies; cultural locations where sport was once seen as one of the last refuges of homophobia (e.g., Curry, 1991; Hekma, 1998; Pronger, 1990). However, attitudes toward homosexuality in the sports industry—and society more broadly—have improved exponentially over the past two decades (Keleher & Smith, 2012; Twenge, Sherman & Wells, 2016; Watt & Elliot, 2019). Indeed, where sport once embraced its intolerance of homosexuality, it is now proud of its increased commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (Letts 2020). Indeed, one only need examine the treatment of athletes such as Israel Folau and Manny Pacquiao, both of whom have been widely condemned for their anti-LGB comments in recent years; or conversely, the praising of so many athletes who have come out publicly (White, Magrath & Morales, 2020). So far, however, most of the research documenting increased acceptance and declining tolerance for homophobia have been restricted to Western nations. As the last section of this chapter examined, matters outside of these nations are often more complex and further investigation into socio-cultural dynamics undergirding masculinity and sexuality are required.

Research has also examined a whole range of competitive sports across the Western world—including rugby, soccer, dance, horse racing, football, wrestling, cross country, and cheerleading to name but a few. Less is known, however, about a multitude of other sports, most particularly individual sports as well as those which continue to be cast as more feminine-appropriate terrains. Additionally, while we must acknowledge and unequivocally accept the positive change which has occurred in recent years, we must also remain cautious. We know little about how contemporary masculinity might intersect with other important factors—such as disability, for example. There are also numerous areas which require further exploration in order to achieve data saturation, such as the construction of masculinity among older generations of men, particularly those from non-white backgrounds. We also know little about how other cultural, economic, and political factors influence matters—particularly in the context of Trumpism (in the US) and Brexit (in the UK).

There are also, perhaps, more nuanced challenges which we continue to face. Indeed, in areas where changing attitudes have undoubtedly occurred, there remain more implicit microaggressions which are, oftentimes, harder to tackle. Needed interrogation might include focusing on the homosexually themed (or homophobic) language, irrespective of its intentions, and assessing the ongoing heteronormative environment that remains omnipresent but unspoken and little acknowledged in many sporting contexts (Magrath, 2020). Indeed, while there is undoubtedly evidence of considerable improvements in the sporting climate, intransigent issues such as these still remain. There is, therefore, more research needed to further explore the ever-changing relationship between sport, masculinity, and sexuality.

Over a decade ago, Anderson appealed to “graduate students and young scholars...[to] investigate the intersection of inclusive masculinities in other arenas” (2009, p. 160). While this appeal was answered, as evidenced by the substantial body of work cited in this chapter, we again reiterate the call for further research. Again, we reach out to graduate students and young scholars, but also to established senior scholars in the field to help to paint a broader and more accurate picture of contemporary masculinities across the world. Perhaps most importantly, we also call on scholars to be led by impartial and rigorous methodological procedures, to be led by data, not by entrenched agendas or personal dispositions. This is important not only for the academic world, but also for policy makers, as

confronting these issues without predisposed biases helps to further develop sport into a more inclusive environment.

Notes

1. The recommendations of the Wolfenden Report were only implemented in England and Wales, and referred to consenting men over the age of 21. The law did not apply in Scotland until 1980, and Northern Ireland in 1982.
2. For example, see *The Global Divide on Homosexuality*: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality/>
3. Outsports.com is typically recognized as the world's prominent website and resource for LGBT issues in sport.

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