

Lesbian athletes in the sports media: ambivalence, scrutiny and invisibility

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Women in the sports media

- Women are framed as lesser (Bernstein 2002)
- Underrepresentation (Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Duncan & Messner, 2000; Cooky et al., 2015; Fink, 2014)
- Infantilization
 - Framing as children (Fink 2014)
- Hierarchy of naming (Duncan and Messner 2000)
- Appearance
 - Valued more than performance (Harris and Clayton 2002)
 - Heterosexy (Griffin 1992, Scraton and Flintoff 2002)
 - Masculine attributes = lesbianism (Wright and Clarke 1999)

Notable public moments of public lesbian coverage

Notable Public Moment	Individual, Club or Series	Date
Coming out (USA)	Billie Jean King	1981
First lesbian soccer team in London (UK)	Hackney Women's Football Club	1986
LGBT activist organisation created (UK)	Stonewall	1989
Coming out (USA)	Ellen DeGeneres	1997
Lesbian TV drama (USA)	The L Word	2004 - 2009
Civil Partnership (UK)	Clare Balding and Alice Arnold	2006
Prominent lesbian characters in a mainstream TV drama (USA)	Callie Torres and Arizona Robbins, Grey's Anatomy	2009 - 2016
Lesbian TV drama (UK)	Lip Service	2010 - 2013
Coming out (USA)	Megan Rapinoe	2012
Coming out (UK)	Casey Stoney	2014
Kissing in the World Cup final (USA)	Abby Wambach	2015
Marriage (UK)	Clare Balding and Alice Arnold	2015

Athletes

- Casey Stoney
 - British
 - 35 years old
 - Retired
 - Managing Manchester United
- Megan Rapinoe
 - American
 - 32 years old
 - Playing



Articles

Stoney	Rapinoe
Homophobia and wages, December 2013 Lamont – The Observer	Coming out, August 2012 Cannizzaro - New York Post
Daley response inspired me to come out, February 2014 – The Telegraph	Discrimination stance, April 2016 McShane – New York Daily Press
Fear of prejudice, February 2014 Sylvester – The Times	Anthem protest, September 2016 Marcotti – The Times
Birth of twins, November 2014 Wilson – The Sunday Telegraph	Rapinoe calls owner of Spirit anti-gay, September 2016 Goff – The Washington Post
Women's World Cup, July 2015 Cocozza – The Guardian	Elite athlete girlfriend coming out, July 2017 Doyle – Hartford, Courant
Becoming assistant manager, February 2018 Edwards - The Telegraph	Life is a walking protest, October 2017 Moore – Arizona Republic

Themes: Ambivalence, scrutiny and invisibility

- Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2014)
- Ambivalence
 - Contradictory or assorted messages (Duncan and Hasbrook 1988)
- Scrutiny
 - Critical observation or examination of the body (McDonald and Eagles 2012)
- Invisibility
 - Silenced themes of sexuality (Waldron 2016)

Ambivalence

Rapinoe:

...she and other female professional athletes are bucking societal expectation the moment they get out of bed to fix a cup of coffee (Moore, 2017).

Stoney:

I'm a big believer that if you come from a background where you have two loving parents, what does it matter? **My mum and dad split up when I was six and I love them both to bits** (Wilson, 2014).

Ambivalence

- Rapinoe – age, gender, activist
- Stoney – family
 - Focus on non non-sport identity and family experience than on the elite sporting career (Christopherson et al. 2002; Wensing and Bruce 2003)
- Shift from infantilization
- Difference in coverage between athletes



Scrutiny

Rapinoe:

She came out as a lesbian in 2012 and is an ambassador for Athlete Ally, a charity that combat homophobia and transphobia in sport (Marcotti, 2016).

Stoney:

- Last month, Stoney was added to the committee of the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA). She was the first women ever to be asked to join (Lamont, 2013).

Scrutiny

- Framed around their sexuality
- Stoney
 - Ambassador for women's football
 - Role model
- Rapinoe
 - Ambassador for LGBT and women's rights
 - Beacon of protest



Invisibility

Rapinoe:

Rapinoe... said she always had lived her life “pretty openly” before officially coming out, but added, **“It was just nice - not to get it off my shoulders** - but to be out there and be proud about it.” (Cannizzaro, 2012).

Stoney:

But actually what coming out has shown me is that **society is changing for the better**. I feel lucky to live in this country (The Sunday Telegraph, 2016).

Invisibility

- Rapinoe – ease of coming out
- Stoney – took time
- Shift in portrayal from personal to societal



Conclusion

- Changing nature of coming out – outed and optional
- Focus on individuals – not appearance
- Ambivalence evident
- Infantilization not evident
- Need for more research in this area and beyond



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