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# Homosexuality : a study of communication between professional sports and the media

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HOMOSEXUALITY: A STUDY OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN  
PROFESSIONAL SPORTS AND THE MEDIA

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

By

Laurie Shantz

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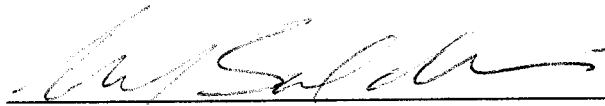
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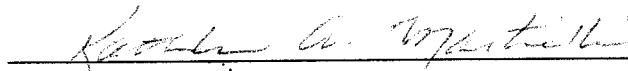
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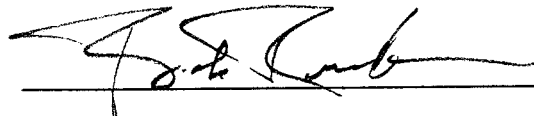
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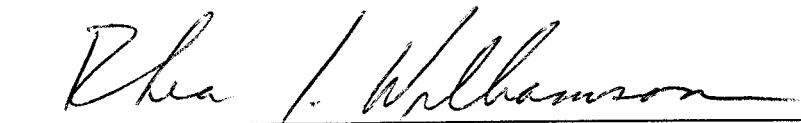


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## ABSTRACT

### HOMOSEXUALITY: A STUDY OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL SPORTS AND THE MEDIA

by Laurie Shantz

This analysis studied the relationship between homosexual athletes, the media, and heterosexual athletes. The study predicted that because of the media's inability and unwillingness to address the issue of homosexuality in professional sports, professional athletes have survived without addressing the issue as well. The issue was explored through interviews with current and former professional athletes, current and former media personalities, and homosexual athletes.

The general consensus among the current and former athletes was that they would feel comfortable playing with a homosexual teammate as long as they didn't feel uncomfortable. The homosexual athletes would like to see a homosexual athlete coming out during their career, but felt that society wasn't ready. The media personalities were collectively against the idea because a homosexual player is a financial liability as well as a major reputation risk. Professional athletes and the media personalities took opposite stands on the issue than was originally predicted.

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## **Introduction**

The professional sports world has never been known for broad-minded thinking or tolerance for diversity and change (Emmons, 2001). Ever since the mid 1900s when professional sports entered into mainstream American culture, athletes have had to live up to a certain image. They are the ultimate heroes for kids, and the fulfillment of a childhood dream for male adults, attained by putting on their most tattered tee shirts and drinking a six-pack of beer. Professional sports are traditionally viewed as an extremely masculine profession where weakness has no place. According to former Minnesota Viking, Sean Salisbury (2002) there are people in the league who have that homophobic attitude, saying, "I could never play with anyone who's gay." It is because of the macho culture. In football, you're never supposed to cry, you're not supposed to be sensitive, and you can't be friends with someone who is gay (ESPN Magazine). As a result, weakness is often equated with femininity, which in men is commonly a trait associated with homosexuality. That being true, it might be difficult for a homosexual male to fit the stereotypes that professional sports figures have been forced to achieve.

There are those who still focus on defining the differences between groups of people rather than celebrating the commonality and the vast diversity among individuals. The use of stereotypes is most common among people who are unfamiliar with the groups they attempt to describe and, in many cases, fearful of that which they do not know. According to Griffin, they use stereotypes because there is power in promulgating negative opinions about unfamiliar groups. Ultimately, the negative description is offered as proof that they are not worthy of displacing those in power (1998).

One of the beautiful things about living in the United States is that people have the freedom to be and act as individuals without enduring social criticisms and disdain for being the person that they are. However, only certain people experience this freedom, those whom society and its components choose to let in. The same goes for professional sports and its franchises. Most of the time, people who do not fit into a certain category are deemed as unfitting or disgraceful. One aspect of society where people are expected to fit into a certain mold is professional sports. According to Bill Callahan (2002), writer for the Boston Herald,

You wear funny shoes in a clubhouse and you may get grief for weeks. You bring your companion Sheldon around to meet the fellas, and you might as well move your locker into the parking lot. Welcome to hell. You'd find more friends if you walked in with a bomb strapped to your body. Of all the major team sports, baseball, because of the individual nature of the game, would give a gay player the BEST shot at success. The NFL would sooner accept a member of al-Qaeda than an openly gay player.

Male athletes especially are taught that they have to talk and act in a certain way. They have to be macho and heroes to adults and youths alike. They are not supposed to show any of their "feminine side" or weaknesses. Male athletes are taught that along with money and fame, women are desired and are part of the perks of being famous. Men, however, are not supposed to desire other men.

Homosexuality has taken its place in American society, but is still a long way from reaching full acceptance. According to Dave Pallone (1991), the first and only openly gay Major League Baseball Umpire, homophobia exists in every aspect of sports, professionally and in the amateur ranks. This is especially true among professional athletes. Those athletes who currently play and are privately homosexual have gone for

years without enduring the pain and torture that others whose homosexuality has been brought out have had to survive. Their pain comes from the inability to reveal their homosexuality due to fear of losing their jobs, endorsement deals, and the respect of their peers. The media is the catalyst for all of the information that reaches the public and homosexual athletes can't be sure how they will react either. Few athletes who are gay openly admit their sexuality for their fear of being completely ostracized. Therefore, the hypothesis is that because of the media's inability and unwillingness to address the issue of homosexuality in professional sports, professional athletes have been able to survive without ever addressing the issue as well.

Even a male athlete's career, no matter how good he is on the field, is subject to criticism and damage off the field. Pallone (1991) also believes that a man could be the most successful baseball or football player that Major League Baseball or the National Football League has ever seen, but the moment he announces he is gay, it is safe to say his career is over. Sports, as well as much of society, believe a gay or lesbian athlete could never present themselves as a positive role model. Is the reason the media keeps the books closed on homosexuality in professional sports because they understand how fragile a sports career is? Why has there not been a gay athlete who has been willing to come out within three years of his career ending?

The playing arena at training camp or in competition, the locker room, or social settings beyond the sporting context, such as bars or night clubs, are all locations in which this masculine identification and solidarity is reinforced (Drummond, 2002). The one place where the media gathers a majority of their information is the locker room.

The locker room is probably one of the most sacred places in all of professional sports. In fact, even today, many professional teams still don't allow female media personalities or employees in the locker room because of what they may see or hear. But what about allowing homosexual media personalities in the locker room? Could it be assumed that no gay person dare enter a locker room? Would gay media personalities be welcomed into the locker room or would they be shunned just the same as gay athletes? Since it has taken this long to get women in the locker room, it could take significantly longer to get openly gay media personalities inside.

By virtue of what they do for a living, athletes are judged on their physical appearance and performance. They are constantly on display. Athletes are consistently being flattered by young women and teenage girls who gawk over them at the games, but if a man did that it, would it make them uncomfortable? There is a huge realm of possibilities that could occur if someone would step up and acknowledge that this may happen and talk about it in a serious and unbiased way. It could force athletes to open up and learn to accept that the guy with the locker next to them or on the opposite side of the field may be gay.

Opening up athletes' eyes to homosexuality within professional sports may or may not cause some problems where people could point fingers at each other and make blank accusations that they may not be able to prove. Mike Piazza and Kordell Stewart are only a couple of examples of what could happen to a player's reputation who maybe doesn't date a lot or who isn't married. When these accusations surface, there is brief media attention given to homosexuality in professional sports, but it generally fades away

quickly. On the one hand, anything to open up professional athletes to homosexuality could be a positive step forward because they will begin to learn to accept that it does exist, but on the other hand, it could corrupt the relationships between players and thus destroying the camaraderie and team element of professional sports altogether.

The purpose of this study is to determine if the media and professional athletes collectively and purposely avoid talking about homosexuality in sports. In order to achieve this purpose, the following research questions are to be answered:

1. Is the subject of homosexuality in professional sports covered by the media and if not, why?
2. How are media personalities and athletes affected by what is reported in the media?
3. How is the subject of homosexuality in professional sports framed in the media?

The following review of literature will address these questions as well as further discuss the relationship between homosexuality, the media, and professional sports.

## **Literature Review**

### **Ideology of Sports**

Sport is not a privileged space into which we can retreat from real life – rather it is systematically and intimately connected with society. Sport as an activity, or an object of interest, is socially constructed; it is defined and given meaning. It is these meanings, which give us the value of being involved in sport – they provide us with identities and identifications (Baker and Boyd, 1997). The culture of sport is in fact made up of many different subcultures and many different dimensions and sites, unified by specific rituals and codes common to all. More than any church, professional sports and its associations have become the great cultural unifiers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The success of professional sports lies in the development of a physical and mathematical language of meanings and loyalties, based on the gendered body, the superseded divisions of culture and religion (Burstyn, 1999).

A significant characterization of the male professional sport culture lies within the stereotypes made about the athletes and the organizations. Athletes are masculine, courageous, and possess superior physical strength. Athletes are assumed to be very tough, manly, and heterosexual. According to Griffin (1998) stereotypes are the product of ignorance and discriminatory bias. However, the gender positions that society constructs for men may not correspond exactly with what men actually are, or desire to be, or what they actually do. It is therefore necessary to study masculinity as well as the men themselves.

## The Masculinism of Sport

“Masculinity,” meaning the pattern or configuration of social practices linked to the position of men in the gender order (Clatterbaugh, 1998 & Connell, 2001), tends to be achieved through a continuous group activity subject to the constant supervision and scrutiny of all the significant males in the man’s immediate social environment (Bly, 1991; Ford, 1992; Pittman, 1993). Masculinities do not exist prior to social behavior, either as bodily states or fixed personalities. Rather, masculinities come into existence as people act. They are accomplished in everyday conduct or organizational life, as patterns of social practice. Close-focus research has shown how we “do gender” in everyday life, for instance in the way we conduct conversations (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Men’s subjectivities are central to gender domination and impact upon the social relations of gender, transforming men’s subjectivities and daily practices (Walsh, 2001). Dynamic relationships and tensions exist between the hegemonic and other “subordinated” and “marginalized” forms of masculinity and recognition of diversity leads to questions of power and gender politics within masculinity. The major example of a subordinated masculinity is male homosexuality, which often meets with violence when expressed openly (Connell, 1995).

Masculinity ought to be viewed from a historical, social, and cultural perspective (Clatterbaugh, 1997; Gilmore, 1990; Weeks, 1995; White, 1996 as quoted in Philaretou & Allen, 2001). Throughout the history of human civilization, different social groups, cultures, and subcultures have evolved and developed their own male standards according to the specific needs and circumstances of their people. Such standards were, and still

are, geared toward serving the needs and sometimes caprices, of the elite male ruling class. It is erroneous to refer to a single male ideology or male standard, or, for that matter, a single mode of masculinity (Carey, 1996; Clatterbaugh, 1997 as quoted in Philaretou & Allen, 2001). It has become something of a truism to state that the concept of “masculinities” assumed during the 1990s, have gained increasing visibility, prominence, and political significance both within and beyond the social sciences (Collier, 2002). Sport has become one of the most important sites of masculinising practice of and socializing boys into many of the values, attitudes, and skills considered so important in the adult world of men (Drummond, 2002). The conception of the masculinity-sports relationship begins to illustrate the idea of an affinity between social structure and personality.

Organized sport is a “gendered institution” – an institution constructed by gender relations. As such, its structure and values (rules, formal organization, sex composition, etc.) reflect dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Organized sports are also a “gendering institution” – an institution that helps to construct the current gender order. Part of this construction of gender is accomplished through the “masculinizing” of male bodies and minds (Messner, 2001). Masculine heterosexual identity is built around ensuring the sanctity of the body, with rigid limits imposed on the circumstances and socially admitted forms of male-to-male physical contact (Tomsen & Mason, 2001).

According to Connell (1995), researchers who have examined the issue of gays in sports largely agree that organized sport is a highly homophobic institution. Particularly contact sports have been described as a place in which hegemonic masculinity is



reproduced and defined, as an athlete represents the ideal of what it means to be a man. That definition contrasts with what it means to be feminine and/or gay (Messner, 1992). But as Griffin suggests, if gay male athletes, who are stigmatized as being feminine can be as strong and competitive as heterosexual male athletes, they may threaten the perceived distinctions between gay men and straight men (1998; as quoted in Gumby, undated).

It has been speculated that organized sport also develops a sense of male solidarity, which encourages men to identify with one another, thus providing a medium for the regular rehearsal of masculine identification (Whitson, 1990). Homophobia, therefore, presents itself in the form of resistance against the intrusion of a gay sub-culture within the masculinity of sports, and serves as a way of maintaining the rigidity of orthodox masculinity and patriarchy. Sports not only reject homosexuality, but also venerate hyper-heterosexuality (Hekma 1998; Griffin 1998; Pronger 1992; Wolf, Wendel, Toma, and Morpew, 2001). Accordingly, Sean Salisbury, a former Minnesota Viking and friend of a homosexual athlete, believes it is the ignorance in professional football that hinders the league's ability to deal with a topic such as homosexuality and rejects its push to fit into the macho, male-dominated culture (Whannel, 2002).

Sociological research on sport has shown how an aggressive masculinity is created organizationally by the structure of organized sport, by its pattern of competition, its system of training, and its steep hierarchy of levels and rewards (Messner, 1992). Images of this masculinity are circulated on an enormous scale by sports media through the terms they use to describe the players (Connell, 2001). Whannel (2002) maintains

that typically professional athletes are described as strong, burley, powerful, and intimidating. They are given nicknames such as “Refrigerator,” “The Bus,” and “Godzilla.” Athletes are also judged on their quickness, vertical leap, and level of endurance. However, there appears to be a restless vertigo of displacement, in which multiple destabilized identities are awash in a sea of intertextual pastiche and cultural self-referentiality, in which even the walls surrounding masculinity are, if not tumbling, at the least eroding (1992). Yet there is still an apparent yearning for sporting heroics, as can be seen in the celebratory portrayals of new emergent stars. In other words, the definition of masculinity is gradually changing in society as society itself changes and becomes more tolerant and accepting (2002).

#### Athletes as Media Celebrities

Given the centrality of noteworthy individuals to the constitution and experience of contemporary sport culture, it is little wonder that a thriving sport celebrity industry has come to the fore (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). They are our heroes. They are eulogized as modern-day warriors. They have worldwide audiences, command enormous respect, and, often, enormous salaries. They smile, they scowl, and they sell products. Virtually every boy wants to grow up to be like them. They are our athletes (Burstyn, 1999). The male spectator who is watching an athletic contest can feel himself as one with his “side,” and “his team” can represent for him the expression of aggression and physical skill. The fan feels a sense of solidarity with other males who are on his side as fans as well as solidarity with members of the team itself (Steinem, 1972).

Athletes are no longer just athletes, but they have become modern day celebrities. According to Marshall (1997) "...the contemporary entertainer is an embodiment of the twinned discourses of late modernity: neo-liberal democracy and consumer capitalism" (as quoted in Andrews and Jackson). The postmodern disposition toward the blurring of institutional boundaries has meant the spheres within which sport celebrities operate as cultural and economic agents have broadened beyond those of the playing field and the corporate endorsement. Therefore, within today's multi-layered promotional culture, the sport celebrity is effectively a multi-textual and multi-platform promotional entity (Connell, 1995).

In contemporary Western culture excessively saturated with media images of celebrity, no American athlete, perhaps no American at all has been more incessantly promoted than Michael Jordan. Jordan's seeming ubiquitous global fame is in part built upon a dual career as a distinguished basketball player and celebrity endorser (McDonald & Andrews, 2001). This canonization is hardly new, as sport has long been tied to the glorification of masculinity and male bodies. Think back to those US sport heroes of yesteryear, including Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, and Joe Namath – whose accomplishments were, in the popular press and in private conversations, often equated with heroism, courageousness, and cultural significance (2001).

Athletes in mediated sports are role models, heroes, and often featured as successful individuals (McKay, Messner, & Sabo, 2000). In the case of former NBA star Dennis Rodman, his "stardom" stemmed just as much from his antics off the court as his behavior on the court. His tawdry relationships and off-the-wall remarks are part of

Rodman's signature style, which made him incredibly marketable. Rodman is an example of how in American mainstream culture, athletes and sports have specific cultural meanings.

The commercialization and commodification of men's sports in the television era have played a large role in turning professional athletes into modern-day gladiators, exchanging alienation, injury, and pain for material and social rewards (Burstyn, 1999). It is the link between politics and ideology that directs this approach to sport and the mass media (Clarke and Clarke, 1982). The sport-media complex is not a fluid, shifting discourse, but a set of large, powerful economies and institutions. With sports apparent distance from work and politics, it may be easy to forget the economics that lie behind it (Byrstyn, 1999). In examining the process of the social production of sport stardom, individual media cannot be seen in isolation. The media feed off each other and audience readings of representation in one medium are always already shaped and structured by representations in other media (Whannel, 2002). In terms of a player's sexuality, New York Times columnist Harvey Araton (2002) contends, "In an enlightened world, everyone could make the choice with social or financial impunity. In this world, the sexuality of the athlete is no more my business than that of the men and women who share the press box with me. What athletes do with their bodies is not my story." However, not all media personalities agree and have found stories about athletes' personal lives, whether true or false, interesting or print worthy.

## Homosexuality in Society

The phrase “media representation” refers to the ways that members of various social groups are differentially presented in mass media offerings, which in turn influence the way audience members of those media offerings perceive and respond to members of the groups represented. Because mainstream media offerings are typically presented to audience members as “transparent mediators of reality” in the social world, they regularly contribute to the social “knowledge” media users cultivate about the “real world” and the wide range of individuals who live there (Gross, 1994). Communications scholar George Gerbner (1998) expands on that assessment when he writes:

Television is the source of the most broadly shared images and messages in history. It is the mainstream of the common symbolic environment into which our children are born and in which we all live our lives. While channels proliferate, their contents concentrate. For most viewers, new types of delivery systems such as cable, satellite, and the Internet mean even deeper penetration and integration of the dominant (representational) patterns of images and messages into everyday life.

Clark (1969) identified four chronological stages of media representation of social groups. During the first stage, nonrecognition, the group simply does not appear at all in media offerings. Viewers from other cultures, therefore, would never know that members of that group exist in American culture if they received all their information about the United States through mass media channels. Once a specific group begins to be represented in media offerings, it enters the second stage: ridicule. During this stage of representation, the group is stereotyped and its members are frequently presented as being “buffoons,” as were African Americans in the early television programs *Amos ‘n Andy* or *Good Times*. During the third stage of representation, regulation, members of

the social group are presented as protectors of the existing social order, such as police officers and detectives. Finally, during the fourth and final stage of representation, respect, members of the social group are presented in the complete range of roles, both positive and negative, that their members actually occupy in real life.

Media representation matters because every media user can identify components of his “knowledge” of the social world that derive either wholly or partially from media representations, fictional or otherwise (Gross, 1994). This reality is especially relevant to the case of media representations of gay men on American television, since many heterosexual Americans do not (knowingly) interact with gay men on a regular basis they may, therefore, rely heavily on the mass media for their knowledge of gay men and the gay lifestyle. Media representation also matters because representation is a form of social action, involving the production of meanings that ultimately have real effects (Hart, 2000).

Negative media representations of gay men can contribute to decreased levels of social tolerance for homosexuality in American society as well as increased levels of homophobia. They also contribute to the vision of a society in which differences are devalued and in which hostility toward gay men may not be perceived as intolerable. In contrast, positive representations of gay men retain significant ability to influence the beliefs associated with gay males and with members of other sexually marginalized groups (Mackie et al., 1996). Because homosexuality is still not universally accepted, it is important for the media to broadcast information about homosexuals in an unbiased way. Without that, it is hard for homosexuals to gain the public acceptance that they

seek. When the media broadcasts their own negative opinions on the air, it sets back any progress toward acceptance that homosexuals had made up until that point. For example, at the conclusion of a CBS documentary called *The Homosexuals*, correspondent Mike Wallace offered the ultimate stereotypical description of homosexuality:

The average homosexual, if there be such, is promiscuous. He is neither interested in nor capable of a lasting relationship like that of a heterosexual marriage. His sex life – his “love life” – consists of chance encounters at the clubs and bars he inhabits, and even on the characteristic of the homosexual relationship. And the homosexual prostitute has become a fixture on the downtown streets at night (Alwood, 1996 as quoted in Rothenberg, 1981).

Homosexuality, while socially stigmatized, has acquired a symbolical centrality in American culture, figuring as a scandalous transgression against which notions of normalcy, in a vast array of domains are defined (Terry, 1999).

Heterosexuality is a system of dominance in which heterosexuality is privileged as the only normal and acceptable form of sexual expression. In this system of dominance, heterosexual identity is valued and rewarded, while homosexual identity is stigmatized and punished. Heterosexism operates on multiple levels including individual, institutional, and cultural. As a result, gay men are subjected to individual fear, prejudice, and violence (Griffin, 1998). However, several American cities and a handful of private employers now have laws that forbid discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Mainstream movies and television shows feature gay and lesbian characters. Celebrities are coming out of the closet every week and there are several self-proclaimed homosexual politicians (Terry, 1999). Therefore the dominance of heterosexuality is a system that the entertainment industry has begun to fight against the prejudice and

discrimination by introducing a positive characterization of homosexuality into its television shows and movies. Professional sports, however, have not been given that introduction yet.

Coming out has recently been an asset for actors in television sitcoms and for stand-up comedians, but the vast majority of gay athletes, particularly in the homophobic sphere of team sports, still feel they have to keep their sexuality private. The inability to obtain corporate sponsorships is a main concern of professional athletes and they realize that any type of overt sexuality can cause sponsors to look them over (Griffin, 1998). According to professional tennis player Bill Jean King, "When I was outed, I lost all of my endorsements within 24 hours. I was just about to retire, and I had unbelievable endorsements (lined up) for the next 10 years." It appears that little has changed: money is still sexual. Agents and marketers see only financial ruin in a gay client's intention to go public (Let's see now. . . you want a dad to buy their son football boots endorsed by a pansy?) (as quoted in Garfield, May 4, 2003). However, Steve Kettmann believes that it is an open secret that there are gay athletes in major league team sports who have set records, made all-star teams, and actually made millions in endorsements. While this may be true for selected athletes, the majority of gay athletes have remained in the closet fearing for their safety and consequent subjection to humiliation. It's really not hard to imagine why that may be true. A career in pro ball can survive drug abuse or even spousal abuse, but even a strong-willed athlete who declares himself gay might risk not only awkward stares and denunciations but also a hastily ended career (Maclean, 1998).



The act of “coming out” is simply when a homosexual person announces publicly his sexuality at a time he feels is the right time. According to Haight (2001) coming out is a radical act. A gay man or lesbian who embraces his or her life in full openness affects social change. By being public, gay men and lesbians give faces and lives to homosexuality. Fear often vanishes with familiarity. Understanding replaces ignorance. Gadpaille (1993) noted that it has not always been harmful and futile to work with homosexuals in such a way as to explore the dynamics of their sometimes conflict-based sexual orientation, and perhaps effects a change in it if that is their wish; it would be and is harmful to have one’s own agenda of change regardless of a homosexual person’s wishes and/or best interests.

Being an openly homosexual media personality is nearly as difficult as being a openly homosexual professional athlete. According to Bill Callahan (2002), the sports editor for the Marin Independent Journal, a lot of the problem lies in that as a sportswriter, one is required to go into a locker room where suddenly the idea of being an openly gay person becomes frightening. “To ‘come out of the closet’ is to leap off a cliff, eyes open, and into the glorious truth of an honest life” (Haight, 2001, p. 3). Rather than being coerced to behave according to narrow ideas of proper conduct, they (men) should be encouraged to develop skills that make them more adaptive to a changing culture. Homosexual men are likely to experience considerable subjective relief and gain substantial self-respect as they recognize the universality of these struggles among men that is to remember that they are not alone in this (Brooks, 2001).

According to Estrada & Quintero (1999), the representation of gay men on American television from the late 1960s to the present has undoubtedly influenced the way the American public thinks about and responds, both socially and politically, to gay men and the issues of greatest relevance and concern to them. Media representations have shaped the way Americans come to understand the phenomenon of homosexuality and, ultimately, they have had a direct bearing on the already complex relationships within and between various social groups in American society. As these media representations have become part of the American social agenda, they have contributed significantly to the commonly accepted ways of discussing and considering the status of gay men and their lived realities. Media representations of gay men in recent decades have provided ideological guidance to American audience members, since the codes, conventions, symbols, and visuals they offered have contributed significantly to the social construction of gay men and to the resulting social ramifications of that construction (Hart, 2000).

It was only AIDS that allowed television to make movies-of-the-week in the 1980s; and though an occasional documentary appearing on PBS, gay films were for gay film festivals, John Waters was underground, and anything offered to a mainstream audience seemed to be influenced by a schizophrenic desire on the part of movie makers to: a) show the audience that gay people are different, and b) insist that they're just like everyone else – especially in matters of the heart (Holleran, 2001).

Virtually at the peak of her career, Rosie O'Donnell announced her homosexuality to the public. The media accepted this right away, which allowed

O'Donnell to use her sexuality as well as her celebrity status to promote gay parenting. Ironically, her announcement came just as the debate over adoption rights began to peak (DuLong, 2002). Similarly, the ABC sitcom *Ellen* made television history in 1997 by introducing the first lesbian lead character on a prime-time series. Regular and recurring gay male characters were also present on a variety of prime-time shows, including *Chicago Hope*, *Cybill*, *Frasier*, *Melrose Place*, *Party of Five*, *Profiler*, *Rosanne*, *The Simpsons* and *Spin City* ("GLAAD Scorecard," 1997). At the start of the 1998-99 television season, NBC made history with the premiere of *Will & Grace*, its new situation comedy featuring prime-time television's first gay male lead characters (Hart, 2000).

During the February 1999 sweeps, the character Jack (Kerr Smith) on *Dawson's Creek* – who had been romantically involved with a central female character for weeks – came out to his family members and friends about his homosexuality. Since then, the series has dealt sympathetically with Jack's process of coming to terms with his sexual orientation, including episodes exploring the reactions of his schoolmates to Jack's new identity and the teen's interest in, yet reluctance to start dating, other young men (Hart, 2000). While, Jack is simply a fictional television character, gay professional athletes live a scared and confused life everyday. However, Jack *is* a representation of the ongoing growth of acceptance of homosexuality in entertainment.

### Homosexuality in Team Sports

Although mainstream sports still may be overwhelmingly homophobic and sexist, it could be argued that the development over the last 20 years of extensive networks of gay community sport activities signifies progress (Pronger, 2000). Still, the world of the

big three sports (football, basketball, baseball) is macho to the extreme. It can be unforgiving. It is not a stretch to imagine the ostracism an openly gay baseball player would face in his clubhouse, or the danger an openly gay quarterback would face if his offensive line decided to “ease up” on its protection. An out player would become the center of a media storm (Haight, 2001). According to former Major League Baseball player Billy Bean, the idea of what all young male athletes have been trained to understand is that homosexuality is like the last link in the chain to, stereotypically, weakness and bad athletics. For example, if a guy drops a ball, other athletes may utter an epithet that says he is gay (Battista, 2001). As the first and only openly gay Major League Baseball Umpire, Dave Pallone (2001) said that “...baseball ripped out my heart and soul, just so they might eliminate what they felt would be adverse publicity.”

There are more than 3,100 active professional athletes in the four major team sports in America (baseball, basketball, football, and hockey). The average career of a professional athlete in the four major sports is short, maybe five years. Therefore, it can be assumed that during the 1980s and 1990s, there have been more than 15,000 professional athletes in the four major team sports. Yet not a single athlete has come out while playing and only a few have come out after retiring. Assuming that the statistics are correct and at the very least 5-10% of the population is gay, that means that there should have been up to 1,500 professional gay athletes in the NBA, NFL, MLB and NHL since 1980 (Gumby, 1999).

Sports attempt to tolerate gay male athletes when they contribute to the overarching ethos of sport—winning—but try to taint the creation of a gay identity within

sport that would see homosexuality and athleticism as compatible. However, by proving themselves successful in sport and meeting most other mandates of hegemonic masculinity except for their sexual identity, gay male athletes show that hegemony is not seamless and that there exists the possibility to soften hegemonic masculinity in the sporting realm (Gumby, 2002). Disproving this common notion is exactly what former NFL player David Kopay (1977) intended to do by insisting that, "...I was out to prove that I was no less of a man because I am homosexual."

According to Kopay, who played nine years in the NFL, "Sports is about the last bastion of Neanderthal thinking that exists in society. Sports are way, way behind" (Emmons, 2001). Garrison Hearst proved that to be true when he said "...I don't want any faggots on my team. I know this might not be what people want to hear, but that's a punk. I don't want any faggots in this locker room" (Lynch, 2002, November 22). This attitude is one reason why gay professional athletes are afraid to come out of the closet. Among the top are the fear of homophobic reactions from their teammates, fans, coaches, and managers. Professional football players say that the macho atmosphere of team sports would make it tough to live together, shower together, and fight together with an openly gay player. Professional football coach Johnny Roland told ESPN, "...If that person was of that persuasion, I'm not sure the quality of his toughness." And NFL player Darrell Green also suggested to ESPN that there isn't enough space for gays in the locker room (Gumby, 1999). Sport culture has been highly influential in shaping and homogenizing masculine ideals across, through, and despite the multiple and diverse masculinities of real men (Burstyn, 1999).

Athletes spend a large amount of their time in the locker room. For as long as professional sports have been in existence, the locker room has remained a very sacred place. However, a locker room can be juvenile, cruel, and the guys one would figure would be the most secure in their sexuality are the most neurotic (Jacobs, 2002). According to Wiggys Sivertsen, "The locker room mentality of homophobic banter and actions prevalent in team sports is why gay athletes conceal their sexual orientation" (as quoted in Emmons, 2001). Former San Francisco Giants outfielder Eric Davis admitted that athletes will reluctantly discuss homosexuality, but agreed that the atmosphere in a clubhouse absolutely would be unbearable for any player who came out. A sports sociologist and consultant to the San Francisco 49ers also believes that "...the player who came out today would wind up experiencing a living hell in the clubhouse, on the playing field, and in the media" (2001).

The main question seems to be if professional sports are ready to embrace openly gay players. According to Billy Bean, professional sports and society for that matter still have some maturing to do before they are ready. He believes that no matter how much progress we think this country has made, "...there are a lot of people out there who are going to want the athlete to fail" (Battista, 2001, p. 13). Former NFL player Sterling Sharpe agrees that an openly gay player would not make it a day in the NFL. He states, "Athletes who are drug users, convicted criminals, or spousal abusers are all welcomed back into the NFL, but a gay player would be an outcast for life. They would be victimized and hazed the minute anyone found out" (Dolin & Winn, 2002). However, Bobby Valentine, former manager of the New York Mets, addressed the issue to

“Details” magazine by saying, “The players are a diverse enough group now that I think they could handle it” (Araton, 2002, p. 1). Those people who are trying to convince themselves gays aren’t in major team sports are in denial. They are trying to preserve an illusion that the only bastion of “real guys” left is in the military and team sports (Jacobs, 2001). Many men who are perfectly comfortable with their homosexuality, who enjoy being gay, also live their lives in non-gay contexts such as professional sports (Pronger, 1992).

One of the largest concerns for gay athletes contemplating coming out is keeping or obtaining new endorsements. Bean waited several years after the end of his career to come out and knows how financially burdensome coming out can be. “There’s so much money involved, you’d have to be foolish or very rich to put your career in jeopardy. It would become a circus. I’ve never met the person that I think could do it” (as quoted in Emmons, 2001). Professional gay athletes not only have to fear losing their positions and being victimized by increased violence against them on the field, but perhaps worst of all, their million-dollar endorsements. Bean even noted in his autobiography that acting straight meant that the only person he had to lie to was himself. It was always easier to be miserable. To be happy, he would have had to undertake the most arduous task of his entire life and it wasn’t worth the risk or the pain (Bean, 2003). In fact, homophobia in sports is so bad that one of the nations leading sports agents, Leigh Steinberg said in an ESPN interview that a gay athlete would have a harder time finding endorsements than a straight athlete who beats his wife (Gumby, 1999).

## Diversity in Professional Sports

Overcoming problems with diversity is an old concept for professional sports. The world of sports has often been a bridge for minority groups into American cultural mainstream. Jackie Robinson, who broke Major League Baseball's barrier to blacks, and Hank Greenberg, baseball's first Jewish star, changed the face of America (Luo, 2003). During his roller coaster career in the National Basketball Association, Michael Jordan has achieved at 38 years old what no one ever thought possible and Yao Ming changed how Asian athletes are viewed all together. Each of these examples represent a moment in professional sports where the perceived impossible was overcome.

Jackie Robinson changed the face of professional sports when he became the first Black person to play Major League Baseball for the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947. He then soon went on to change the face of professional sports forever. When Jackie Robinson burst onto the scene in 1947, he managed to break Baseball's color barrier by bringing the Negro Leagues' electrifying style of play to the majors. He quickly became Baseball's top drawing card and a symbol of hope to millions of Americans (Baseball Hall of Fame). Robinson lit the torch and passed it on to several generations of African-American athletes and opened the nation's eyes to a whole new concept. While the Brooklyn Dodgers infielder didn't make a nation color blind, he at least made it more color friendly (Schwartz, 1998). In the novel "Idols of the Game," Robert Lipsyte and Pete Levine described Robinson's first Major League Baseball game as "...the most eagerly anticipated debut in the annals of the national pastime. It represented both the



dream and the fear of equal opportunity, and it would change forever the complexion of the game and the attitudes of Americans” (1998).

All of Robinson’s fame didn’t come without a price. Former Brooklyn Dodger manager Branch Rickey made the initial decision to place Robinson on his team. His decision, which caught everybody in baseball either on the other side of the fence or straddling it uncomfortably, threw an atomic bombshell into a situation which baseball itself had made untenable. Until Robinson made his way onto the scene, the game had traded on the term “national pastime” while failing to accept Negro players even in the smallest of leagues (Mann in Tygiel, 1997). In the beginning, the idea of a Negro playing in the major leagues didn’t go over very well. According to Bill Nack, "Robinson was the target of racial epithets and flying cleats, of hate letters and death threats, of pitchers throwing at his head and legs, and catchers spitting on his shoes" (Schwartz, 1998). In fact the rage of bigotry was instant. Sports pages throughout the United States supported the supposition that blacks were generally inferior to whites. Bobby Feller of the Cleveland Indians claimed that Robinson could not hit big league pitching because his shoulders were not built like white players. Alvin Dark, a Boston infielder, said, “Negros don’t think as quickly as whites.” Most sports enthusiasts customarily agreed (Andersen, 2003). With each experience, Robinson learned how to exercise self-control and to answer insults, violence and injustice with silence. As a model of unselfish team play, he earned the respect of his teammates and, eventually, the opposition (1998).

While Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball, there have been several other examples of athletes who have overcome stereotypes and helped

achieve a wider range of diversity within professional sports. At age 38 Michael Jordan once again returned to the National Basketball Association for, according to him, one last season. In doing so Jordan endured both positive and negative press regarding his comeback. Many said that he was too old to keep up with the younger players such as Kobe Bryant and Kevin Garnett. Mitch Lawrence (2001) wrote in the New York Daily News that "...if he really does come back next season, it'll be Michael Jordan's greatest gamble, ever." Jonathan Last (2001) wrote that "...Michael Jordan is coming back to basketball out of spite." Even so, Jordan was able to accomplish the unthinkable and in some sports fan's eyes, he continues to reign as the greatest professional basketball player in history.

When the Houston Rockets picked up Yao Ming during the NBA draft, he became the first international to be chosen as the overall first pick (Xinhua Daily News Service, 2002). Not only did Ming change the way that the Chinese are viewed in the NBA, but also how they are portrayed in Hollywood. Thanks to Ming, the Hollywood portrayals of Asian men as inscrutable and subservient – and the popular stereotype of the Asian-American as the bookish, overachieving pre-med student, slight and unathletic – are finally being dispelled (Luo, 2003). Major League Baseball, which had one Asian player before 1995, is now peppered with names such as Suzuki, Sasaki, Ishii, Shinjo, Kim, and Park.

#### Real World Examples

In November 2002, former Green Bay Packer Esera Tuaolo came out on the HBO show Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel. Shortly thereafter, he wrote an article in "ESPN

Magazine,” in which he admits that “...sometimes I’d spend hours lying awake, praying for the anxiety attack to end, hoping my head would stop spinning on top of my banged-up body” (p. 72). In the locker room, he would listen to jokes and stories being told about homosexuals, but never could say anything about it. The forced silence was worse than the comments themselves (Dolin & Winn, 2002). In order to cope with this pain, Tuaolo would drink tequila bottles at a time, while crying himself to sleep. After nine years in the National Football League, living life on the outside as a heterosexual man almost tore him apart (p. 74).

Since coming out Tuaolo insists that he is “...just your typical gay Samoan ex-nose tackle who would like to break into show business” (Tuaolo, 2002, p. 75). Even though he is comfortable with himself and his sexuality, that doesn’t necessarily mean that others feel the same. When asked if he thought a superstar football player will ever come out during his playing days, Tuaolo answered, “I don’t see it happening. The league just isn’t ready for it, and neither are the fans” (2002, p. 77). In the end, life after football has left Tuaolo time to spend with his two children and partner, which doesn’t leave time for any regrets.

In mid-2001, Brendan Lemon, the editor of “Out” magazine wrote a letter to that magazine discussing his homosexual relationship with a professional athlete. Unlike Tuaolo, Lemon feels that professional sports and its fans could handle gay athletes coming out during their careers. During an interview on CNN Talkback Live, Lemon said he felt that if the athlete whom he was in a relationship with were to come out, his life would become easier. “I’ve been talking with him about this issue for more than a

year—that he would feel tremendously relieved in his personal life not to have to hide this part of it, because I think this is someone who would like to do this in order to be a role model to gay children” (Battista, 2001). The argument against that is that someone who isn’t in professional sports couldn’t understand the possible consequences that could occur due to coming out. A caller to the show pointed out that even if Tiger Woods or Michael Jordan were to come out tomorrow and say he was homosexual, it would be like professional suicide, that is, as far as endorsements go (2001).

Also on the show former Major League Baseball player Billy Bean discussed his experience with coming out in 1999 after his partner passed away. His take on what would happen if an athlete came out during his career is that it would change the entire focus of how people look at him as an athlete. The ballplayer will no longer be judged by his batting average, but by who he hangs out with off the field, who he lives with, where he’s going, and who his parents are (Battista, 2001). The athletic ability of the person becomes irrelevant.

After coming out to the public, Bean went on a tour around the country talking to young athletes and students about his experience as a homosexual athlete. Although he is content with his decision and has no objection to the idea of gay athletes coming out during their careers, Bean also feels that the player would be putting the security of their career in jeopardy and causing uproar in all of professional sports (Battista, 2001).

With the National Football League being such a historically masculine sports organization, gay athletes such as Dave Kopay find it hard to communicate with teammates and identify with the fans. Kopay came out in 1975 and was the first

professional athlete to do so (Emmons, 2001). Like many others to follow, Kopay was hoping that his coming out would help other young athletes feel comfortable enough with themselves to do the same. What kept him from revealing his homosexuality more than anything else was shame and fear of the public opinion. One can only begin to understand his teammates shock over Kopay's homosexuality when one considers how deeply the mythology of masculinity is embodied in the sport of football. When he spoke out about his homosexuality, even his family took it to be a flagrant refutation of all they, and their neighbors had admired in him (Kopay & Young, 1977).

Having realized and understood his sexuality since he was a child, Kopay said that he used football to gain acceptance into society. "I had early decided on football as the way I would fit in and express myself in this society. I gave little or no thought to what I would do after I could no longer play football. The absolute physical expense of the sport was sufficient in itself" (Kopay & Young, 1977, p. 53). While football was an adequate cover for Kopay's sexuality, it forced him into a world where homosexuality was joked about. Homosexuality in this setting is considered such a taboo the coaches and players not only feel free but obligated to joke about it. "To be homosexual is to be effeminate, like a girl. 'Cocksucker' becomes the ultimate insult. On one level they would insist on the complete absence of homosexuality among them and on another they are confirming its presence – in their minds, at least – by the endless banter and jokes about it" (1977, p. 51). In the end, Kopay caused a lot of people to think about homosexuality who would have otherwise continued to block it out as a freakish condition of people they would never choose to know (Kopay & Young, 1977).

All of these athletes have one thing in common, which is that they hope they are able to set an example for future athletes facing the same social barriers that they did and that one's self perception is equally as important as the perception given by others. However, if nothing else, just that people begin to think about it from the gay athletes perspective, not just their own.

### Applicable Theories

#### *Sex-role Identity Theory*

Sex-role identity represents the degree to which an individual regards himself as masculine or feminine... The degree of match or mismatch between the sex-role standards of the culture and an individual's assessment of his own overt and covert attributes provides him with a partial answer to the question, "How masculine (feminine) am I?" (Lippa, 2002). This theory also seems to predict relatively weak links between sexual orientation and sex-typed behaviors. Because individuals' understandings of gender and gender stereotypes vary considerably, the ways in which individuals label themselves and enact masculinity and femininity would also vary substantially (Myers & Gonda, 1982; Spence & Sawin, 1985).

Role theory is an approach to social analysis based on the power of custom and social conformity. People learn their roles, like actors, and then perform them under social pressure. "Sex role" theory explains gender patterns by appealing to the social customs that define proper behavior for women and for men. Applied to men, sex role theory emphasizes the way expectations about proper masculine behavior are conveyed to boys as they grow up, by parents, schools, mass media, and peer groups. This theory

emphasizes the “role models” provided by sportsmen, military heroes, etc; and the social sanctions (from mild disapproval to violence) that are applied to boys and men who do not live up to the role norms (Connell, 2001).

According to Kagan (1964) sex-role identity theory therefore also proposes a “noisy” path from sexual orientation to “sex-role identity” to enacting that identity through gender-related behaviors. This theory seems to make no obvious predictions about which domains of gender-related behavior should be linked most strongly to sexual orientation. Rather, this would seem to depend on varying cultural stereotypes about sexual orientation and gender (Lippa, 2002). Although intuitively plausible, the casual sequence proposed by sex-role identity theory is contradicted by empirical evidence showing that gender-typical and atypical behaviors precede rather than follow adult sexual orientation (Bailey & Zucker, 1995). This evidence is mirrored by developmental findings that certain sex-typed behaviors (e.g., play and toy preferences) appear in infants and toddlers before even basic kinds of gender knowledge and self-labeling have developed (Lippa, in press; Ruble & Martin, 1998). If an individual reaches the point of self-identifying as gay or lesbian, labeling theory predicts that the individual will then behave in ways consistent with the new label (Bohan, 1996).

Sex-role identity theory makes the distinctive prediction that sexual orientation should correlate most strongly with conscious sex-role identity (how masculine or feminine the individual thinks him or herself to be). Because sex-role theory proposes that sex-role identity mediates the link between sexual orientation and gender-related

behavior, the relation between sexual orientation and gender-related behaviors should be eliminated when this mediating factor is statistically controlled (Lippa, 2002).

### *Chilling Effect*

According to the Brown Law Dictionary, the definition of chilling effect is “any law or practice which has the effect of seriously discouraging the exercise of a constitutional right or the deterrent effect of governmental action that falls short of a direct prohibition against the exercise of First Amendment rights” (1991, p. 165).

The chilling effect that the media has employed upon itself is a form of self-censorship. No one is telling them that they cannot address homosexuality in professional sports, but they have chosen to keep the subject closed. Essentially what it does is “...deprive the public of access to important information and the clash of competing viewpoints that undergirds the First Amendment” (PR Newswire, 2002). It has been said that professional sports is not ready to deal with having homosexual athletes participate in competition, but with the chilling effect, they aren’t given the chance. According to Denis McQuail (2000), “The purpose of regulation should be to create and maintain the conditions for free and extensive intercommunication in society and advance the public good as well as to limit potential to legitimate private and public interest” (p. 184). Through the medias avoidance of talking about homosexuality in professional sports, they could possibly be impeding the public and sports organizations from discussing an important social issue.

The relationship between homosexuality, professional sports, and the media has established its presence through outed players and spontaneous comments made by



athletes. Diversity has been a long standing issue in professional sports. Past experience shows that collectively, there is a possibility that homosexuality as a diversity issue can be overcome and recreate itself into just another moment in history where professional athletes overcame the odds against them and dominated their chosen career.

Homosexuality doesn't seem to be covered by the media of today, though when it is, the conversation is generally sparked by controversy. For example, because of many past failed attempts to convince Major League Baseball of the importance of diversity education, specifically about homosexuality, Billy Bean consistently keeps himself and his lifestyle in the media mix.

The media reports the subject of homosexuality in professional sports as it happens. When Billy Bean wrote his autobiography titled "Going the other way," he hit the media circuit to promote the book. At that point homosexuality in professional sports had been somewhat of a moot point since Esera Tuaolo came out several months earlier. It is rather difficult to predict whether or not a gay professional athlete is going to come out, but according to Dan Woog (2002), "The world of sports is not a smelly place, ripe with the odors of hatred and homophobia, but it is a bright, wonderful area filled with possibilities and promise." When asked the big gay sporting question regarding whom the first male sporting superstar to come out is going to be, Simon Garfield paused for a short while, as if he might have a name or two. "It's the wrong question," he said at last. "Everyone thinks that we're going to see a professional sportsman say when they lift a trophy, 'I'm here and I'm queer. . .'" Instead what is going to happen is that some young person who is competing today as an openly gay high school or college athlete will come

up through the ranks. Do I know this young person's name? No. But I do know he's out there" (May 4, 2003). That is certainly a possibility, but at the same time, no one could have predicted the bold entrance of Jackie Robinson into Major League Baseball.

With that being said, is the subject of homosexuality in professional sports covered by the media and if not, why? If so, how are media personalities and athletes affected by what is reported in the media? And how is the subject of homosexuality in professional sports framed in the media?

## **Method**

### **Respondents**

The athlete respondents consist of former and current professional baseball, basketball, and football players. There are three former baseball players, two former and one current basketball player, and two former and two current baseball players. All athletes interviewed are male. All athletes interviewed are from the Bay Area except one current and one former basketball player. Three athletes, the current basketball player, a former basketball player, and one current baseball player are African American and the remainders are Caucasian.

The media respondents consist of two former and eight current newspaper media personalities, one current magazine media personality, and one current television anchor. There is one female media personality and eleven male media personalities interviewed. All are from the West Coast except the television media personality and one newspaper writer are from New York. All are currently working except one newspaper media personality is retired. The female newspaper media personality and one other currently employed newspaper media personality are African American and the remainder of the respondents are Caucasian.

There are three homosexual athlete respondents.

The total number of interviews conducted was 25 and each respondent was offered written confidentiality and/or anonymity, whichever terminology they preferred.

### The Instruments

The research methodology is virtually qualitative. The first portion of the method is a pre-interview questionnaire regarding the respondents' views on whether or not the topic of homosexuality is avoided in regards to professional sports. The questionnaire consists of ten questions and was given to the respondents only after they agreed to participate in the interview. Prior to the interview, each participant was informed that there would be absolutely no reference to their name, likeness or any organization they are affiliated with (both past and present). The questionnaire was either e-mailed beforehand or given at the time of the interview, whichever they chose. If the interview was done over the phone, the pre-interview questionnaire was read prior to the interview questions. There was a separate questionnaire for media personalities and former and current athletes, which equals a total of two different questionnaires.

The interview itself consisted of nine questions for media personalities and eight for former and current professional athletes. The pre-interview questionnaire and interview questions for the former and current athletes are the same. The wording of the questions may have been slightly altered depending on who the respondent was, but the base of the question consistently remained the same. The method for choosing each respondent was random unless they were referred by a third person.

### Procedure

The researcher contacted the individual athletes through personal contacts (i.e. they were a friend of a friend) or through cold calling or emailing regarding this research. The same method applied to both the media personalities and former and current athletes.

However, all the media personalities who were finally interviewed were initially contacted through email or via references from other members of the media.

The final set of interviews was conducted with three homosexual athletes; two of the athletes are openly gay in their sport and the third respondent is not. The homosexual athletes were simply asked how being gay affects them in their respective sport and if they have any regrets now about being openly gay (or not) in their sport. The homosexual athlete who is not openly gay in his sport was also asked questions regarding that decision. The interview session then became a conversation about what it is like to be an openly gay athlete.

The second part of this research is a content analysis of previous research on homosexuality in America and first-hand accounts of homosexual athletes who have gone public. The time period for this research is from 1975-2003. The research began in 1975 because the first homosexual athlete, Dave Kopay, came out in that year. However, the time period for the majority of the content analysis is 1990-2003.

The reasoning behind this type of fieldwork is to gain a first hand perspective from people who are involved in both professional sports and media industries. They would know better than anyone else the background behind the media attention that homosexuality gets in professional sports. Through qualitative research it is possible to gain the athlete's perspective on having had a homosexual teammate and not finding out until years later or to learn about their feelings regarding the possibility of having a homosexual teammate. Ultimately, the goal of the research was to understand what keeps the media from pushing a discussion of homosexuality in professional sports and

athletes from openly expressing their feelings regarding the issue. A few athletes have publicized their feelings, however it is important to understand if they speak for the majority or not.

#### Limitations of the Study

The biggest limitation of the study is the accessibility and willingness of professional athletes. It is also difficult to gain the perspective of every athlete on every team. In order to truly gain a well-rounded opinion from all of professional sports, it would be necessary to at least interview representatives from the different regions. Therefore, this study cannot be generalized to include all athletes and media personalities. Secondly, it was difficult to arrange for the interviews to be in person. Several of the media personalities were working around their own deadlines, which created a lot of time constraints, while the athletes were generally juggling busy schedules as well. Lastly, the topic is severely controversial and uncomfortable for most people to talk about. This made it difficult for people to agree to participate. The sensitivity of the topic also may not have allowed for the respondents to fully express their beliefs and feelings regarding homosexuality.

## **Findings**

The literary review showed that the reason homosexuality is not discussed in professional sports is because athletes have a historically macho reputation to live up to, which not only involves the athletes themselves, but also sponsors, fans, and team management. Since the majority of sports fans are men, there is an underlying stereotype that says that athletes have to be durable, rugged, and tough because that is what men who watch want to see. All of which are not stereotypically associated with homosexuality. In the locker room, athletes don't want to have to be worrying about whether or not the guy with the locker next to them is "checking them out" or if they have sexual thoughts in their minds about other teammates.

Masculinity is a major part of all professional team sports. It is a word that is often used when describing the characteristics of a successful professional athlete. Generally, the strongest and most powerful athletes are often the most interesting to watch and therefore the most popular athletes on the team. These are the athletes with the multi-million dollar endorsements and contracts because they are the athletes that the fans want to watch. What it really boils down to is that players are concerned about three things: image, endorsements and personal comfort or acceptance. That goes for both homosexual and heterosexual athletes as well as their teammates.

Diversity has been a longstanding issue in professional sports. Whether it is race, gender or sexual preference, there is always a correlation between professional sports and diversity. As professional sports become more diverse, so do the fans, however, homosexuality remains an unpopular issue within the discussion of diversity.

## Media Personalities

The interview findings were pretty consistent with the literature. When asked how professional sports would react to a homosexual athlete who came out during their career, the media personalities interviewed collectively believed that it would take a big name athlete who maintained a high popularity level, such as Michael Jordan or Mark McGwire, for both professional sports and fans to be accepting of the idea. One newspaper media personality said, "There would have to be a context for it because athletes are at different levels. If Tiger Woods came out as opposed to a minor leaguer, the reaction would be different. People would be more inclined to accept [Woods] because of his already set reputation" (Anonymous, personal communication, August 18, 2003). Several of the newspaper media personalities believed that the idea would never be accepted by either party involved, however the media might be more likely to accept the idea because they would want to report what is politically correct rather than what they believe everyone would want to hear. One newspaper media personality gave credit to himself saying that he would not react in the same way as the public or members of the various professional sports organizations. The magazine media personality believed that at first there would be silent whispers and comments made, but the courageous people would stand up and ask the question, "who cares?" Not everyone wants to be labeled as homophobic. However, some people would become disloyal to the homosexual athlete either because they didn't want to be associated with them or because the traditions of professional sports say that they shouldn't like them. Nevertheless, it has been shown already with the Mike Piazza rumors and with him taking the time and energy to hold a



press conference, that society isn't ready. People are very defensive and uptight when it comes to image and society isn't ready to change their image of professional athletes.

Regardless of whether professional sports or the media would be accepting of a gay athlete, three of the newspaper media personalities agreed that the fans would have the hardest time accepting the idea because it would take away from the idea that professional athletes are strong and powerful. They also felt that the players, with the exception of a few, would keep their opinions to themselves because they wouldn't want to offend anyone else. "The media would react a lot better than the public would. It's not brought up that often, but many athletes would not accept homosexual athletes in the locker room or the clubhouse. The media is more receptive than athletes and may often defend gay athletes more because they want to be politically correct" (Anonymous, personal communication, June 4, 2003). It was commonly noted that the most discomfort or protest from the players' side of the issue would be during team travel and in the locker room. Just as many male athletes are uncomfortable undressing and showering in front of female media personalities, they would feel self-conscious doing the same in front of a homosexual person. The one television media personality did note that it does differ from region to region. "Fans in California are going to have different ideas and beliefs than fans in Texas or Alabama" (Anonymous, personal communication, June 6, 2003).

When asked why the media is more willing to discuss homosexuality in entertainment than in professional sports, the response from every media personality was that homosexuality is entertainment. "Over the top gay acting is popular and people

enjoy it. Entertainment is seeing how much tolerance they can get away with. Both gays and heterosexuals laugh together at what they see in entertainment. Sports are more macho and more taboo” (Anonymous, personal communication, August 18, 2003). Entertainment has always been known for pushing the public’s level of tolerance and as time has passed, that tolerance level has increased. The entertainment industry feeds off of controversy and by nature is more accepting of diversity and people who act different, while professional sports are more traditional in their thinking. What makes athletes popular is how they perform on the field/court rather than their personality. According to a retired newspaper media personality, the entertainment media is possibly using homosexuality to just sell a hot story. He also responded by saying that sports have more traditional expectations than entertainment. “The public wants actors to be wanton, while wanting athletes to be strong.” (Anonymous, personal communication, August 18, 2003).

Again, sports have such a macho image to uphold. People still view sports as the last bastion of reality and maleness. “They are very male, macho-oriented, while the entertainment industry is much more feminine” (Anonymous, personal communication, June 9, 2003). Homosexuality is displayed in entertainment as funny and joyous with no gender lines. Entertainment is much more feminine as opposed to sports, which continues to be male dominated. In entertainment, women are just as popular as men whereas in sports males prevail. This automatically gives entertainment a more feminine edge, which is often associated with homosexuality. Male athletes have been conditioned all their lives to believe that sports is not a place for the stereotypical gay person. The general perception is that homosexuals are not strong enough to be athletes, while

homosexuality is much more common in entertainment because there aren't those stereotypes.

When asked whether or not they thought that professional sports would ever be outwardly accepting of gay athletes, all of the media personalities believed that it will eventually happen, but not in the near future. The television media personality as well as the one female newspaper media personality firmly believed that in order for there to be any progress, an athlete just has to come out and face the scrutiny that would lie ahead. One newspaper media personality felt that the most interesting reaction to watch would be from the team management. It would be most interesting to see how they would react to a superstar player who came out as opposed to a semi-popular average caliber player. Even if there was an outward acceptance shown by professional sports, it would be difficult to determine if it was genuine or for public relations purposes. "If an athlete came out, the team and some athletes would express some support, but behind the scenes there would be animosity and difficult situations" (Anonymous, personal communication, June 6, 2003). One would also have to keep in mind that it depends on where the athlete is playing. An athlete who played for a team in California would get a different reaction than one who played in Tennessee. The same newspaper media personality also said that if there was going to be any sign of true acceptance, it would have to be for an athlete who was already very popular with the fans. Therefore, the fans and team management would be left with little choice but to learn to accept the player just as they had before. They compared it to Jackie Robinson's story because as the first black in Major League Baseball, he was the most well known at the time. Robinson was the first athlete to do it;

therefore he was the most popular and profitable. But if he had not been a star caliber athlete, Robinson would have been passed on and disregarded (June 6, 2003). The same goes for homosexual athletes. If a gay athlete who was of star caliber revealed he was homosexual, the media, fans, and management would be forced to deal with the situation. If the gay athlete was just an average player or a bench player, it would be swept away and management would release the player under the pretense that he wasn't holding his own or that he quit. Both professional sports and the fans would then beyond ostracize him. Several members of the media also agreed that in a non-mainstream sport like tennis or golf, it is much more accepted because the macho factor isn't there.

Everyone except the retired newspaper media personality and television media personality agreed that in order for there to be a change in the minds of professional sports regarding homosexuality, the stereotypes about professional athletes would have to be broken first. The "boys will be boys" mentality would have to be shattered in order for a homosexual athlete to stand a chance. It was quickly noted by several members of the media that the outward reaction of team management would be severely different than the feeling of animosity that they would have behind closed doors. Several respondents also said that they would like to see a homosexual athlete come out during their career, but they just didn't see it happening in their lifetime. One newspaper media personality said that he believes that as long as society continues to make strides, professional sports will eventually catch up. However, he also remarked that for every person who is educated in what homosexuality is and who the people are, there is a person who grew up uneducated and therefore, according to him, prejudiced and scared of something that

he/she doesn't know or understand. For this kind of evolution to occur, our entire culture has to evolve and completely change its thinking, which many view as virtually impossible. Regardless, most of the media personalities interviewed believed that society, including professional sports has come a long way in its thinking and as more time passes it will continue to grow and change (Anonymous, personal communication, October 14, 2003).

The point was made by most of the older, more veteran media personalities that at the time when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in professional baseball, no one ever had imagined that was possible. Just like in that situation, in order for there to be any acceptance of homosexuals in any of the big three professional sports (baseball, basketball, football) more than one athlete has come out while they are still playing. When breaking the color barrier, Robinson was the first, but he was not the only one. Not even the strongest person could endure the backlash that they would receive from the public, teammates or management/ownership doing it alone. Only one media personality believed that professional sports would have to accept a gay player because they know that a portion of consumers (fans) are gay or at least pro gay. Therefore, they would do the politically correct thing in order to keep attendance numbers up and sponsorship dollars coming in.

Although when asked why they believe that professional sports have fallen behind the rest of society in terms of its thoughts on homosexuality, all of the media personalities attributed it to the machismo attitude of the players and management.

It's the machismo attitude. Athletes are going to feel uncomfortable showering with a teammate who is gay and it's pretty much just not going

to happen. Athletes have a fear of being hit on. It's easier for females. Sex is part of pro sports; players have a lot of children out of wedlock and have reputations for being 'playboys' and having a lot of women around them. They flash their money around and women come up to them all of the time and many of them aren't educated to act any differently. Gay activity may be seen as confrontational to this culture. Athletes may believe that they have worked very hard for what they have achieved and gay athletes don't belong in that culture (Anonymous, personal communication, June 6, 2003).

Society expects athletes to act and talk a certain way in order to uphold a certain standard; neither of which is associated with being homosexual. Boys are taught to be men and that in order to be a true man, they can't be gay. People are also more accepting of the idea of just not knowing because it's easier that way. The stereotype of what a man is and should be is still very strong in professional sports. Professional sports are trying to maintain a certain level and image that a percentage of men want to uphold. It was also said by everyone that it would probably take a couple of generations to push tolerance to where it should be. Professional sports' bending of traditional values tends to take longer than the rest of society. The bulk of fans are still men and the majority of them feel threatened by the idea of changing the traditions of sports because they feel comfortable with the way things are. One of the strongest traditions in professional sports is the image that people have of the athletes. They are viewed as strong, brave, and tough. They are children's heroes and grown men's fantasies (Whannel, 2002). Homosexuality, whether right or wrong, doesn't fit that image.

The media personalities all agreed that athletes would feel uncomfortable showering with a teammate who is gay as well as having a huge fear of being hit on by a teammate. The presence of gay people may be seen as confrontational to this sports

culture. As mentioned before, athletes may believe that they have worked very hard for what they have achieved and gay athletes don't belong in that culture. That seems to be just the way it is and for a long time, the way that it is going to be. The television anchor thought that it was a bit simpler and that the barrier just hasn't been broken yet. Players have to come out and then we will see some change. However, he also said that any major change won't be seen in this lifetime (Anonymous, personal communication, June 6, 2003).

Knowing that professional athletes do have an image to live up to, the media personalities were asked about the reasons behind and consequences of rumors. Mike Piazza was used as an example. The West Coast media personalities attributed it to the competitiveness of the New York media and the lower standards of beat writers in that area. "There is fierce competition in New York and the media market took it for what it was. There was a story out there that people were looking for clarity on, so they kept it going until there was an answer. It was virtually a manhunt for the answer. If there is a beat writer who is waiting for a story and something like this comes along, they are going to pursue it" (Anonymous, personal communication, April 12, 2003). However, the majority agreed that not all media personalities would write a story based solely on rumors. It all depends on who the media personality is and what organization he or she works for. The respondents stressed that a legitimate media person wouldn't bring up the question of an athlete's sexuality without a factual basis with which to do so. In New York, where the story about Piazza was first printed, the media is very competitive and if a media personality believes that they have a strong lead, they are likely to go for it

hoping that they have the next big story. Virtually every media personality responded by saying that a player's sexual preference has nothing to do with their productivity level. What an athlete does at home, behind closed doors is no one's business but their own. Rumors may also get reported about more often because men's sports hasn't had a player like Martina Navratilova come out and attest that they are gay and take it or leave it. There was one newspaper media personality who said that he was surprised that there hadn't been someone like Navratilova in men's sports yet. Again, it falls back to the historical beliefs, traditions, and attitudes of male athletes.

On the other hand, while most media personalities said that they would not have run with the story if they had the opportunity, a couple newspaper media personalities admitted that they may have pondered the idea. Generally speaking, the media and professional athletes don't have that close of a relationship. A person would have to have a lot of trust in someone to confide to them such delicate information. According to one media personality, that type of relationship just doesn't generally exist. Another stated that it isn't necessarily wrong to run with a story like that. However, the general consensus was that there is no real glamour in discussing someone who is gay as opposed to making stuff up for ratings. They also concurred that whether or not an athlete is gay is irrelevant to almost all sports stories. "Whether or not Piazza is gay or not is not news. If Piazza wasn't as popular, it wouldn't have been an issue" (Anonymous, personal communication, July 20, 2003). An athlete's sexual preference does not have anything to do with how he performed in a particular game; therefore, there is no point in bringing it up in a story.



The following question also asked for the media personalities opinions about other past examples of a player speaking out about homosexuality. They were asked to recollect about the stand that former All-Pro Green Bay Packer Reggie White took regarding homosexual athletes. The question posed also asked them about who has the control when it comes to whether or not professional athletes chose to come out or not. There were a variety of answers to this question, which split the opinions almost in half. Some media felt that it was solely up to the athlete while others believed that was impossible considering all of the other factors that go along with being a professional athlete. Also, it depends on the player and their strengths and weaknesses.

The higher that you get on the star chart, the harder it is to speak badly of them. For the most part, I think that athletes fear the possibility of their career ending, but at the same time, they think “who cares” because they are playing at that level, which proves that they can do it just as well. At the same time, they probably have a fear of being ostracized. If even a simple injury can keep a player out for a short time, what would happen to a player who was gay? Eventually, they would fall so far out of the loop that they would soon find themselves replaced. The worst feeling for an athlete is to not be part of the herd. It is such a delicate situation because they have to fight to stay in the mix. If you are homosexual, you do not belong in the herd” (Anonymous, personal communication, August 20, 2003).

Like White, many athletes also believe that if you are homosexual, you do not belong in the herd.

Of course there is a threat of bodily harm not only from fellow teammates, but also disloyal fans and opponents. Every media personality interviewed alluded to this backlash as one of the primary reason gay athletes stay in the closet. Endorsements and contracts were all noted, but according to them, the main reasons why gay athletes keep quiet are because they are afraid of being victimized and not being accepted. The second

most popular reason was having a fear of what people might think or say. The media believes that an athlete's reputation is more important to them than endorsements. Sports are just such a macho man's world where most athletes don't think that any negative reaction is worth coming out for. Others may look at what openly gay athletes before them have gone through after their careers and decide that it's not worth the chance.

The majority of the newspaper media personalities, not including the female media personality, believe that it is simply about the backlash and ramifications with some of it being about the money and endorsements. This is not an idealistic world where everyone gets along, but the real world where homosexual athletes are not accepted. Financially, a gay athlete would lose any chance at endorsements or sponsorships and if they already had any, they would find themselves being asked or forced out of their contracts. Regardless if they want to be or not, athletes are role models and storybook heroes. A homosexual athlete would shatter the illusion that fans have of athletes and take away from the whole mystique of professional sports. It would be terribly difficult to be the person who was responsible for taking all of that away. For a gay athlete, it wouldn't be worth it to risk their career or safety. They have to look at the benefits versus the drawbacks. Coming out offers personal satisfaction and self liberation, but it's questionable as to whether or not it is worth the consequences.

Billy Bean led a double life during his time in Major League Baseball. Some may view his decision as a choice and some a preference regarding his decision to come out during his career and face the consequences. In regards to this, the media personalities were asked about fairness and who the final decision maker is in whether or not an athlete

chooses to reveal his homosexuality during his career. The media collectively concluded that it is up to the athlete himself whether to come out or not. Of course, there are some deciding factors that go along with it, but the ultimate decision goes to the athlete. “Ultimately it is the person’s decision, but there are other factors that are included in all of these parts. Other people are factored in his mind and they have to ask themselves if it is worth it or not” (Anonymous, personal communication, September 1, 2003). An athlete would have to go to his organization first to be fair. If an athlete were to come out and did it on his own and without informing management first, the organization would feel burned and most likely not back up the player. It’s more beneficial to go to the organization first. For example, Magic Johnson went to the Los Angeles Lakers before he announced he had HIV. In that case, the team publicly supported him and therefore society was more accepting and sympathetic of his situation.

Two newspaper media personalities believed that a lot of it comes down to parents needing to educate their children. If you have tolerant parents, you are most likely going to have tolerant children. When it becomes an issue for the athlete, it shouldn’t be an issue for anyone else but him and his family. Bean knew for himself that if he had handled the situation any other way, his career would have been over. Regardless if the decision is ultimately the athletes or not, there are still all the other factors to account for. Again, they have to decide whether the positives outweigh the negatives.

The media professionals were then asked what they would do if they were to interview an athlete who they knew were homosexual, but it was not the basis of the

interview. The media as a whole responded in two different ways. First, half of them responded by saying that they would never bring up the topic of homosexuality because it has nothing to do with sports. They believed that printing a story like that is simply sensationalism and terrible journalism. The other half responded by saying that they would ask about it only if it had to do with the context of the story. "If there were a reason for it, then I would write about it. For example, if the player brings it up or welcomes me into their home and introduces me to their partner, that would show me that they were comfortable talking about it" (Anonymous, personal communication, August 18, 2003). The only other reasons that they may ask about a player's sexual preference is if there were already rumors in the media about it and they wanted clarification. The players have a right to choose to respond if they feel that it is necessary.

The last interview question for the media was regarding diversity in general and whether or not they believed that professional sports has genuinely embraced change and diversity or have just outwardly embraced it while inside they are against the idea. There were a lot of variations in the answers to this question but several of the older media personalities did say that with professional sports, you have to force it down their throats before they'll swallow. "They are not going to be willing to just sit down and change an opinion or view that has been in place for most of history. But, it also depends on the sport. Some sports are more willing to discuss homosexuality if the percentage of gay athletes is bigger in that sport" (Anonymous, personal communication, September 2, 2003). They are not going to be willing to just sit down and change an opinion or view that has been in place for most of its history. The younger media personalities, including

the female media personality, said that time is the key to changing people's ideas about homosexuality. Let society mature by itself and eventually the idea of a homosexual professional athlete will be socially and generally accepted.

Generally, they answered by saying that by and large, sports have done a good job of accepting diversity. Forcing the topic wouldn't be beneficial, but with the help of a brave and willing gay athlete, the stereotypes could be slowly broken. "It comes down to someone having to break the barrier. If Jackie Robinson had quit because he couldn't take the backlash anymore, it would have been years before anyone tried it again. If the player is strong enough to handle it, eventually society would get used to it"

(Anonymous, personal communication, October 14, 2003). In order for there to be continuing growth, athletes are going to have to start learning to keep their mouths shut. After Garrison Hearst made his comments players began to do so because no matter which side they took, their opinions would be questioned.

The one East Coast newspaper media personality thought that from a player prospective and in management choosing players, professional sports have done well as a collective group. In regards to diversity in hiring management and in ownership, there has been a long-standing reluctance to acquire a diverse staff. The newspaper media personalities and the television media personality were quick to point out that professional sports has certainly made strides to improve on diversity issues, but at the same time they also noted that they are moving a much slower pace than the rest of society. One newspaper media personality pointed out that there has been reluctance by the National Football League to hire black coaches. The NFL recently implemented a

policy whereby every team that is in need of a new coach has to interview at least one black candidate.

In general, protecting endorsements is the key for athletes. Part of the outward acceptance may be to keep sponsors and fans happy. Jackie Robinson, Yao Ming, and Michael Jordan were fully embraced because they proved themselves as reputable and capable athletes, while Robinson proved to everyone that he was a better athlete than the white players. In the National Basketball Association, there are not many visibly white players who dominate that are from the United States because international talent is increasing at a very steady pace. A newspaper media personality said that you could probably count on one hand the amount of dominant American born players left in the NBA. Other nationalities are just better athletes. As long as a guy can play, he is going to play. It doesn't matter who they are or where they came from. If an athlete has the skills to keep fans in the seats, they will play. The bottom line is that professional sports is a business and if there is an athlete who has marketable skills and attributes that the fans want to see, ownership will find a venue to put them in.

#### Former and Current Professional Athletes

The second set of questioning was to former and current professional athletes. Their first question was regarding whether or not they personally knew anyone that was a homosexual. Every single athlete said that they all have known or currently know people who are homosexual either by having been told, it being obvious or that they have been hit on by another man. One former basketball player said, "I've met many both male and female. Some have been apparent, some have admitted it, and others have tried to pick

me up” (Anonymous, personal communication, September 15, 2003). Most of the athletes also admitted that they had played on a team with a homosexual as well. However, one former football player was quick to point out the unnecessary nature and topic of the paper. He didn’t care when he was playing and believes that homosexuality should never be brought up regarding sports because the two have nothing to do with each other. At this point, he refused to answer any more questions.

The following question asked what they would do if a teammate announced that they were homosexual. Everyone responded by saying that they would treat a teammate who announced they were gay the same as before, however they may feel different inside. Although, everyone did say that in terms of taking a shower and team travel, they may feel a little weird around a gay teammate. At the same time, the current football players and the basketball players said they would still speak to them the same and treat them the same as a player. Meanwhile, all others interviewed said that they would treat them different in terms of how they would joke around with them. As for player performance on the field, everyone agreed that as long as they played well and gave one hundred percent during the game, nothing else mattered. The only time that it would matter would be if they began staring or making passes at their teammates. As long as it’s not brought into the clubhouse or locker room, most players didn’t see a problem with having a gay teammate.

Only one athlete, a former baseball player interviewed, said that he would look at and treat a gay teammate completely different. He said that the biggest foreseeable problem would be keeping up the team camaraderie, which is something that you need to

have to win. “It causes dissention on and off the field. Athletes are not there to address social issues and it shouldn’t come up at all” (Anonymous, personal communication, October 1, 2003). There was also a concern that personalities that clash in this way may throw off team chemistry. Being gay could get in the way, but it’s up to management to keep that sort of thing outside the clubhouse and ballpark. It should never come up. The gay player may not necessarily be the problem either. It could be that the other players can’t handle it. However, all of the athletes agreed that what it comes down to is not whether or not a teammate or opposing player is homosexual. Setting sexuality aside, the only important characteristic in an athlete is whether or not they can play the game and if not, then they don’t belong there anyway.

When asked about whether or not they believed that homosexuality is a taboo topic in professional sports, the athletes were pretty much in agreement. First and foremost, they concurred that homosexuality is such a taboo because in most sports there is a macho attitude that goes along with it. One current football player was quick to say that “...sports are very combative and being gay and being tough do not go hand in hand. Athletes need to be strong and powerful or at least emanate those characteristics. There is a high element of competition and it demands that you don’t show any weakness” (Anonymous, personal communication, September 19, 2003). Homosexuality exudes weakness and a lack of the strength that it takes to be a professional athlete. It’s not necessarily right, but that is the way it is in professional sports. Another football player pointed out that homosexuality is more taboo in sports because of the contact and physical aspect. “It’s the same idea as the Army’s ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy.



Homosexuality in sports is a subject that is not aired publicly for a reason so there is no reason to bring it up. All of the athletes believe that it's none of their business who or what someone is or chooses to be. If they choose to be gay, fine, but leave it at home. There is no place for it in sports (Anonymous, personal communication, July 29, 2003).

The professional athletes interviewed all agreed that homosexuality is a social issue. Athletes are not there to address social issues and it shouldn't come up at all because it takes away from the focus of the game. Athletes also have the responsibility to other players, the city and the fans (especially kids) as role models and they owe it to the fans to keep a certain profile. Kids are brought up to believe that one of the manliest things to do is play sports. "It encompasses manly prowess, creates a 'top dog' ideal and proves power" (Anonymous, personal communication, August 8, 2003). There is no place in that for the stereotypical characteristics of homosexuality.

The athletes were then asked about what they would do if they sat down for an interview and at the end of the interview and they found out that the media personality was gay. Every athlete answered that they were comfortable around homosexuals and they wouldn't change their answers. "I wouldn't change my answer. I am comfortable with gay people and I wouldn't find a need to change my answers" (Anonymous, personal communication, July 29, 2003). Also, it was pointed out by a former basketball player that someone should be able to handle having a gay media personality interview them. In most cases, a lot of athletes have already been interviewed by someone who is gay and just don't know it. Athletes are there to do a job and if they have made their way

to that level of play, they should be able to handle themselves in that situation (Anonymous, personal communication, July 20, 2003).

Like the media personalities, the athletes were also asked about the Mike Piazza rumors. The difference being that they were asked about what they would do if the rumors were about them. Only a couple of the older, retired athletes commented on the ethical aspects of a media personality writing such a story. It's not right for media personalities to write things like that, but at the same time they understand that the reality is that they are going to anyway. Today everything is reported regardless of its truth. By the time a story gets to the paper, it has lost some truth to it. In other words, if the story isn't straight from the source, it is not usually true.

All of the baseball players and current football players became a little defensive when answering this question. They said that most of the time, rumors are started because of a lack of anything better to report. Media personalities, especially in a competitive market, are always looking for a story that will give them the most personal gain. If they can get something out of it or make a name for themselves, they will run with the story as long as possible. Besides, there are rumors about everything and it shows that the public is still interested. People will believe what they want to believe because they can. You can't change a person's mind. The first thing that people believe generally is what they are going to continue to believe. All of the players also said that if the rumors were about them, they would probably just ignore them. "I try not to listen to rumors. If the rumors were about me, I wouldn't fight, argue, or defend them. I would just ignore them" (Anonymous, personal communication, August 13, 2003). They know

who they are and the people that matter to them know who they are and that is all that is important. The former players agreed that during their careers, they heard the rumors about themselves, but they didn't think anything of it at the time. One former basketball player said that if he were still in sports, he wouldn't worry so much about the accusations themselves as he would the financial aspects. In this society, in order to be a sex symbol, you need to be heterosexual and the same applies in order to make more money. Money affects everything and that's why athletes stay in the closet. People attach themselves to athletes in their minds. They imagine that they are buddies with them or that they have some personal connection to them and they wouldn't do that with a gay person (Anonymous, personal communication, July 20, 2003).

Athletes generally understand that the rumors and character evaluations are just part of being professional athletes. One current football player said that he would accept them as rumors because it happens all of the time. Then again, some athletes deny it even when they are true because they don't want to deal with the consequences. He believed that you have to have a lot of respect for Martina Navratilova for coming out during her career. It wasn't easy for a long time, but eventually, it blew over and it's not an issue anymore. There just aren't enough male athletes who are willing to go through the scrutiny that she went through (Anonymous, personal communication September 19, 2003).

Working off of the question regarding whether or not homosexuality in professional sports is taboo or not, the athletes were then asked how much the topic of homosexuality in their profession has crossed their minds. Generally, the athletes said

that it has really never crossed their minds. However, one current football player said that it crosses his mind quite often. He believes that there is always an underlying current of someone being gay. There are always jokes being made or slang being used in the locker room and on the field. In sports, someone is always challenging your manhood. There is always a question of who's the strongest, fastest or most strategic athlete (Anonymous, personal communication September 19, 2003). However, there were a couple of athletes who said that they just didn't care if they had a gay teammate. "When the idea was first breached to me, I just passed it off and thought that it didn't matter. It's not important to me what someone does at home. If gay guys are playing, that's great" (Anonymous, personal communication, September 16, 2003). This however was the minority opinion.

Athletes were then asked if they would ever expose or out a teammate who they found out were gay. Everyone answered "No" to this question, but they gave different reasons as to why. The current basketball player said that he has played on teams with homosexuals before and there was no reason to tell anyone at the time. Another current football player said that he might tell someone if he thought that having a gay person on the team would hurt team camaraderie. A former basketball player said that he may tell a friend, but if the guy could play, who cares about his sexual preference. "As long as he keeps it to himself, I don't have a problem. If I felt threatened or they interrupt my ability to play, then I might say something" (Anonymous, personal communication, September 18, 2003). In fact, all of the athletes also said that if they felt threatened or they interrupted his ability to play, then there may be a problem.

Lastly, the athletes were asked about how professional sports have historically dealt with diversity. It was determined that professional sports overall have done a bad job at dealing with diversity. Some of the current athletes feel that professional sports does deal with diversity, but too slowly, while others feel that it hasn't dealt with it at all. The current basketball player said that he felt that professional sports have made shallow attempts in certain areas. "In terms of players' ethnic backgrounds, sports are pretty diverse. There are players coming from all around the world. I think that professional sports have made shallow attempts in certain areas. In terms of players, sports are pretty diverse. There are players coming from Europe and everywhere now. Baseball has a good mix of Latin players along with blacks and whites. So on the field, diversity is there" (Anonymous, personal communication, September 18, 2003).

One former basketball player said that it is a façade to keep people in the seats. It doesn't matter to the majority of the athletes interviewed who or what a person is as long as they are working towards the same goal as everyone else. All of the athletes believe that the only reason why professional sports ever talks about homosexuality is because the media brings it up first. If sports had it their way, it would never become an issue. They believe that it's all about the money anyway. Owners are worried about endorsement contracts and sponsorships and usually do whatever the television networks tell them to do. Management works off what they believe their best financial interests are.

Several of the athletes took a different stance and said that in professional sports, its open competition and the best athletes are the ones who play. Management and

athletes are there to put the best athletes forward. Athletes are replaceable and well aware of it. Therefore it would be foolish of them to do anything to jeopardize their careers. Gays have had to fit in just the same as Latinos, Hispanics, Asians, African Americans, and any other person who has had to integrate into professional sports. Some believe that if they can make it in society, it shouldn't be any different in sports. As long as they have the ability and skills it takes to win, they should be able to play. Leave their personal lives at home and any discussion about sexuality wouldn't be necessary. Management and ownership prefer that gay and straight athletes keep their mouths shut no matter what they have to say. They don't want them to talk about homosexuality at all, no matter the context. There is a gray area that professional sports remain in and they feel that it is a good place for them to be. Professional sports only deals with diversity issues when they are forced to. They are very slow to make changes. The current basketball player interviewed said that it is ridiculous that it took baseball so long to accept blacks (Anonymous, personal communication, September 18, 2003).

Professional sports in general have a certain element of racism. There is a level of indifference of people who aren't in the norm and it is human nature to not accept some people who don't fit into that norm. According to several of the athletes interviewed, professional sports fit into that norm.

### Homosexual Athletes

The homosexual athlete's perspective is completely different than any other perspective so far. The first homosexual athlete interviewed is a fairly well known voice in advocacy for athletes like himself. Before even being asked any questions he

expressed his feelings regarding how the media handles homosexuality in sports. He believes that where the media once avoided the topic altogether, they are now determined to find out who is gay even if it is at the expense of the reputation of athletes who are not.

“No regrets” was the major theme of his particular experience when he publicized his homosexuality. He feels that his experience was positive and the reactions from friends, family and colleagues were of support and love. “Any backlash or negative feedback was well worth the incredible weight lifted off of my shoulders.” The truth is much more powerful than any negativity or hate because most of the time, those feelings come from a lack of knowledge about homosexuality (Anonymous, personal communication, September 5, 2003).

As for professional sports, he feels that it is not as homophobic as people may like to think. Because of this, there is really no better place for a homosexual athlete to hide. However, athletes are given way too much credit and there is way too much emphasis on their opinions. Professional athletes generally know nothing more than how to play that sport. Why would anyone want to ask athletes about anything except for their game? They have been conditioned since they were children to believe that in order to be an athlete, you have to be macho, tough and relentless. None of those qualities are generally associated with homosexuality, which is why it is the perfect place for a homosexual that doesn't want anyone to know to hide out.

One other thing that he pointed out regarding the mentality and politics of professional sports is that the sports industry is a business and as a business they have rules, laws and ethics that they are obligated to follow. By allowing people like Reggie

White, John Rucker and Garrison Hearst to speak out against homosexuality in a way that is harmful and condescending, management and ownership are creating a platform of hate. He also very firmly pointed out that if this continues, professional sports may be looking at a class action lawsuit for sexual harassment. Professional sports cannot continue to allow its athletes to make hateful comments and think that they are going to be able to get away with it by giving the athletes a slap on the wrist and a monetary fine.

Lastly, he wanted to point out that in order for there to be an openly gay professional athlete, it is going to have to be someone who is a high school star athlete who makes his/her way up the ladder as an openly gay athlete. "There would be book deals, movie and television offers, and nonstop media publicity. This person would not only be the first to do so, but they would immediately become a world famous celebrity" (Anonymous, personal communication, September 5, 2003). There is no conceivable way that professional sports and its athletes can then avoid the issue. It is too easy to discard an athlete who has already made it to the professional level, but you can't do that with someone who could cause that much attention for that period of time. He also mentioned that historically, homosexual athletes now are in the same position that black athletes were during the Jackie Robinson era.

The second homosexual athlete interviewed had virtually the same opinions. He was extremely pro gay as well as very optimistic that society is taking a turn for the better when it comes to the acceptance of homosexuals in general. However, professional sports aren't quite up to speed with the rest of society. As the up and coming generation progresses through high school and college, they are learning to be more accepting of



different ideologies and beliefs. But at the same time, he wanted to point out that those who are teaching these young people are the older generation who are more closed minded. It is up to the young people themselves to gain the knowledge and understand that homosexuality is ok and not something to be afraid of or turn your back on.

When asked about his own experience as a homosexual athlete, he said that it was harder to tell his family than members of the athletic community. For the most part, people who you play with and compete against are not truly your friends. Athletes are taught to believe that their teammates are like family and they should be treated as such, but as soon as someone doesn't fit the proper ideal teammate, they are ostracized. That does not qualify as family values, love or acceptance. "That is why the only people whose opinions matter are the people who truly love you and support you no matter who you are or what you claim to be" (Anonymous, personal communication, September, 8, 2003). He also said that it is different in his sport because it is more of an individual rather than a team competition. Although, no matter what sport you play in whatever state you live in, there are going to be people who care and people who don't.

As far as he is concerned, being gay or straight isn't the definitive characteristic in what makes a person who they are. In order for a homosexual athlete to be able to feel comfortable coming out in such a macho and male oriented group, more people have to have that same belief. It is up to parents and teachers to instill that sort of thinking into their children. The stereotype for the typical professional athlete will probably always be that of a macho, tough, and strong man. However, there is a great possibility that with

the growing amount of young homosexual athletes, the stereotypes about gays can be broken.

The third homosexual athlete to be interviewed is not openly gay within his sport. He said that the reason that he hasn't told anyone isn't because he doesn't want to, but because the topic just hasn't come up yet. He is new to the sport so he isn't terribly comfortable talking about it. However, his new partner wants to join the sport and would like for them to be an out couple. He does feel that there could be some potential impact on his relationships with fellow athletes and training partners. It's not something that is discussed within the circle and he isn't sure if there are any other openly gay athletes in his sport.

For him personally, being gay is not a barrier because it's really about competing with himself and each athlete is solely in it to win. People expect excellence in other people. However, being gay increases his level of motivation and competitiveness. That is fine for him, but if he goes and tells everyone he is gay, they might not want to get beat by a gay person and the focus will go from an inner motivation to "... we can't let ourselves get beat by a gay guy" (Anonymous, personal communication, October 10, 2003). The focus of the sport is so much about training and the level of competitiveness that no one talks about anything else. At the same time, if he did tell his fellow athletes that he is gay, it may motivate them to work harder.

In the long run, he really isn't comfortable telling anyone because he assumes that there would be a problem and that he may not be viewed as a real person, but as "the gay guy." You and the sport, that's all that people see. "By coming out, that perception will

change and the outcome is up in the air. In the gay community it is very sexy and attractive to be an athlete, but in the sports world, gay athletes are not looked upon positively” (Anonymous, personal communication, October 19, 2003). He’s just not sure that is something that he wants to experience.

## Narrative Analysis

For the narrative analysis, four of the athletes and four of the media personalities were re-interviewed. The athlete respondents were two former basketball players, a former baseball player and a current football player (See Appendix E). The interview was tape recorded and transcribed. The answers to each question were coded for “positive,” “negative” and “neutral” references. The same process was repeated with four of the media personalities. The participants were two current and two former newspaper writers.

Positive is defined as *characterized by or displaying certainty, acceptance, or affirmation*. Negative is defined as *not positive or constructive*. Neutral is defined as *not aligned with, supporting, or favoring either side in a war, dispute, or contest* (Webster’s, 1993). The information was then analyzed and reported. The respondents were once again promised complete confidentiality/anonymity, including that no one besides the researcher would have access to the tapes for voice identification purposes.

## Method

The narrative analysis process consisted of evaluating and reviewing eight of the total interviews, which included four former or current athletes and four former or current media personalities. None of the interviews of homosexual athletes were included in the narrative analysis. The interviews that were chosen were done so by assigning all of them numbers and randomly picking them out of a basket. The assigning of numbers to each of the transcripts used is as follows: A1 (Athlete 1), A2 (Athlete 2), A3 (Athlete 3), A4 (Athlete 4), R1 (Media personality 1), R2 (Media personality 2), R3 (Media

personality 3), R4 (Media personality 4). However, the total number of transcripts (four athletes and four media personalities) to be used in the narrative analysis was predetermined. An unbiased third party did the drawing of numbers.

Once the interviews that were going to be analyzed were chosen, it was determined that each interview would be coded for positive, neutral and negative adjectives that described homosexuals by two separate coders at different times. The positives were highlighted in green, the neutrals were yellow and the negatives were red. Both the interviewer and an unbiased third party performed this analysis. Once both people coded all eight transcripts the findings were compared and contrasted for similarities in coding. The following information is a breakdown of each question as answered by each of the interviewees.

#### Disclaimer

As stated above, the original plan was to code the responses for positive, negative and neutral key terms. After coding the responses from the eight different interviews, it has been determined that there is a discrepancy in the coding among the coders, within what constitutes subtle prejudice. Therefore, the responses will only be coded for the most clearly positive and the most clearly negative responses. Subtleties of prejudice will not be attempted in this study.

In life, we learn and acquire belief systems in an active way. We discuss, evaluate, and decide upon these new learnings. These are systems of standards and codes of behavior that are easily re-evaluated. While they are clearly knowable and readily accessible to evaluation, they are not automatic in application. To behave out of these

decided beliefs one must devote a minimal amount of time and attention to the situation and then apply the decision. One must also be fully aware of the cues and indicators that this is, indeed, a situation where the rule or belief does apply (Cole, 2004). In this situation, it is extremely difficult for the coders to withdraw all of their preconceived beliefs and feelings towards the subject matter. It cannot be assumed that the coders would be able to purely objectify their answers. There is too much information readily available to the coders to not answer subjectively. This is not an instance where it is feasible to ask the coders to be completely objective given the subject matter and task at hand.

Although the coders weren't asked to give their opinions on what they believed was positive, negative or neutral, they were asked to give their interpretation. In the process, their learned and innate prejudices caused discrepancy in the results.

### Athletes

#### *Question Number One*

The first question was answered very similarly by each of the four athletes whose transcripts were analyzed. None of the answers contained any positives or negatives. Each athlete had admitted to having some type of contact with a homosexual person, but no one elaborated on how that made them really feel. Each answer was very short and straightforward with little or no emotion shown towards homosexuals. All of the athletes explained their encounters, however, they all failed to show any emotion towards the situation.

### *Question Number Two*

Each athlete answered the second question very differently. A1 made two positive and three negative statements towards homosexuals, A2 made no positive or negative statements, A3 made one negative statement, and A4 made four negative statements. All of the athletes said that they would treat a homosexual athlete the same and not alter the way that they spoke to them. The differences in answers came about in regards to how they felt others would react to a homosexual teammate. All but A2 stated that they would treat a homosexual teammate differently if they brought their sexuality into the clubhouse. Again, the statements were very general and geared towards how others may or may not feel, rather than the respondents' feelings.

### *Question Number Three*

With this question, all of the references to homosexuals were negative except one reference that A3 made to homosexuality as "taboo." Homosexuals were described by A1 as weak, while A4 stated that homosexuals would cause dissention on the field as well as being feminine and superficial. Therefore, they wouldn't fit in at all.

### *Question Number Four*

The statements made towards homosexuals in this question were not regarding their feelings towards homosexual athletes, but towards media personalities. All four athletes answered positively. They all agreed that they wouldn't feel different or change their answers if the media personality was gay. Within all of these answers, there was not one negative statement made in reference to homosexuals.

### *Question Number Five*

This question asked what an athlete would do if there were rumors about them that they were gay. The responses to this question were all quite the same. Each athlete stated that they know that rumors are merely part of being a public figure. By letting the rumors bother them, they are also letting them interfere with their ability to succeed as an athlete. A1, A3, and A4 all partially blamed the media for reporting rumors regardless of truth. However, they also said that it is up to the public to believe or disbelieve what the media has to say. A2 was a bit more tolerant of the rumors stating "I would just accept them as rumors and move on."

### *Question Number Six*

It was expected that the athletes would all say that they never think about what it would be like if they had a homosexual teammate. A1 said that he thinks about it fairly often while A2, A3, and A4 said that they never thought about it until this interview. The remaining portions of the answers were widely varied. A1 said that he thinks about it in terms of one's manhood being questioned because such a large part of being an athlete is proving how strong you are. A2 and A3 said that they never gave it a thought when they were playing because it wasn't a social issue back then either. A4 thinks that it is simply an issue that should be left at home.

### *Question Number Seven*

Teammates usually stick together and that was shown in the answers to question seven. A1, A2, and A4 said that they would absolutely never out a teammate who was homosexual. A3 admitted that he may tell a friend, but wouldn't deliberately try



sabotaging someone's career. As stated in several other answers, A3 affirmed that this would be the case as long as the gay athlete kept his personal preferences out of the clubhouse and separated his personal life from his professional.

*Question Number Eight*

When asked how well they felt professional sports addressed the topic of homosexuality, the athletes all had very definite and personal opinions. The answers ranged from virtually no opinion at all to extremely negative. A1 said firmly, "...badly. It's an act to keep people in the seats." A2 felt that professional sports were too slow to acknowledge and accept change and that this delay is unfortunate because it puts gay athletes in a position where they feel like they have to hide their true selves. A3 and A4 acknowledge that professional sports are a business and the purpose of business is to make money. A3 believes that management puts the best athletes on the field that it can find and as long as those athletes perform up to management's standards, everything remains fine. A4 believes that professional sports live by a "don't ask, don't tell policy." As long as athletes remain quiet about their sexuality and/or their opinions about others sexuality, the game will play on. As soon as a player becomes a public relations issue, there is a good chance that they will be looking for work elsewhere. Like A3, A4 believes that as long as the seats are filled, management will continue to do business in the manner in which they have become accustomed.

## Media Personalities

### *Question Number One*

The media personalities' answers to this question were extremely varied. R1 believed that the media would react a lot better than the public would. He feels that homosexuality isn't brought up that often because no one wants to face the reality that there are homosexuals in professional sports. R2 said that homosexuality in sports is an image issue and they aren't ready for that kind of image bust. Like R1, R2 said that society isn't ready for a homosexual athlete. R3 took a different approach in saying that the media would have a field day if there were a homosexual athlete who came out. However, he did also acknowledge that it could be a disaster especially for the gay athlete. R4 was the only one who acknowledged that it's different from region to region. R4 also took a different stand mentioning that homosexual athletes understand that there are homosexual fans that are consumers as well and the best way to keep everyone happy is to keep quiet.

### *Question Number Two*

The underlying message conveyed in each of the answers is that it is the machismo attitude of professional sports and its participants that sets it aside from not only the entertainment industry, but also the rest of society. Actors are hired to play a character and it doesn't matter who they are off the screen as long as the character on the screen is believable. Athletes, on the other hand, don't have the luxury of pretending they are someone else. R2 thought that the entertainment industry is much more feminine than professional sports and therefore homosexuality is more acceptable. R3

said that there is no competition for physical power in entertainment. A common thought in all four responses is that entertainment and professional sport are two totally different worlds with exceedingly different beliefs and expectations. Overall, they are rather incomparable.

### *Question Number Three*

The purpose of this question was to find out if the media personalities ever thought that professional sports would become accepting of homosexual athletes. R2 and R3 mentioned the changes that Jackie Robinson brought to professional sports. R1 simply stated that it won't change anytime soon because the macho attitude will never go away. R2 also thinks that if an athlete does announce his homosexuality while playing, it would take a marketable, money-making player for management to back them up. Not only would a non-market player be ostracized by the majority of the fans, but also their own management. Different from R2, R3 thought that all it will take is a brave athlete, just like Jackie Robinson to initiate the change. R4 responded completely different than the rest by saying that management will do whatever it takes to stay politically correct in the situation. He also believes that in some respect, professional athletes are just puppets who do whatever they are told to by management.

### *Question Number Four*

Here the media personalities were asked why they felt that as society evolves and becomes more open to discussing homosexuality, professional sports has remained at a virtual standstill. They were also asked if they felt it was different for men and women. R1 reaffirmed that professional sports is all about the money. They, as well as the fans,

are much happier not knowing if there are any gay athletes and they would like to keep it that way. R2 said that the barrier just hasn't been broken yet and a player has to come out before any real changes will be made. R4 wasn't sure why there hadn't been a male athlete who came out during their career. However, they acknowledged that there would be serious repercussions, which make it understandable why no one had done it yet. R3 placed the responsibility on stereotypes saying that being macho is expected of men, but not for women. R1 and R4 suggested that it is easier for women because the majority of women's sports are played individually and there is less expected of them. R2 put a totally different perspective on things by saying that since the majority of fans are male, the idea of a lesbian athlete isn't so offensive.

#### *Question Number Five*

This question asked the media why they are willing to accuse Mike Piazza of being gay, but not discuss the athletes who really are. All four media personalities accused the New York media right from the beginning of starting those rumors. R3 went as far as saying that not all media should be lumped into one group and that the responsibility of those rumors should fall on the person who started them. They all also said that reporting on a story such as that without viable proof is wrong. R1 said that it is just part of an athlete's job to have to deal with rumors, while R2 said that those types of rumors can do more harm than good because people may start to believe them. R3 added that if Mike Piazza weren't a popular player, there wouldn't have been an issue. He is a big name athlete and because he is popular, the public loves to follow stories like this.

*Question Number Six*

Over the course of time, athletes have voiced their opinions regarding homosexuality in professional sports. Here the media personalities were asked what they felt kept homosexual athletes from publicly coming out. R1 felt that for the most part, athletes feel that they have reached the professional level and don't want to jeopardize their careers. All four media personalities responded similarly, however adding that it is just plain fear of their career ending. R2 noted that coming out would offer a huge amount of personal satisfaction and self liberation, but a decision has to be made regarding whether or not it's worth risking pride and dignity. R3 also felt that athletes haven't done it because they don't want to suffer the consequences. Men, whether or not they are gay, have a lot pride and the last thing they want to do is compromise that pride.

*Question Number Seven*

Billy Bean is arguably one of the most referenced "out" homosexual former professional athletes and this question asked if it was fair that he chose to lead a double life while playing Major League Baseball. R1 took an interesting stand on the issue saying that it's the athlete's choice. However, it may be acceptable to society if the athlete were already popular and been openly gay as they came up through the college and professional ranks. In that case, they may not have to go through what Billy Bean did. R2 also took a unique stand suggesting that the gay athlete would have to take it to management first to be fair. Unlike R1, R3 said that it isn't just the athlete's decision to make. Teammates, friends, and family all play a part in deciding if the perceived public scrutiny is worth the world knowing that he/she is gay. R4 went in a completely different

direction by saying that temptation is the key to all of this. Athletes like Bean who live a double life don't deserve any sympathy because they are cheating on their spouses (if they have a spouse) and if a heterosexual man did the same thing, he would be criticized. Homosexuals shouldn't be treated any different.

#### *Question Number Eight*

When asked if they knew an athlete that they were interviewing was gay without a doubt, would they ask him/her about it or not, all but R2 said absolutely not. However, R3 and R4 said that if the athlete brought it up first, they would consider using the information or at least continuing the topic of conversation. R2 said that it depends on the context of the interview. R4 also said that if the athlete brought it up first, they would solicit questions, but in general it's irrelevant.

#### *Question Number Nine*

The final question asked the media personalities opinions regarding how professional sports have historically dealt with diversity and whether or not professional sports have embraced change and diversity or rejected it and merely created a façade of acceptance. Each media personality basically answered the same, but with different reasons. R1 believed that you have to force professional sports to address an issue because they won't take the initiative. R1 also mentioned that it depends on the sport because a sport that already has a noticeable population of gay people wouldn't find any offense in talking about it. R2 took a totally different stand in saying that professional sports have done a good job of accepting diversity, but what it really comes down to is that someone will have to be willing to break the barrier, just as Jackie Robinson did. R3

disagreed by saying that professional sports struggles with diversity. As for reasons why professional sports may have trouble dealing with diversity R2 and R4 both brought up the recent comments made by Garrison Hearst. They both agreed that it is comments like those that are hindering professional sports from being able to embrace diversity, as maybe it should.

## **Conclusion**

In his autobiography, Trailblazing, Eric Anderson (2000) quotes a friend who said, "I'll spend the rest of my life trying to prove that I'm straight, but you're free to be who you are without worrying about people having the wrong impression." According to homosexual athletes, that is one of the many upsides to being an openly homosexual person. The sense of knowing who you are and allowing for people to get to know the real you is an incredibly powerful feeling.

The homosexual athletes' opinions about how the media and professional sports handles the issue is completely opposite that of a heterosexual athlete. Homosexual athletes are more on the defensive side as opposed to having the general opinion that it really doesn't matter if there are gay athletes. Homosexual athletes are also much more positive thinkers when it comes to the idea of there ever being an openly gay athlete. In fact, Dave Lohse (2001), an openly gay college athletics official at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, believes there could be no better time than now for an athlete to announce his homosexuality. What is most interesting is that the majority of the athletes interviewed said that they wouldn't care if they had a homosexual teammate and they all admitted that they probably have had a gay teammate and didn't know it.

Generally speaking, homosexuality in professional sports is a modern day diversity issue. However, for most media personalities and professional athletes, it's not really an issue at all, which is why it is rarely discussed. The athletes don't bring it up, so the media doesn't ask them about it. If it does come up in an interview, there has to be some relevance to it before it becomes newsworthy. The media not only wants to report



on what the public wants to hear, but they want to make sure that there is some factuality to it before they put their name on the story. Media personalities receive phone calls daily from people who think that they have the next big story, but part of the job is to determine if there is any truth to it even before they approach the athlete in question. The main goal for athletes is to win games and as long as that continues to happen, there is no reason to question anyone.

Through both literary research and qualitative interviews, it can be concluded that the media does not often cover the subject of homosexuality in professional sports. The reason why it is not covered is that it is just not relevant to their task at hand. Sports media are there to report scores and other occurrences during the games. Their purpose is not to report on sensational rumors or to create character evaluations of players. However, there are times when stories about a player's life outside of sports are written, but whether an athlete is homosexual or not is still irrelevant. The only time that homosexuality is a relevant topic for a story is if that was the original purpose of the story or the athlete chooses to talk about it first. The media personalities that were interviewed all concurred that it is no ones business whether or not an athlete is homosexual.

Some athletes admitted that they pay attention to what is reported in the media, but others said that they don't care about what others have to say about them. They feel that their purpose is to play a game and if the media wants to criticize them for that, fine, but when they report about their personal lives, the line between what is appropriate and what is not, is crossed. It is up to the fans to decide whether or not the rumors are true because the athletes already know the truth.

Media personalities aren't necessarily affected by all of what is reported in the media, however, they are the cause. At the same time they are affected by what they report because if there is any untruth to it, they are the ones who have to face the consequences. That is why media personalities are so careful about what they report. The media personalities are also affected by the athletes and their behavior, but only to the point where the athletes do something out of context or that is deemed newsworthy. For the most part, media personalities are insistent that they only report the facts and they leave sensationalism up to everyone else. In order for gossip to travel, media personalities have to continue to report on it. However, the media would insist that they only continue reporting the information because the public has a demand for it.

The media personalities interviewed insisted that they would only report the subject of homosexuality in professional sports when it is already an issue. The exception would be when a media personality is looking for a story that will emit sensationalism or to make a name for him/her. Legitimate, competitive media don't report on rumors or athletes personal lives. Homosexuality is still a taboo subject in professional sports and most media personalities aren't looking for the controversial lead, but to simply report the facts and results of the game. Until the media feels that society is ready to handle a homosexual athlete, the subject will continue to be laid to rest. However, when the time comes that there is a homosexual athlete to report about, it is going to cause a media frenzy not unlike what Jackie Robinson experienced back in 1947. Regardless of the speed in which progress is being made, the overall conclusion is

that steps are slowly being taken in the right direction and homosexuality will some day be fully accepted in professional sports.

### **Directions for Future Research**

In the future, researchers could examine what role women's sports play in the ideology of homosexuality in sports. Just as there are a lot of stereotypes about male athletes there are several about woman athletes. It would also be helpful to examine and understand non-mainstream sports such as Rugby, Lacrosse, and Soccer and how the ideologies of those athletes, management groups, and fans are different from with mainstream sports such as baseball, basketball, and football. There are a lot of possibilities for research in high school and college sports as well as with youth athletes. For future research, it would be good to have a larger sample of both professional athletes and media personalities in order to gain a better balanced perspective and balance of opinions.

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**Appendix A – Pre-Interview Questionnaire (Media)**

1. What type of media outlet do you work with?

Newspaper          Radio          Television          Magazine

2. What media organization do you work for \_\_\_\_\_?

3. How many years have you been in the media profession? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Have you ever interviewed someone who was homosexual?

Yes                  No                  No Comment

5. If you were to interview anyone and you knew they were homosexual, would you tailor your questions differently than if they were heterosexual?

Yes                  No                  I don't know

6. Would you ever turn down the possibility of an interview because the person was homosexual?

Yes                  No                  I don't know

7. If given the opportunity to "out" a homosexual professional athlete in an interview would you do it?

Yes                  No                  Maybe

8. I believe that homosexual professional athletes should be able to come out to the public during their careers without ridicule and harm.

Agree                  Somewhat          Neutral                  Disagree                  Strongly  
Agree                  Agree                                                    Disagree

9. Society is ready and mature enough to deal with homosexual professional athletes.

Agree                  Somewhat          Neutral                  Disagree                  Strongly  
Agree                  Agree                                                    Disagree

10. Homosexuals have less athletic ability than heterosexual professional athletes.

Agree                  Somewhat          Neutral                  Disagree                  Strongly  
Agree                  Agree                                                    Disagree

**Appendix B – Pre-Interview Questionnaire (Former/Current Athletes/Employees)**

1. What sport are you associated with?  
Baseball                                      Basketball                                      Football
2. How long have you been with your organization?  
1-3 years                                      4-6 years                                      more than 7 years
3. Do you have any friends outside of professional sports who are openly homosexual?  
Yes                                      No                                      Would rather not say
4. Do you believe that sexual preference effects athletic ability?  
Yes                                      No                                      I don't know
5. Have you ever played on a team with a homosexual athlete?  
Yes                                      No                                      I don't know
6. I believe that homosexual professional athletes should be able to come out to the public during their careers without ridicule and harm.  
Agree                                      Somewhat Agree                                      Neutral                                      Disagree                                      Strongly Disagree
7. If given the opportunity to "out" a gay athlete in an interview would you do it?  
Yes                                      No                                      Maybe
8. Homosexuals have less athletic ability than heterosexual professional athletes.  
Agree                                      Somewhat Agree                                      Neutral                                      Disagree                                      Strongly Disagree
9. I would feel comfortable having a homosexual teammate.  
Agree                                      Somewhat Agree                                      Neutral                                      Disagree                                      Strongly Disagree
10. Society is ready and mature enough to deal with homosexual professional athletes.  
Agree                                      Somewhat Agree                                      Neutral                                      Disagree                                      Strongly Disagree

### **Appendix C - Interview Questions (Media)**

1. In your opinion, how would the professional sports world react to a homosexual athlete who chose to “come out” and remain playing?
2. Why is it that the media is more willing to discuss homosexuality in the entertainment industry, but not professional sports?
3. Do you think that professional team sports will ever become outwardly accepting of gay athletes?
4. As society evolves it becomes more open to discussing homosexuality, but professional sports has remained at a virtual standstill. Why is that? Is it different for male athletes than female athletes?
5. The media has participated on numerous occasions in discussing the possibility of various athletes being gay because of their behavior off the field. If the media is willing to accuse Mike Piazza of being gay when he repeatedly says he’s not, why not discuss athletes who really are?
6. Reggie White declared some time ago his negative feelings about homosexuals. Knowing that this is probably the attitude of many athletes, what could be the reasons why gay athletes are afraid to come out?
7. Billy Bean led a double life while in the major leagues that very few people knew about. Is that fair to him, his wife or his partner?
8. If you knew that an athlete that you were interviewing was gay without a doubt, would you ask him about it, or leave the topic alone? Why?
9. In your opinion, how has professional sports historically dealt with diversity? Do you feel that it and its members have embraced change and diversity or rejected it and merely created a façade that diversity is accepted?

#### **Appendix D – Interview Questions (Former/Current Athletes/Employees)**

1. Have you ever met a homosexual person? If yes, how did you know they were gay?
2. If one of your current teammates/players came out tomorrow as a homosexual, would you treat them the same or different?
3. Why do you think that homosexuality is such a taboo subject in professional sports? In your opinion, is it really taboo at all?
4. How would you feel sitting down with a media personality for a one-on-one interview and at the end of the interview, he revealed himself to be gay? If you knew beforehand, would that make your answers different?
5. What did you think about the Mike Piazza rumors? What if those rumors were about you?
6. Before today, how much has the topic of homosexuality in your particular profession crossed your mind?
7. Would you ever “out” a teammate/player who either confided in you or you found out on your own that was homosexual? And would you ever quit or demand to be traded if one of your teammates/players announced he was homosexual?
8. In your opinion, how has professional sports historically dealt with diversity? Do you feel that it and its members have embraced change and diversity, or rejected it and merely created a façade that diversity is accepted?

## **Appendix E – Coded Responses to Interview Questions**

### **Athlete One**

#### *Coder One*

Positive

Negative

1. Yes. Either because they told me or it was blatantly obvious. Sometimes it was because they tried hitting on me. At least that's what I thought was happening.
2. I would probably act differently meaning I wouldn't shower or change in front of them. At the same time, I would speak the same way to them and treat them the same as a player. The guys and I joke around and a lot of those jokes and comments may be taken as anti-gay, but I'm not going to stop making those jokes or comments just because one of my teammates is gay. That is their choice not mine and I don't think the rest of the team should censor themselves for the other person. On the field nothing changes as well.
3. Sports are very combative and competitive. Athletes need to be strong and powerful or at least emanate those characteristics. There is a high element of competition and it demands that you don't show any weakness. Homosexuality eludes weakness and a lack of the strength that it takes to be a professional athlete. It's not necessarily right, but that is the way it is in sports.
4. I wouldn't change my answer. I am comfortable with gay people and I wouldn't find a need to change my answers. Besides that, there is no reason why that would ever need to be said in the first place. It has nothing to do with me and nothing to do with the questions or answers during the interview.



5. Most of the time rumors are started because of a lack of anything better to do. Media personalities, especially in a competitive market, are always looking for a story that will give them the most personal gain. If they can get something out of it or make a name for themselves, they will run with the story as long as possible. I think that's what happened to Piazza. It's unfortunate, but I think that it happens all the time.

6. Fairly often actually. There is always an underlying current of someone being gay. Jokes being made, comments and lingo, things like that. There are always jokes being made or slang being used in the locker room and on the field. You don't really think about it at the time though. In sports, someone is always challenging your manhood whether it be an opponent, coach or media person. There is always a question of who's the strongest, fastest or most strategic athlete.

7. No to all of them. I have played on teams where someone was gay and it didn't bother me then and it doesn't bother me now.

8. Badly. It is a façade to keep people in the seats. What should it really matter anyway as long as we are fighting on the same side? It doesn't matter who or what a person is as long as they are working towards the same goal as everyone else.

### *Coder Two*

Positive

Negative

1. Yes. Either because they told me or it was blatantly obvious. Sometimes it was because they tried hitting on me. At least that's what I thought was happening.

2. I would probably act differently meaning I wouldn't shower or change in front of them. At the same time, I would speak the same way to them and treat them the same as

a player. The guys and I joke around and a lot of those jokes and comments may be taken as anti-gay, but I'm not going to stop making those jokes or comments just because one of my teammates is gay. That is their choice not mine and I don't think the rest of the team should censor themselves for the other person. On the field nothing changes as well.

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7. No to all of them. I have played on teams where someone was gay and it didn't bother me then and it doesn't bother me now.

8. Badly. It is a façade to keep people in the seats. What should it really matter anyway as long as we are fighting on the same side? It doesn't matter who or what a person is as long as they are working towards the same goal as everyone else.

## **Athlete Two**

### *Coder One*

Positive

Negative

1. I have met many homosexual people, both male and female. I don't remember exact times and places and I'm sure that there have been instances where I couldn't tell. Some encounters have been apparent, some of them admit it and others have exposed themselves by trying to pick me up or hit on me.

2. If one of my teammates came out tomorrow as homosexual I would treat them the same as I did before. That is as long as he played well. If it affected his play or anyone else's on the team, then I would consider not playing with him. It really shouldn't matter what someone is off the court as long as they keep it to themselves when it's time to play.

3. I think that homosexuality is a taboo subject no matter where you go. The only difference between professional sports and the rest of the world is that professional sports is years behind the rest of society. Their archaic way of thinking, while unfortunate isn't

going to change. In California and especially in the area that you are studying in, the thinking is a lot different. Athletes and people in general live in a society where it is a lot more OK to be different. California is a much more liberal state than most others so it's hard to give a general answer. I also think that it has a lot to do with the macho aspect of sports. It's not manly to be gay. Athletes are supposed to be tough and hard and that doesn't go along with the stereotypical nature of what it is to be gay.

4. What difference does it make if an interviewer is gay? They are just doing their job. It has nothing to do with the questions or the reasons behind them. It also won't affect my answers.

5. I would accept rumors about me as just that, rumors. It happens all the time. I would take the time to defend them once and then move on. As long as I know the truth, what a media personality has to say makes no difference. On the other hand, some athletes deny it even when they are true because they don't want to deal with the consequences. You have to have a lot of respect for Martina [Navratilova] for coming out during her career. It wasn't easy for her for a long time, but eventually, it blew over and it's not an issue. Although it is easier for a woman to gain acceptance than a man. That doesn't mean that what she did wasn't courageous for her culture changing announcement. I just don't see a man doing the same thing any time soon.

6. Before now, I never gave a thought to homosexuality when I was playing because it was never an issue. At that time, it wasn't as big of a topic in society either. It seems kind of silly to think about anyway. Even if it were a topic of conversation, I would have ignored it. It's not important to the game itself and that's why we're there.

7. I would absolutely never out a teammate under any conditions.
8. Professional sports only deals with it when they are forced to. They are very slow to make changes. It is ridiculous that it took baseball so long to accept blacks. Professional sports in general have a certain element of racism. There is a level of indifference of people who aren't in the norm. It is human nature to not accept some people. To put gay athletes in a situation where they have to hide or suppress themselves is really sad and unfortunate. It is unfortunate that people have to hide because they aren't part of the norm.

*Coder Two*

Positive

Negative

1. I have met many homosexual people, both male and female. I don't remember exact times and places and I'm sure that there have been instances where I couldn't tell. Some encounters have been apparent, some of them admit it and others have exposed themselves by trying to pick me up or hit on me.
2. If one of my teammates came out tomorrow as homosexual I would treat them the same as I did before. That is as long as he played well. If it affected his play or anyone else's on the team, then I would consider not playing with him. It really shouldn't matter what someone is off the court as long as they keep it to themselves when it's time to play.
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### **Athlete Three**

#### *Coder One*

Positive

Negative

1. Yes, they were just open about it. Otherwise I don't care nor do I pay much attention. Gay people are everywhere, that's just the way it is. If I let it bother me, then I'm just as stupid as the rest of those people who let it affect their daily lives. That's just nonsense.
2. I would certainly look at them different. I think that the biggest problem would be to keep up the team commodore, which is something that you have to have to be successful. I could also see where two personalities that clash in this way may throw off team chemistry. Being gay could get in the way, but it's up to management to keep that sort of thing outside the clubhouse and ballpark. It should never come up. The gay player may not necessarily be the problem either. It could be that the other players can't handle it, which is exactly why the subject should never come up. There is no place in sports for homosexuality. If a player is gay leave it at home or don't bother showing up. It just doesn't belong.

3. It causes dissention on and off the field. Athletes are not there to address social issues and it shouldn't come up at all. Athletes also have the responsibility to other players, the city and the fans (especially kids). They have a responsibility to young kids as role models and they owe it to the fans to keep a certain profile. That responsibility doesn't include being gay. Athletes are supposed to be almost super-human, where homosexuals are stereotyped as feminine, superficial people who care more about what they look like in a certain pair of jeans than how many homeruns they are going to hit.

4. No. Someone should have to be able to handle it. They are there to do a job and if they have made their way to that level, they should be able to handle themselves in any situation, especially that one. It's so simple and silly to think that a simple thing like having a conversation with a gay person would bother someone. I can't understand how that could bother someone. It makes no sense whatsoever.

5. I don't remember that, but if it were me, I would feel angry. Today everything is reported regardless of its truth. Even if it started out by being true, by the time a story gets to the paper, it's lost some truth to it. If the story isn't straight from the source, it's not usually true anyway. Most of the time, the "facts" in the stories are from "reliable sources," which tend to be the most unreliable. The stupidest people of all are the one's who believe it.

6. Never, really. It was never an issue when I played, but homosexuality wasn't a societal issue either.

7. I may tell a friend, but if he could play, who cares. As long as he keeps it to himself, I don't have a problem. If I felt threatened or they interrupt my ability to play, then maybe.



Having grown up in San Francisco, I know that gay people have different lifestyles at home than they do at work. Leave it at home and everything will work. Otherwise, find somewhere else to play. It doesn't belong anywhere near a baseball field, the clubhouse or the fans.

8. Its open competition and the best athletes are the ones who play. Management and athletes are there to put the best athletes forward. There are so many athletes that are replaceable, therefore it would be foolish of them to do anything to jeopardize their careers. Gays have had to fit in just the same as Latinos, Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, and any other person who has had to integrate into sports. If they can make it in society, why should that be any different than sports? They should be able to play. Leave it at home and discussion wouldn't be necessary.

*Coder Two*

Positive

Negative

1. Yes, they were just open about it. Otherwise I don't care nor do I pay much attention. Gay people are everywhere, that's just the way it is. If I let it bother me, then I'm just as stupid as the rest of those people who let it affect their daily lives. That's just nonsense.

2. I would certainly look at them different. I think that the biggest problem would be to keep up the team commodore, which is something that you have to have to be successful.

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5. I don't remember that, but if it were me, I would feel angry. Today everything is reported regardless of its truth. Even if it started out by being true, by the time a story gets to the paper, it has lost some truth to it. If the story isn't straight from the source, it's not usually true anyway. Most of the time, the "facts" in the stories are from "reliable sources," which tend to be the most unreliable. The stupidest people of all are the one's who believe it.

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8. its open competition and the best athletes are the ones who play. Management and athletes are there to put the best athletes forward. There are so many athletes that are replaceable, which they are aware of, therefore it would be foolish of them to do anything to jeopardize their careers. Gays have had to fit in just the same as Latinos, Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, and any other person who has had to integrate into sports. If they can make it in society, why should that be any different than sports? They should be able to play. Leave it at home and discussion wouldn't be necessary.

#### **Athlete Four**

##### *Coder One*

Positive

Negative

1. Yes, either through gestures or voice inflections. They just have different mannerisms than heterosexuals. They talk different, dress different and look completely different. I'm not sure though. I could be wrong; it's not like I stopped them and asked if they were gay. I never thought about it at the time. I guess I just didn't care.

2. I would treat them the same. We're just playing a game and as long as you can play the game, you can stay, otherwise you need to leave. People need to leave their personal lives at home where they belong. None of that belongs on the field or in the clubhouse. What you do on your own time is your business, but as soon as you step into the clubhouse or on the field, you are on everyone else's time as well. At that point the only thing that anyone should be thinking or talking about is the game.

3. Because kids are brought up to believe that one of the manliest things to do is play sports. It encompasses manly prowess, creates a "top dog," and proves power. They are taught that only a true man is strong, fast, and gifted enough to be called an athlete. Not one of those qualities is stereotypically associated with homosexuality. Fathers don't want their young boys to grow up to be gay. It's embarrassing to them to have a weak, powerless child. That's what people who are sports minded, whether it is an athlete or a fan, believe to be "gay." Athletes who are gay hide it for that reason. If they were so proud of it, then why not just come out? Maybe they aren't as proud as they thought they were. I have a young son and I don't know what I would do if he came to me and said that he were gay. I hate to say it, but that's not how I want my son to grow up: gay.

4. I probably wouldn't even care to pay any attention because that's not the reason why I'm there. Even if I did know, my answers would not change. The interview would presumably be about me, so in reality, it wouldn't affect me in the slightest. Besides, they are just a media personality reporting the facts and doing their job and I'm an athlete doing my job. Sexual preference really has nothing to do with either unless that was the purpose of the interview.

5. There are rumors about everything whether you are an athlete, actor or high school student. Everywhere you go someone is saying something about you. To some athletes, it shows public interest and means that people care. To others, it is unnecessary publicity and annoying. As for the validity of rumors, people will believe what they want to believe. You can't change a person's mind. The first thing that people believe generally is what they are going to continue to believe. It never matters if the rumor is correct or not so why try to defend it? It doesn't affect my athletic ability so I don't really pay attention. It's entertainment for the public. Period.

6. Never really. You hear about it on television and through other entertainment outlets, but not in sports. When the idea was first breached to me, I just passed it off and thought that it didn't matter to me. I couldn't see how it could affect me at all. I think about it off and on now, but not while I'm playing. If someone lets it affect their train of thought on the field, they should rethink their place in professional sports. It's not important to me what someone does at home. If gay guys are playing, great, but I don't want to know about it.

7. No, I wouldn't. No, if you can produce on the field, it doesn't matter what you do behind closed doors.

8. Sports goes by the don't ask, don't tell policy. They prefer that you keep your mouth shut no matter what you have to say. They don't want you to talk about homosexuality at all, no matter the context. They don't want you to talk about anything that could be construed as controversial at all. If the PR department might have to get involved, just don't say it. When athletes shoot off their mouths, management has to step in and take

over. Save yourself the trouble and keep quiet. There is a gray area that sports remains in and that is a good place for them to be. As long as fans keep filling the seats, professional sports will be happy. They don't care what the repercussions and consequences are as long as there is money filtering in.

*Coder Two*

Positive

Negative

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2. I would treat them the same. We're just playing a game and as long as you can play the game, you can stay, otherwise you need to leave. People need to leave their personal lives at home where they belong. None of that belongs on the field or in the clubhouse. What you do on your own time is your business, but as soon as you step into the clubhouse or on the field, you are on everyone else's time as well. At that point the only thing that anyone should be thinking or talking about is the game.
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4. I probably wouldn’t even care to pay any attention because that’s not the reason why I’m there. Even if I did know, my answers would not change. The interview would presumably be about me, so in reality, it wouldn’t affect me in the slightest. Besides, they are just a media personality reporting the facts and doing their job and I’m an athlete doing my job. Sexual preference really has nothing to do with either unless that was the purpose of the interview.

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### **Media personality One**

*Coder One*

Positive

Negative

1. I think that the media would react a lot better than the public would. It's not brought up that often because no one wants to face the reality that there are homosexuals in their locker rooms. Many athletes would not accept homosexual athletes in the locker room or the clubhouse if they knew they were there. The media, though, is more receptive than athletes and the media often defends gay athletes more maybe because they want to be



politically correct. This isn't necessarily true for all media personalities. There are some media personalities who only report what they think will get them the quick dollar. There are a lot of lies and misconceptions when it comes to athletes and the media.

2. We want our actors to be wanton and our athletes to be strong. That's just the way it is and I don't think that will ever change no matter how open-minded society becomes as a whole. Actors aren't typically viewed as role models whereas athletes are seen almost as godlike. People look to actors for fashion ideas and style. They look to athletes for courage and the "Cinderella story." Athletes don't necessarily want to be that way, but growing up kids want to be like Barry Bonds and Tim Hudson because they are cool.

They get to play a great game and make a whole lot of money. That's just the way it is.

3. Not any time soon. Stereotypes are strong and we still follow the rule that "men will be men" and "boys will be boys." Once people are set in their opinions and convictions, it's terribly difficult to change that. Right now, baseball is the most diverse, but the macho attitude will never go away. It is more of a rural problem than an urban problem. Athletes who play in cities like Oakland and San Francisco are much more diverse and open-minded than athletes in Kansas City or Jacksonville. That's just the way it is and it's unfortunate that there isn't a common ground where they can teach each other.

That's just not important to athletes. They are the way they are and that's the way that they want to be. Diversity training is common in professional sports, but there is nothing that I know of that deals with homosexuality. We just happen to live in the most liberal part of the country.

4. Boys are taught to be men and taught that they can't be gay; it's just not the right thing to do. People are more accepting of the idea of just not knowing; it's easier that way and more comfortable. Ignorance is bliss for a lot of people, especially athletes. The stereotype of what a man is and should be is still very strong. Professional sports is trying to maintain a certain level and a certain image that a percentage of men want to uphold. Otherwise there is a good chance that parents wouldn't expose their children, especially young boys, to professional sports. It's all about the money. If the athletes aren't worrying about it, the fans won't either. I don't think that men's professional sports will ever outwardly accept homosexuality. It's easier for women because there is less expected of them in terms of athleticism and strength. That's not necessarily right, but I think that it is pretty true. The majority of women's professional sports are individual. In that case there is less of an impact. As for women who play football for example, they are willing to play a physical game and are stereotypically referred to as "butch" or lesbians. With that already in place, there is less of a hurdle to overcome.

5. The media only run with the story when they hear about it first. No one has ever said it was wrong to publish as story such as that. Unfortunately they have a First Amendment right to do so. You can't get athletes or management to talk about it. They just won't do it. That's why they have public relations departments to get rid of media personalities who try to talk about false reports of speculation. Rumors are part of the job for athletes, but it is up to them how they handle it; some just handle it better than others.

6. I think that it has to do with all of the above. The higher that you get on the star chart, the harder it is to speak badly of them. For the most part, I think that athletes fear the

possibility of their career ending, but at the same time, they think “who cares” because they are playing at that level, which proves that they can do it as well. They probably have a fear of being ostracized. If even a simple injury can keep a player out for a short time, what would happen to a player who was gay? Eventually, they would fall so far out of the loop that they would soon find themselves replaced. The worst feeling for an athlete is to not be part of the herd. It is such a delicate situation because they have to fight to stay in the mix. If you are homosexual, you do not belong in the herd.

7. The athlete makes that decision. It’s no one’s business and it is a very private and personal issue. However, a team like the Giants who hold a special event each year to raise money in the fight for AIDS would have to support a gay player because it has already shown its support for AIDS. In that case, they would have put themselves in a position where it is in their best interest to show support. I think that if that ever happens it would possibly bring down much of professional sports. At that point it is up to society to either accept the athlete or reject sports altogether. Unfortunately, I don’t think that society and/or professional sports are strong enough to handle it at this point and I don’t think that will change in your lifetime. This would be the case especially if a high caliber player were to come out. A lot of people think that if a high caliber athlete came out, it would be better. I tend to think differently. I would have to take a guy that came up through the ranks for that to happen. Fans would have to get to know the gay athlete before he became a professional. At that point, I think that acceptance is more likely.

8. I would never ask them about it. If they brought it up, maybe, but I would ask first to use the information. There are three things that a media personality follows regarding

information: on the record, off the record and non-attribution. After enough experience, you know which one is appropriate for that situation.

9. With professional sports, you have to force it down their throats before they'll swallow. They are not going to be willing to just sit down and change an opinion or view that has been in place for most of history. But, it also depends on the sport. For example, people jump to conclusions faster about ice-skating. Some sports are more willing to discuss homosexuality if the percentage of gay athletes was bigger in that sport. It comes back to the stereotypes and preconceived ideas that we have about professional athletes. Of course there are homosexuals playing baseball and football, but we aren't going to hear about it for the reasons I talked about before. No one wants to be the one responsible for the downfall of professional sports; and that is likely to be what happens.

Why take the chance?

*Coder Two*

Positive

Negative

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3. Not any time soon. Stereotypes are strong and we still follow the rule that "men will be men" and "boys will be boys." Once people are set in their opinions and convictions, it's terribly difficult to change that. Right now, baseball is the most diverse, but the macho attitude will never go away. It is more of a rural problem than an urban problem. Athletes who play in cities like Oakland and San Francisco are much more diverse and open-minded than athletes in Kansas City or Jacksonville. That's just the way it is and it's unfortunate that there isn't a common ground where they can teach each other. That's just not important to athletes. They are the way they are and that's the way that they want to be. Diversity training is common in professional sports, but there is nothing that I know of that deals with homosexuality. We just happen to live in the most liberal part of the country.

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time, what would happen to a player who was gay? Eventually, they would fall so far out of the loop that they would soon find themselves replaced. The worst feeling for an athlete is to not be part of the herd. It is such a delicate situation because they have to fight to stay in the mix. If you are homosexual, you do not belong in the herd.

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## **Media personality Two**

### *Coder One*

#### Positive

#### Negative

1. It's been shown already with the Mike Piazza rumors, with him taking the time and energy to hold a press conference, that society isn't ready. People are very defensive and uptight when it comes to image. The sports world just isn't ready for that yet. I think that there would be a total uproar, almost too chaotic to control. Society isn't mature enough to handle such a serious and life changing situation. It's an undeterminable amount of time until that is going to change.
2. Sports has such a macho image. Women's sports have to work harder to simply justify their existence. They have a lot more to prove than men's sports. Sports are very male macho oriented and the entertainment industry is much more open and free. They



display it as funny and joyous. There are no gender lines in entertainment and it is a lot less pressured to live up to a masculine standard. Of course entertainers have certain standards to live up to, but they aren't the same as athletes. Entertainment is much more feminine because there are so many dominate female actors as opposed to sports which is male dominated. In entertainment, women are just as popular as men where in sports males are dominant. That makes the two industries difficult to compare.

3. It is kind of like Jackie Robinson. If there was one athlete of star caliber, it may work out ok. Because if the first one was not a star, it would be swept away and management would release the player under the pretense that they weren't holding their own or that they quit. Management and owners wouldn't be willing to back up a second string or bench player. There is no reason for them to put their reputation and the organizations credibility on the line for a non-market player. They would be beyond ostracized. In a non mainstream sport like tennis or golf, it is much more accepted because the macho factor isn't there. Those are also individual sports. If someone who is the cornerstone of a team came out, society and the fans would have to accept it. A Barry Bonds would have a much different reception than a Bobby Keilty.

4. The barrier just hasn't been broken yet. Players have to come out before any real changes can be made. It's like the saying that men think that two women together is a fantasy, but the image of two men together is gross. Since the majority of fans are male, the idea of lesbian athletes is not so offensive.

5. I can't stand members of the media who make things up for the sake of ratings or circulation or to make a name for themselves. There's no real glamour in discussing

someone who is gay as opposed to making stuff up for ratings. There's just nothing that they can get out of it. If anything, media personalities who create stories such as the Mike Piazza rumors do more damage than good. With, football for example, the average fan wants to see macho men playing, not stereotypically wimpy homosexuals. They won't watch anymore with gays playing so even suggesting that there may be gay football players without any real proof would be absolutely ridiculous.

6. **It's all about acceptance.** It's not so much that they fear for their lives. Sports are a macho mans world. For a gay athlete, it wouldn't be worth it to come out. They have to look at the benefits versus the drawbacks. For a gay athlete it wouldn't be worth it to sacrifice what they presumably worked their whole lives to achieve. Coming out offers personal satisfaction and self liberation, but it's questionable as to whether or not it is worth it. **A man's pride goes a long way, even if it means holding in something as personal as sexual preference.** I suppose it just depends on what's most important to the individual.

7. **An athlete has to go to the organization first to be fair.** If someone wanted to come out and do it on their own, the organization would feel burned and most likely not back up the player. They would be worried about the media. It's more beneficial to go to the organization first. For example, Magic Johnson went to the Los Angeles Lakers before he announced he had HIV. In that case, the team publicly supported him and therefore society had an easier time accepting it. The fans ultimately dictate everything because they pay for everything. Going about it in any other way than Magic did could be detrimental.

8. Depends on the context. Period. I can't really answer that otherwise.

9. By and large, sports has done a good job of accepting diversity. It comes down to someone having to break the barrier. Fans would give opinions and some may react with hostility, but ultimately it depends on the individual athlete who made the announcement. If Jackie Robinson had quit because he couldn't take the backlash anymore, it would have been years before anyone tried it again. If the player were strong enough to handle it, eventually society would get used to it. As soon as the athlete backs down, society wins and there will be little or no chance of anyone ever trying it again. After the Garrison Hearst comments, players are learning to keep their mouths shut because no matter which side they take, their opinions will be questioned. Media personalities are just waiting for someone to stick their foot in their mouth and create the next big story. Athletes are beginning to understand more that this is the case and avoid these controversial topics more. It is certainly in their best interests to do so. I can't imagine that it won't be a decade or more until someone is willing to knock down that wall.

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### **Media personality Three**

*Coder One*

Positive

Negative

1. You would see reaction in the media; particularly in talk radio. Talk radio hosts eat this stuff up. However, it could be disastrous. A recent example is the Garrison Hearst story. He made an unnecessary comment that he shouldn't have and it made nationwide news. If you or I had said it, no one would have paid any attention. For a homosexual athlete, there would be a lot of media scrutiny; any person who came out would be under the microscope and teammates would face a wide range of issues including the shower and traveling. Gays have a right to be whoever they want to, but when it affects other people, they should and do really think twice about saying anything.

2. Because of the machismo attitude of sports. Most sports are very male oriented and the ideal perfect man has to live up to a certain machismo standard. This mostly applies to athletes. Athletes have been conditioned all their lives to believe that sports are not a place for the stereotypical gay person. It's a competition for who's the fastest, strongest and who has the most endurance. The general perception is that homosexuals are not strong enough. Homosexuality is much rarer in athletics than entertainment because entertainment is just that, for people's enjoyment. There is no competition for physical power. Who you see on the television or movie screen aren't real people; they can be whoever they want to be at that moment. It's a competition for artistic creativity, which follows along with the stereotypical homosexual. They are considered more artistic and

fashion minded people. That is about as far away from professional sports as you can get.

3. Eventually, yes. You have to point to the color barriers that were broken and at the time, no one ever imagined that would happen. When a homosexual breaks that barrier just as Jackie Robinson did the color barrier, there will be similar reactions of disgust and anger, but in time it will become accepted just as when the color barrier was broken. All it's going to take is one brave person and a management that will back them up.

4. It all comes down to stereotypes. For males, being macho is accepted and expected, but not for females. Females are expected to be feminine and strength is typically not considered to be a female characteristics. A man who is gay and in sports goes against the stereotypes.

5. Not all media organizations should be lumped into one group. The person who started those rumors is just a bored, no name beat writer. That type of media only tries to sell papers and generally don't care who they hurt in the process. Responsible papers would not do that to an athlete without knowing the facts first. Whether or not Piazza is gay or not is not really news. It has nothing to do with why he is a popular media figure in the first place. Piazza is a top-notch athlete and if he weren't, then no one would care about his personal life. If Piazza wasn't as popular, it wouldn't have been an issue. It's true that this type of attention is just part of the territory, but there is a point where reports become hurtful and unnecessary. All it does is make it harder for the credible media and for athletes who are gay to feel comfortable about coming out.



6. It depends on the athletes. I think that the general mentality is “I don’t want to go through that” because homosexual athletes have seen what others have gone through in the past and don’t want to experience the consequences themselves. In mainstream America, homosexual athletes wouldn’t get or keep endorsements. It’s unfortunate, but true. It’s all about what the fans want and the majority of fans are men. It’s unfortunate to say, but no one really wants to see that.

7. Ultimately it is the person’s decision, but there are other factors that are included in all of these parts. Other people like family, friends, and teammates are factored in his mind and he has to ask himself if it is worth it or not. A lot of people may think that it is just about the athlete, but there are so many other factors that they have to consider. Even the fans are a consideration because acceptance is a huge deal for these athletes. Yeah, sure it’s the athlete’s choice whether or not they want to come out, but it affects an incredible amount of people.

8. I would leave the topic alone unless it was part of the story. I don’t foresee it ever needing to come up unless, like now, it’s the topic of conversation.

9. Professional sports struggles with diversity. Recently there has been an issue of black coaches in the NFL and whether or not there are enough. Now, any NFL team that is in need of a coach is required to interview at least one black person. That shouldn’t have to happen. If teams are now being forced to interview black coaches, then there is certainly something wrong with how diversity is handled. In a way sports mirrors society and society struggles with how to embrace it just like individuals. It is still difficult to talk

about diversity and until that isn't the case anymore, there is no chance of a homosexual athlete making it a day in professional sports. **We're just not mentally ready.**

*Coder Two*

Positive

Negative

1. **You would see reaction in the media; particularly in talk radio. Talk radio hosts eat this stuff up. However, it could be disastrous. A recent example is the Garrison Hearst story. He made an unnecessary comment that he shouldn't have and it made nationwide news. If you or I had said it, no one would have paid any attention. For a homosexual athlete, there would be a lot of media scrutiny; any person who came out would be under the microscope and teammates would face a wide range of issues including the shower and traveling. Gays have a right to be whoever they want to, but when it affects other people, they should and do really think twice about saying anything.**

2. **Because of the machismo attitude of sports. Most sports are very male oriented and the ideal perfect man has to live up to a certain machismo standard. This mostly applies to athletes. Athletes have been conditioned all their lives to believe that sports are not a place for the stereotypical gay person. It's a competition for who's the fastest, strongest and who has the most endurance. The general perception is that homosexuals are not strong enough. Homosexuality is much rarer in athletics than entertainment because entertainment is just that, for people's enjoyment. There is no competition for physical power. Who you see on the television or movie screen aren't real people; they can be whoever they want to be at that moment. It's a competition for artistic creativity, which follows along with the stereotypical homosexual. They are considered more artistic and**

fashion minded people. That is about as far away from professional sports as you can get.

3. Eventually, yes. You have to point to the color barriers that were broken and at the time, no one ever imagined that would happen. When a homosexual breaks that barrier just as Jackie Robinson did the color barrier, there will be similar reactions of disgust and anger, but in time it will become accepted just as when the color barrier was broken. All it's going to take is one brave person and a management that will back them up.

4. It all comes down to stereotypes. For males, being macho is accepted and expected, but not for females. Females are expected to be feminine and strength is typically not considered to be a female characteristics. A man who is gay and in sports goes against the stereotypes.

5. Not all media organizations should be lumped into one group. The person who started those rumors is just a bored, no name beat writer. That type of media only tries to sell papers and generally don't care who they hurt in the process. Responsible papers would not do that to an athlete without knowing the facts first. Whether or not Piazza is gay or not is not really news. It has nothing to do with why he is a popular media figure in the first place. Piazza is a top-notch athlete and if he weren't, then no one would care about his personal life. If Piazza wasn't as popular, it wouldn't have been an issue. It's true that this type of attention is just part of the territory, but there is a point where reports become hurtful and unnecessary. All it does is make it harder for the credible media and for athletes who are gay to feel comfortable about coming out.

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about diversity and until that isn't the case anymore, there is no chance of a homosexual athlete making it a day in professional sports. We're just not mentally ready.

#### **Media personality Four**

*Coder One*

Positive

Negative

1. It changes from region to region. Depending on what area of the country you live in the reactions and opinions are going to be different. We just happen to live in an area that is more diverse than many others. There is just no general way to answer that question. There are external factors that have to be considered and discussed as well. Because of the pressure applied by sponsors and the need for political correctness, most athletes feel a need to protect the sponsors image and reputation by keeping their thoughts to themselves. There are many more athletes than endorsement deals. The rare and exceptional athletes who are lucky enough to get them understand that they have to be extremely careful about what they say and do or those deals will be ripped away from them. Also, it is simple that no one wants to offend anyone else. Heterosexual athletes know that there are homosexual fans and consumers who are pro homosexual. Therefore they don't want to express any negative opinions to interfere with those relationships. Athletes are people too. They have feelings just like everyone else. They are typically held in such high regard for their abilities that we sometimes forget this. I think that an athlete that came out would be fine even though athletes won't like it because they wouldn't feel like they could say anything in order to stay politically correct. Heterosexual athletes don't want to make anyone mad; there is just too much at stake.

Just as some guys who are heterosexual and/or followers of the bible would feel uncomfortable dressing in front of female media personalities, they would feel uncomfortable in front of a homosexual teammate. There is a respect issue towards the families and, spouses of the athletes. An openly gay athlete would be forced to dress in front of teammates, which would cause a high discomfort level. Heterosexual athletes would always wonder what the gay player was thinking or feeling. Whether or not it was perverse or sexual.

2. Because that would be the athletes choice to make their personal life public. Media personalities respect the athletes' choices to talk about it. People still view sports as the last bastion of reality and maleness. The two don't go together; homosexuality is not accepted as part of the sports culture. It doesn't fit the stereotype, which for centuries has been engraved in people's minds. Sports are still the storybook reality. Young boys grow up idolizing athletes and men teach their children that these athletes are the epitome of what it is to be a man. In regards to homosexuality and diversity of athletes in general, no one sets out to out someone; it's not part of the domain and has no relevance to the domain. Essentially, actors and actresses are viewed as physically dominant as athletes are, but in a different way. With Hollywood, it is about glamour, which is typically feminine ideals, while athletics is viewed as a competition of strength and endurance.

3. Yes, in part because of the fact that they know a portion of customers are gay or pro gay. Again, they will stay politically correct to protect gate numbers and sponsorship dollars. As long as the ownership is open-minded and embraces homosexuality, the players will be forced to do the same. In some respects, professional athletes are just

puppets being controlled by management and corporate endorsements. As long as they do and say what they are told, then there won't be any problems. When issues occur, it's when athletes step out of this and speak their minds.

4. I don't know. It is perplexing because we haven't had a Martina Navratilova in men's sports. She was so far ahead of her time. It is safer to go after a woman in a sole sport than a man in a team sport, but in a perfect world it wouldn't matter. If someone were to out a superstar such as Piazza, they would not only burn their bridge to him, but to management, the rest of the players, and to the fans. There would be serious repercussions. I'm not saying that what she did was easy by any means, but I do think that you can't really compare the two situations. However, I am surprised that we haven't had an openly gay athlete in men's sports. If there were to be a gay athlete who came out during their career, they would have to do it strongly like she did. That line hasn't been crossed where a superstar athlete has come out and taken a stand and until they do, there is no chance that any type of acceptance will occur.

5. Endorsements and sponsorships, the fact that it is unmarketable and they dread the shame of teammates knowing they lived a lie. There is also a high level of fear and anger of teammates knowing period and most, if not all, don't suspect a thing. Fans still view sports as a Disney like competition with the "Cinderella" Anaheim Angels and Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Athletes are still role models and storybook heroes that children look up to and parents dream that their children be like. No one wants to shatter the illusions of fans or subject themselves to taunting and harassment from opposing teams fans in opposing stadiums; the added pressure is not worth it.

6. Like I said before, it depends on what sport and what city we are talking about. San Francisco is going to have a different viewpoint than Philadelphia. That has to be taken into consideration when making predictions about what may or may not happen if a gay athlete were to come out.

7. It is fair because he is cheating on his wife just the same as a heterosexual would. I believe that we are all born with a cross to bear. The hardest thing to do is stay faithful because of temptation. I've been happily married for over 20 years, but I would be lying if I said that another woman before has never tempted me. It is no different for a homosexual. For example, my desire to have an affair on my wife equals his desire to have a secret life and they should be viewed as the same. Temptation is the key. I have no personal sympathy for homosexuals. It is a choice. However, it is not fair to the wife.

8. It's totally circumstantial. In general, no, I don't care. Generally it is irrelevant. I am open if they wanted to, but I wouldn't bring it up out of the blue. If the rumors were already flying heavily, I would bring it up to address the rumors, but that's it. I've done that before with Joe Namath to give him the opportunity to respond. I didn't do it as to assume that the rumors were true; he denied them and that was that. I have never had that specific experience. If it did occur, I would take the fact that I knew it and leave it there. It doesn't need to go any further than that.

9. With Garrison Hearst, I know the DeBartolo/York family well enough to say that they embrace diversity. At the very top of that organization, that feeling is very legit. In general, protecting endorsements is the key. Part of the outward acceptance may be to keep sponsors and fans happy. Jackie Robinson, Asians, and Michael Jordan were fully



embraced because they proved themselves on the field. Robinson proved to everyone that he was a better athlete than the white players. In the NBA, very few visibly white players are dominant are from the USA. You can probably count on one hand the amount of dominant American born players left in the NBA. Other nationalities are just better athletes.

*Coder Two*

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