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WORKING IT "OUT": EMPLOYEE NEGOTIATIONS OF SEXUAL IDENTITY IN SPORT ORGANIZATIONS

By

ELIZABETH S. CAVALIER

Under the Direction of Elisabeth O. Burgess

ABSTRACT

This project examines the experiences of 37 gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees of professional, collegiate, and club sport. Using intensive, non-directive interviews and Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), I explore how employees negotiate the near-total sport institution, perceive the environment for sexual minorities in sport, manage their sexual identities, and identify potential allies at work. Participants informed their beliefs about the sport workplace by the totality of their direct and indirect experiences, their observation of others, and their accumulated experiences in sport as athletes and employees. While employees' perceptions of the sport environment were slightly negative, their actual experiences were predominantly neutral or positive.

Participants discussed their workplace experiences in terms of coming out, being out, and acting out. They identified levels of "how out" they were, even as their behaviors belied that designation. "Being out," for these participants, involved relying on various motivations and

strategies at work. One group of participants felt coming out was part of a larger moral imperative to create social change, and did so by emphasizing gay identity over sport or work identity. A second group felt it was professional or responsible to stay closeted at work, noting that personal lives and private lives should not intersect. A third group also highlighted their work and sport identities over their gay identity, without attaching any liability to their sexual identity. These employees, who were the youngest members of the sample, did not place significance on sexual identity as a salient feature of their overall identity. "Acting out" involved both active and passive strategies to emphasize or deemphasize sexual identity at work.

This project suggests that the processes by which employees negotiate their workplace environments (and, particularly, sport as a workplace) are complex and nuanced. For non-heteronormative employees working in sport, their processes of coming out, acting out, and being out were mediated by many factors, including age, type of sport, workplace hierarchy and identity formation processes.

INDEX WORDS: Sport, Sexual identity, Employees, Workplace discrimination, Coming out

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By

ELIZABETH S. CAVALIER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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WORKING IT "OUT": EMPLOYEE NEGOTIATIONS OF SEXUAL IDENTITY IN SPORT ORGANIZATIONS

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December 2009

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Chet Meeks (1978 – 2008).

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION: THE SHIFTING SPORT LANDSCAPE

In February, 2007, John Amaechi, a former professional basketball player for the Utah Jazz and the Orlando Magic, came out of the closet as a gay man. He joined an exclusive club with a growing membership list of athletes publicly declaring their status as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (albeit most after their playing career was over). To date, Amaechi is the only NBA player to publicly declare he is gay. In the last few decades, there have been other professional athletes who have publicly spoken about their gay or lesbian identity, including former NFL players Dave Kopay and Esera Tualo, Olympic diver Greg Louganis, current WNBA player and Olympic medalist Sheryl Swoops, former Major League Baseball player Billy Bean, and tennis players Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova.[1]

When Amaechi came out, a familiar narrative emerged in the sports and mainstream media. This narrative resembled the script the media used when Tualo came out in 2002, the same script when there were rumors about a gay Major League Baseball player dating a journalist in 2002 (Lemon, Kim and Kennedy 2002), the same script when a "scandalous" new book with a chapter interviewing a closeted NFL player hit the market (Freeman 2003). The coming out events of these athletes were treated as, if not scandalous, at least shocking news, sparking speculation, rumor and innuendo about other players who might be the next one out of the closet. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the coming out disclosure, other (presumed heterosexual) athletes were interviewed and quoted about the presence of gay athletes on their teams and in their locker rooms. While the vast majority of public comments were neutral or

[1] For a comprehensive list of out college and professional athletes, coaches, and employees, see Outsports 2009.

positive (Lemon et al. 2002), the few negative sound bytes dominated the airwaves, such as the statement by retired NBA player Tim Hardaway after Amaechi's coming out: "I hate gay people…It shouldn't be in the world, or the United States. I don't like it." While Hardaway's statements were almost universally lambasted in public, the controversy surrounding the incident continued to perpetuate the message that gay people in sports were, to borrow Georg Simmel's (1950) concept, strangers in a strange land.

As more professional athletes begin to publicly declare a gay or lesbian identity, joined by the ever-swelling ranks of out collegiate and even high school athletes, we are told an increasingly complex and shifting narrative about the atmosphere in sports for sexual minorities. While the sports atmosphere still clearly has both formal and informal structures which promote a negative environment with regard to non-heteronormative sexual identities, this story is changing, and at times changing rapidly (Anderson 2009). I suggest that the slow increase of the number of athletes coming out publicly does not represent a sudden increase in gay-athlete participation; rather, it reflects shifting changes in the atmosphere of sport itself. The atmosphere is arcing towards progress around issues of sexual identity. Publicly out gay athletes are, sometimes paradoxically, both the cause and the effect of this social change.

However, athletes only tell part of the story about the institution of sport. When I began my undergraduate education, I was an Athletic Training major at Ithaca College. I had a markedly average career as an athlete in youth and high school sports. I knew I wanted to stay involved in the field, and clearly my athletic prowess was only going to take me so far. Like many of my classmates, I came to Athletic Training as a former athlete, bringing with me the background and mentality from my sporting days. I entered an institution full of current and former athletes, and the institution was intimately affected by this fact. The institution of sport,

as a workplace, is full of former athletes who carry with them many of the messages around issues of sexual identity that they received in their playing days—primarily, messages that reinforce negative ideologies around sexual minorities. Yet as a workplace, the institution of sport carries different standards of behavior for athletes and employees. This project focuses on the experiences of non-heterosexual employees of professional, NCAA, and club sports as they navigate the shifting landscape of the sports work environment.

Sport Atmosphere and the Institution of Sport

Sport is both a practice and an institution (Arnold 1997). It is both something one does and something one is a part of. This project focuses on the institution of sport, in terms of its broad reach and influence on society. Anderson (2005) suggests that the institution of sport is structured through three significant components—as a "near total," all-encompassing institution, as a gender-segregated space, and as a closed-loop system. Sport is near-total because it requires "homogeneity of thought and action" (p. 66). It is one of the most gender-segregated institutions other than jails or mental hospitals (p. 71). Finally, it is a closed-loop system, where ideologies get reinforced by coaches who were once athletes, while former athletes with competing ideologies drop out of the system before they become coaches, leaving normative ideologies unchallenged. These three components make sport a unique social institution for analysis, and make the experiences of sexual minorities within sport reveal complex narratives about the institution as a whole.

The participants in this project thought of sport less like an institution and more like an atmosphere. They rarely articulated an awareness of the overarching institutional forces embedded in sport. They thought of their positions in sport (as fans, as current and former athletes, and as employees) as separate and distinct; rarely did they connect their experiences in

these different statuses as part of an overall institutional structure. For them, sport was an environment or an atmosphere, and lacked the overt forms of social control they associated with an institution. However, it is precisely this invisibility of the structure of sport that allows it to exhibit such control on the behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of those who are embedded within the institution. This project focuses on the nuances between the attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors of non-heteronormative sport employees as they navigate the structural constraints of the institution of sport.

The institution of sport, particularly in the United States, is one with significant symbolic value. It is, as Eitzen (2001) suggests, a "microcosm of society" (p. 6), reflecting and reifying social values. Sport can embody values such as hard work, fair play, and teamwork, and provide a site for socialization into adulthood. Sport has been used on the global stage for political demonstrations and has been used in developing nations to build a sense of community. As an institution, sport can provide symbolic representation of positive norms and ideologies of a society. However, the institution of sport can also be a place where more deleterious social values are reinforced—values of racism, sexism, elitism, sexual prejudice and homophobia. Sport can be a place where discriminatory practices are reified and institutionalized or a place where they are deconstructed on the path toward social change. In the last fifty years, sport has provided an example of the contestation of various social barriers around issues of race, sex, social class, ability status, and access. However, there has been a less visible, but growing, contestation around issues of sexual identity in sport.

This project focuses on sexual prejudice and homophobia in the institution of sport, and details the experiences of 37 men and women who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or non-heterosexual employed in both elite and non-elite level sports. In particular, I examine the navigation of the workplace environment for employees of major and minor-league professional, NCAA Division I, II, and III, and club sports. I examine how employees perceive their work

environment and what tools they use to aid in their perceptions. I also focus on the actual experiences they have as they navigate the sport workplace as sexual minorities. Finally, I focus on the relevance of the "closet" model of coming out, and examine how employees utilize specific active and passive strategies to come out, be out, and act out at work.

Relevance

Sport is a social institution that provides a cultural space to critically analyze the many power dynamics that occur in daily life. Sugden and Tomlinson (2002) note that "sport is a prominent practice of everyday life" (p. 8) and as such provides a unique cultural form to study power dynamics. The fact that sport is such a prominent institution in American society makes it a significant case study to examine issues of power and inequality. In particular, by focusing on the lived experiences of those with insider status in the institution of sport (such as athletes or employees), it is possible to examine the power dynamics around a multitude of issues, including gender, sexuality, discrimination, and self-image. Sport provides the setting for an examination of much larger issues of power and structure within society, and this project examines some of those significant issues.

Institutional Power Dynamics

The sporting atmosphere has historically presented processes of exclusion and inclusion which incorporate specific power dynamics. According to Sugden and Tomlinson (2002), a primary goal of social science research should be to examine and explain the role of power dynamics in society. They argue that researchers should explain "when, why, and how power transforms from one of its dimensions, or balance of dimensions, to another" (p. 5). They take a

macro level perspective that power, in all of its forms, is a significant factor in how institutions are shaped, maintained, and controlled. In the work environment, power certainly belongs to those in positions of authority over employees. However, even the most subordinate worker can produce power in certain social circumstances. An individual with a non-heteronormative sexual identity working in an environment that has historically been hostile to sexual minorities still has power and agency, both of which help shape the institution of sport. As Foucault (1975, 1978) argues, power is not simply descending from an outside force but is produced by individual subjects. Within the institution of sport, even marginalized employees create and maintain power dynamics. Sugden and Tomlinson (2002) illustrate this point, noting,

> Within popular culture, there is what Stuart Hall calls 'the double stake…the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it.' The study of particular sport cultures can demonstrate this, showing how power relations themselves involve an ebb and flow of influences, illustrative of the reflexive and generative capacity of human actors to confirm, adapt, negotiate, and at times remake their institutions and cultures (p. 8).

This dissertation focuses on that process of adaptation and negotiation as professionals employed in sports remake their institutions and cultures. This adaptation includes mechanisms by which employees disclose (or do not disclose) their sexual identity in the workplace, thereby actively having an impact on the dynamics in their work environment. This can also include more subtle, nuanced actions that change and shift consciousness. Yet the actions (or inactions) of individuals on the job have further-reaching implications than simply impacting individual work environments. Rather, these adaptations and negotiations by employees shift and change the institution as a whole. In doing so, employees are changing sport from the inside out.

Sugden and Tomlinson (2002) remark "It is insufficient for social scientists to merely identify a power relation. They must also learn to understand what that power relation means to those engaged within it" (p. 9). With this in mind, I explore power dynamics around issues of

sexual identity, disclosure, and self-concept within the institution of sport in the United States. By examining the experiences of those professionally involved with sport via open-ended, face-to-face interviews, I deconstruct assumptions about nuanced meanings and demonstrate the significance of those meanings to society as a whole. In doing so, I challenge current explanations about sexual identity in sport.

Sport Employees as Unique and Significant

Professional athletes are the most visible representatives of the institution of sport. They are often worshipped by an adoring public and compensated disproportionately as compared to other important people in society. Athletes are entertainers, and we reward entertainers with media coverage, endorsements, and other financial compensation on a global scale. Athletes' experiences of discrimination and identity management are an important representation of the institution of sport (and, ultimately, of society at large). Unfortunately, the experiences of athletes are almost always the *only* narrative that is visible as a representation of the institution. Athletes are on the forefront of the institution of sport. I argue that the experiences of those in the background—the "backstage" (Goffman 1959) employees—represent an even *more* significant representation of the institution because their treatment does not generally take place in the public eye. Therefore, this project focuses particularly on the experiences of the paid employees of sport, not the athletes themselves. While nearly all of my sample (n=35) had prior background as players, some extensively, which informed their experiences as employees, the narratives told by gay, lesbian and bisexual employees differs from the story told about gay athletes. This narrative represents a furthering of the "story" about sport. Many of the participants in this project brought with them the accumulated experiences of a lifetime in

sport—as former players, as fans, and as employees. They brought with them many of the ideologies and experiences that researchers have suggested exist for athletes who are sexual minorities. However, their experiences as employees in sport expands upon the narrative about gay athletes, providing another layer of depth and nuance to the overarching narrative about sports as an institution.

To some extent, this project is simply about work discrimination on the basis of sexual identity, and sport provides an example of a prominent institution with which to study both the processes of discrimination and the strategies employees use to negotiate their workplace. Some of the concepts that are relevant in this project are relevant in other areas of work discrimination—both based on sexual identity and about other areas of social identity. Both professional and big-time collegiate sport are like other institutions in the sense that they are organized with a corporate hierarchy and focus on an ultimate goal of competitive success and financial profit. Sport also has a legacy of being a male-dominated domain (Messner 1992) and therefore is useful in examining experiences on the basis of both gender and sexuality, much like other male-dominated occupations. Woog (2001) focuses on the experiences of gay men working in "heterosexual jobs, as most people—gay as well as straight—would call them" (p. vii). He notes that "all out gay men—no matter what profession or job—share certain experiences that straight men never can. These experiences revolve around overcoming homophobia, be it subtle or overt, in the workplace. And even though every gay man's story is different, the issues are often the same" (p. viii). This project can be used to understand work discrimination on the basis of sexual identity and add to the literature on general sexual orientation work discrimination, particularly discrimination that is less overt and formal, and instead relies on more subtle processes to create a negative environment for sexual minorities.

However, in other ways this project *is* specific to the institution of sport itself. Part of this specificity lies in the pervasiveness of the institution in our culture. Sport is literally *everywhere*. The media covers sport to the point of saturation. Athletic apparel and sport souvenirs are a trillion dollar industry (Lapchick 1996). Millions of children and adults participate in some form of organized sport throughout their lifetime. Sport metaphors are used in everyday vernacular. As an institution, sport impacts our everyday lives in a way that is unique.

Mechanisms that operate within sport happen in the public eye. Television broadcasts games and various media sources report about them. Press releases detail contract negotiations, discipline of (front-stage) personnel, and health status on a daily basis. As a result, fans and the general public feel connected to the institution in a way that is not possible with many other social institutions. Therefore, sport provides a backdrop for a public negotiation and contestation of specific social values. Participants in this project noted how for them, employment in sport was unique because of the amount of time they spent with their coworkers and the sometimes social nature of their work environment. Finally, sport is unique because the vast majority of its employees have prior experience as athletes. Their participation in the institution comes from many levels and with many different experiences, and many of them based their perceptions of the environment as an employee less on their actual experiences as employees and more on their accumulated experiences as athletes.

Social Change Within Sport

Sport is an institution with a rich legacy of exclusion and inclusion during particular historical time periods. During the late 1800s, as contemporary professional leagues began to

emerge, sport struggled with inclusion over social class issues. During the 1940s and 1950s, sport began systematically racially desegregating, although it took several decades before significant desegregation was achieved. The first Paralympic Games was held in 1960, beginning a process whereby athletes with physical disabilities demanded access to sport at the highest levels of participation. The 1970s saw the enactment of Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act, which provided for equality of access on the basis of sex. Despite these changes, sport remains today as a site of hegemonic masculinity in which "real (heterosexual) men" (Clarke 1998) are in power. Yet unlike similar institutions such as the military, sport promotes an *ideology* of inclusion, even as the reality of that ideology may not be currently realized. As such, it is a crucial site for an examination of the issues of inclusion and discrimination.

We are in the midst of social change around issues of sexual identity in sport. While the vast majority of researchers suggest that sport is still a site of hostility, negativity, and danger for sexual minorities, there is evidence to suggest that this is changing (Anderson 2009). This research challenges some of the existing arguments about sexual identity management that are currently advanced in the literature. While participants' reported some negative experiences and perceptions, the overall picture was not one of a "hostile environment." The vast majority of participants had experiences that were neutral or positive, while their perceptions were slightly, but not overwhelmingly, negative. Furthermore, the strategies that participants used at work also were not a linear "coming out of the closet" model that has been discussed by researchers for the past two decades.

Research Aims

The main concept in this project is sexual prejudice within the institution of sport. As most of the existing research focuses on the experiences of gay athletes, and to a lesser degree, lesbian coaches, I focus particularly on the experiences of the more "backstage" employees of sport. As a population, this group is overlooked by current research relating to work discrimination or sport, and I aim to bridge the gap between the experiences of non-heteronormative athletes and sexual minorities working within the institution of sport. In doing so, I add depth to the narrative about the interaction between sexual identities and the institution of sport. Primarily, this research has three goals: 1) ascertaining employees' perceptions of the overall atmosphere of professional, collegiate and club sport, particularly with respect to sexual identity; 2) uncovering the strategies and processes employees use to negotiate the workplace atmosphere, including the ways in which they make their sexual orientation known (or don't); and 3) determining how employees identify potentially allies (or people who may not be allies) and adjust their behavior, strategies and negotiations accordingly. I use grounded theory methodology (GTM) and qualitative interviews to examine the experiences of 37 gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees in professional, college, and club sport environments.

By focusing on the experiences of employees, this project expands upon previous suggestions that athletes, as the most visible face of the sporting institution, stay closeted because they are seen as role models. The behavior of visible employees (i.e. coaches) and less visible employees suggests that the institution of sport is complex and nuanced. The combination of these research goals along with a focus on a wide variety of sport employees is currently unique within the field.

A Note About Language:

Researchers often discuss the existence of homophobia in organized and professional sport. Baunach, Burgess and Muse (2009) note that the term *homophobia* is antiquated and often misleading. They suggest that "the 'phobia' suffix has been considered problematic because it suggests personal pathology, psychological diagnosis, or mental illness" (p. 2). Similarly, *heterosexism* is inadequate because it focuses primarily on structure rather than "denoting the personal attitudes of heterosexuals toward homosexuals" (p. 3). They follow Herek (2000) in suggesting the term *sexual prejudice* "to refer to 'negative attitudes based on sexual orientation,' thus linking these attitudes to other prejudicial attitudes based on gender, race, religion, among other potentially stigmatizing characteristics" (p. 3). Using the term sexual prejudice is advantageous because it can refer to an entire spectrum of non-heteronormative behaviors, rather than narrowly focusing on the labeled behavior of "homosexuality." Within this project, I use the term "sexual prejudice." However, in the literature review, I use the terminology that the referenced author utilizes, which is most often the term "homophobia."

A second term I use throughout this paper is the term *non-heteronormative*. Heteronormativity, first coined by Warner (1991), initially described "the norms against which non-heterosexuals struggle (p. 3)." Cohen (2005) expanded the usage of the term, defining heteronormativity as "practices and institutions that legitimize and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and 'natural' within society" (p. 24.) However, Cohen's definition incorporates heterosexual individuals such as single mothers and sex workers who are nonetheless defined as non-heteronormative because they are not perceived as "normal, moral, or worthy of state support" (p. 26). The concept of heteronormativity has been used to highlight the connections between sex, gender, and sexual identity, and particularly critiques the

dichotomous binary system which suggests sexual identity can be understood in a simple, linear model of sex and gender. While the term non-heteronormative does include, for example, unmarried heterosexual partners, single parents, and non-traditional family forms, for the purposes of this project I am using it primarily to refer to those who engage in non-heterosexual behaviors or claim an identity as something other than heterosexual. However, I use non-heteronormative rather than only using "gay, lesbian, or bisexual" to describe my participants. This is a conscious attempt not to restrict my sample *only* to those who actively identify with the label gay, lesbian, or bisexual but otherwise engage in identity construction that is not heterosexual. Additionally, I use the term non-heteronormative in an attempt not to privilege heterosexuality by referring to my respondents as "not straight" or "non heterosexuals[2]."

Heasley (2005) challenges the usage of the term "non," specifically in reference to the idea of being non-traditional. He notes, "being 'non' means 'not having… 'non' erases. And in the process, it problematizes other… 'Non' has no history, no literature, no power, no community. 'Non' requires an invention of self" (p. 311-313). However, the lack of literature and community also leaves open the possibility of the creation of new language to describe said community. The use of the term "non-heteronormative" in this paper is meant to reflect a positive absence of contemporary labeling around issues of sexual identity. It is not meant to privilege the concept of heteronormativity, but rather to expand those definitions. I intentionally did not limit my sample only to the labels of "gay" "lesbian" or "bisexual," in an attempt to include individuals who may not consider themselves straight but don't necessarily feel connected to the "gay community" as an identity center. It is my hope that the term "non-heteronormative" is not read as a restrictive term, but rather as an expansive one.

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[2] This word choice is similar to using the term "person of color" rather than "non-white" in race literature.

Structure of this Document

In Chapter Two, I outline the existing literature about sexual identity and sport, including workplace discrimination and the strategies used by non-heteronormative employees to negotiate workplaces in general and sport specifically. I also outline the theoretical framework for this project. Chapter Three discusses the methodological approach, including sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four focuses on employee perceptions of the sport atmosphere and the components of the atmosphere that influenced their perceptions. It also focuses on their actual experiences as sexual minorities in sport, which often had little effect on their overall perceptions about the institution. Chapter Five focuses on the idea of "coming out" at work—both on the importance participants placed on coming out and the specific ways in which they emphasized or deemphasized their sexual identity. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the overall theoretical and practical contributions of this work.

CHAPTER 2.

PREVIOUS LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Previous Research:

Virtually all of the literature on homophobia in sport focuses on the experiences of athletes. Groundbreaking work by Anderson (2002), Woog (1998, 2002), Caudwell (1999), Cahn (1994), and Griffin (1992, 1998) highlight the negative impact of homophobia on all athletes, both gay and straight. Clarke (1998) notes that sports has been regarded "as the area for boys to learn how to be 'real' (heterosexual) men…Thus it is (heterosexual) men who…have the power to define what counts as legitimate…Legitimacy is the embodiment and celebration of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity" (p. 149). Through this celebration of hegemonic masculinity, the institution of sport has an effect on both boys and girls in developing a sexual and gender identity. Harry (1995) notes, "Among men, socialization into sports and its associated ideology constitutes training in sexism and homophobia. Such 'character-building' seems to be unanticipated consequences of a seemingly innocuous and wholesome pastime…however, sports socialization for women does not appear to entail the learning of this prejudices" (p. 115). As these scholars suggest, men and women are socialized differently in sports around issues of sexual identity. Male athletes learn values of sexism and homophobia, while female athletes are taught to emphasize their femininity as well as their athletic prowess (Cahn 1994; Cavalier, 2003; Griffin 1998) and to avoid the stigma of the lesbian label (Griffin 1998, 1999).

Various scholars have addressed the topic of homophobia in organized sports, particularly focusing on how heterosexism and homophobia negatively affect experiences for

gay athletes. However, there is a paucity of literature on the experiences of those involved in sport in capacities other than that of athlete. While some scholars (esp. Bredemeier, Carlton, Hills and Oglesby 1999; Griffin 1998; Krane 1996) have focused on the experience specifically of lesbian coaches, there has been little scholarly attention on the experiences of other gay, lesbian, and bisexual sport employees.

While there has been less attention to other sport employees in scholarly literature, there has been some mass media attention focused on issues of sexual identity in sport for non-athletes. In 1999 the online community OutSports was launched (Ziegler and Buzinski 2007), catering to gay sports fans. They provide articles, columns, message forums, and resources for gay athletes, employees, and sports fans. OutSports has also profiled several out employees, including gay coaches, trainers, and front office employees. ESPN has covered the coming out of an openly gay NCAA coach (Garber 2007) and an NFL athletic trainer (Bull 2004). *The Advocate* covered the coming out of a gay former baseball umpire (Hoffman 2002). This mass media attention on employees has primarily, though not exclusively, covered the experiences of gay men in sport.

While athletes are the most visible employees of major league sports, many others work in the "backstage" (Goffman 1959). How these backstage employees are treated serves as a measurement for the openness and inclusiveness of a sports league. For the past eight years, the Center for the Study of Sport in Society has issued the "Racial and Gender Report Card" about major league sports.[3] This study focused on the percentage of racial minority and women employees each league employed as owners, coaches, managers, and professionals in league

[3] In 1997 and 1998, the project only tracked inclusion on the basis of race. In 2000, they began to include gender as a variable. They include the following leagues: Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), United States Olympic Committee (USOC), Major League Baseball (MLB), US Olympic National Governing Bodies (NGB), Major League Soccer (MLS), National Hockey League (NHL), and National Football League (NFL) (Lapchick 2001).

offices (Lapchick 2001). While this project did not include sexual orientation, it still demonstrates that diversity within league offices, not just on the playing field, is an important measurement of inclusiveness within the institution of sport. A "passing grade" on the several elements of the report card indicates a commitment to diversity within a league. If having a comparative percentage of racial and gender minority owners, coaches, managers, and professionals serves as a measurement of inclusiveness and progressiveness of a sports league, it stands to reason that the atmosphere experienced by sexual minority employees is also indicative of the relative openness of a professional league.

The Racial and Gender Report Card also documents the total number of employees in some of the leagues they evaluated[4]. In 2004, The NBA had 478 active players and 3,551 employees. The WNBA had 235 players and 654 employees. Major League Soccer had 277 players with 470 employees. Major League Baseball had 1,591 active players with 1,901 employees (not including the support staff personnel). The Racial and Gender Report card included the following categories as "employees": league office professional employees, league support staff personnel, owners, coaches, assistant coaches, CEO's/Presidents, general manager/director of player personnel, vice presidents, senior administrators, professional administrators, physicians, head trainers, team support staff personnel, central office employees and majority owners. As these data demonstrate, there are at least twice as many employees as athletes in most professional leagues (and sometimes considerably more than that, as with the NBA which boasts 7.4 employees for every one athlete). The Racial and Gender Report card helped provide a blueprint for my conception of what counted as an "employee" for this project and helps provide data that illustrates the size of the institution of sport as a whole.

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[4] Currently, they have released 2004 data on Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the Women's National Basketball Association, and Major League Soccer.

The experiences of gay athletes provide a backdrop for an analysis of the experiences of gay sport employees. A common excuse for lesbian and gay professional athletes staying in the closet is the "image problem" (Griffin 1998, 1999) for women and the assumption of heterosexuality (Messner 1995) for men. Related to both of these ideas is the "athlete-as-role-model" argument, which suggests that the stigma of homosexuality keeps athletes closeted for fear of losing endorsement deals and social acceptance (essentially that athletes have an economic incentive to stay in the closet). However, if background employees also feel that they have to remain in the closet, or if they have negative experiences based on sexual identity at work, this says something larger about the institution of sport as a whole. It might point to the fact that sport as a whole, on an institutional level, discourages open and/or progressive dialogue around issues of sexual identity. The role model suggestion or the economic incentive argument may very well be masking the fact that the institution of sport actively restricts open sexual identity formation of *all* individuals involved in sport; this may suggest that repression of non-heteronormative behavior is a *feature* of organized sport. Historically, sport has shown that it has a stake in maintaining hegemonic gender and sexual identity ideologies.

There are several clear themes in the literature on this topic. I will focus on the following: (a) presentation of the "self" in sporting work environments, including the phenomenon of what Anderson (2002) calls "segmented identities"; (b) existence and prevalence of work discrimination in general experienced by gay and lesbian employees; and (c) strategies utilized by gay and lesbian employees (both within and outside of sport) to deal with homophobic workplace discrimination. These concepts are crucial to the central themes of this research project.

Presentation of Self Via Segmented Identities

Both gay men and lesbians involved in sport frequently identify a distinct separation between their "gay self" and their "sport self." In his autobiography, Dave Pallone (2002), a gay former baseball umpire, notes, "I was extremely excited. I thought, 'I've found a profession.' But off the field, I still hadn't found *myself*. The only thing I was interested in while I was in St. Petersburg was becoming an umpire. I still wasn't sure about my sexuality (p. 51)." Pallone illustrates what Anderson (2002) calls "segmented identities." He thought of his self (or identity) as having distinct parts—his sexual identity self and his umpire self. This point echoes Bredemeier and colleagues (1999), who noted that lesbians in physical education "acknowledged feelings of tension between their perceptions of themselves as good people and social labels attached to being lesbian" (p. 424). These two categories were mutually exclusive for the women in their study. One respondent noted, "my lesbian identity was totally integrated into all aspects of my life, except in sport and PE" (p. 429). Billy Bean (2003), one of the few major league baseball players to publicly come out of the closet, albeit after his playing career was over, suggests a similar tension between being the "gay man" and the "ballplayer." He notes, "it would be three more years before the story I was determined to keep quiet made national headlines. The truth is I'd never wanted to be a star *anywhere but on the field*. I never set out to be a role model for gay ballplayers or anyone else. I couldn't figure out why all the attention had come to me" (Bean 2003: xviii- emphasis added). Denizet-Lewis (1998) describes a similar experience about a closeted gay sportswriter. "The writer…doesn't have problems acknowledging his homosexuality in just about any other context, but the world of mainstream sports is a different beast entirely" (p. 25).

Anderson (2002) discusses the impact of a homophobic atmosphere in men's organized sports. He argues this atmosphere contributes to the emergence of segmented identities in gay male athletes. He notes,

> ...the normalization of homophobic dialogue in American sport serves to subjugate the gay male identity as an inferior form of masculinity and helps marginalize gay athletes so that they must maintain segmented identities. Their identities as athletes are accepted but their identities as gay are not (p. 874).

Anderson also contends that this segmented identity occurs particularly with extremely successful male athletes—their identity as athlete is accepted as long as they are a vital contributor to the team. He discusses the concept of "masculinity insurance;" the idea that only the most successful gay male athletes challenged the heteronormative system by coming out. They had less to risk by virtue of their being highly successful. Their gay identity was more accepted, although still not openly discussed, by their straight teammates because of their highly regarded athlete identity[5].

Bredemeier, Carlton, Hills and Oglesby (1999) suggest that distinct identity dimensions are not restricted only to gay athletes. They discuss identity as having two dimensions: the personal and the social. Essentially, this involves a distinction between "who you really are" and "who you present to the world." The authors note, "the personal aspect involves an individual's self-representation and self perception. The social aspect involves the representation of self to others in a fairly consistent way; it appeals to an organized set of perceptions and feelings an individual holds about herself with regard to some social category" (p. 421). The tension between their personal (or "real") identity and their social representation of their self created conflict for lesbians involved in physical education. The authors note,

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[5] As Sheryl Swoops demonstrated by coming out of the closet in October, 2005, "masculinity insurance" is not restricted to gay male athletes. Being a superstar athlete still trumps being a gay athlete.

> Sport and physical education formed foundational elements of our co-participants' identities. The tension between their emerging lesbian identity and the overt homophobia left our co-participants feeling at times confused, fearful, constrained, and threatened, and at other times affirmed, supported, encouraged, and empowered (p. 427).

Higgs and Schell (1998) explore in detail the tension between this idea of the distinction between authentic identity and the identity one presents to others. They utilize Goffman's (1959) metaphor of the performance of identity on either a front or back stage. They note, "in response [to the stigma of a lesbian label], many homosexual women utilize a 'staged reality' to protect their secrets from the world." (p. 64). Goffman's analysis helps clarify the performance of the personal and social aspects of identity outlined by Bredemeier and colleagues (1999).

Higgs and Schell (1998) explain the usefulness of Goffman's work specifically to an analysis of closeted women in sport.

> In Goffman's terms, the "front" is part of the performance used deliberately, or unintentionally by the actor to convey the reality of the situation to the audience. For women in sports, the use of personal fronts such as clothing, make-up, and hair are used to camouflage the true nature of the women's sexuality and maintain what Goffman referred to as "consistency with the traditional notions of femininity… The "back region of women athletes' performances may contradict the impression fostered by the "front region" (p. 64).

Higgs and Schell (1998) point particularly to the segmentation process for closeted women. They note a distinct identity performance for recreational softball players on the field that contradicts or is dissonant from their identity performance in the workplace. The authors report that 94% of their respondents felt there were differences between their leisure self and their work self. One participant noted, "I am a lot more gay in my leisure time" (p. 72).

A final feature of the presentation of segmented identities is the distancing oneself from sexual identity as a salient category. This is similar to the colorblind ideology advanced in some race and ethnicity literature. Muska (2000), one of the first openly gay athletic directors in

Division I NCAA sports, discusses how he was "outed" prior to beginning his employment at Oberlin College. He notes, "any desire to just get to work, do a good job, and gain respect regardless of my sexual orientation was by then a moot point" (p. 64). This comment reflects segmentation between his ability to do a good job as an athletic director and his sense of self as a gay man. Muska discusses that he would rather be seen as an athletic director who happens to be gay, instead of as a gay athletic director.

Non-heteronormative individuals who are involved in the sports industry, whether in the capacity of athlete or as employee, face an industry where presenting identity in a segmented fashion is commonplace. Of course, athletes have other segmented identities, such as student and athlete (Adler and Adler 1991). However, for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in the institution of sport, the process of segmentation can involve denying, repressing or hiding one part of their segmented identity. Gay and lesbian individuals routinely distinguish between their "selves" into distinct parts—at least incorporating both their gay self and their sport self as distinct identities (Anderson 2002).

Workplace Discrimination

Another important body of literature includes workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Research focuses both on evidence of the *existence* and prevalence of anti-gay discrimination and on *perceptions* and experiences of discrimination by gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees. There is empirical evidence of discrimination in 1) the workplace in general (non-sporting) and 2) in sporting environments in particular. Both bodies of literature are important in understanding the theoretical issues in this project.

Defining and measuring discrimination in non-sporting environments.

Chung (2001) defines work discrimination as "unfair and negative treatment of workers or job applicants based on personal attributes that are irrelevant to job performance" (p. 34). Van Hoye and Lievens (2003) note that sexual orientation discrimination is fundamentally different from other forms of workplace discrimination. They argue that sexual orientation "represents a non-observable or underlying type of diversity, as opposed to more visible characteristics such as race or gender…this is because gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees can generally choose to what extent they disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace" (p. 16). This unique feature of sexual identity discrimination makes the measurement of discrimination difficult to ascertain. It also makes it difficult for the victims of such discrimination to know with certainty whether or not their experiences were based on sexual identity.

Leonard (2003) argues that gay and lesbian employees have undergone a "partial revolution over the past half-century: A revolution because that status [as gay or lesbian] has been significantly transformed, but only a partial one because in many parts of the country there remains no statutory legal redress for overt discrimination against sexual minorities in the private sector workplace. In addition, enforcement of nondiscrimination guarantees remains uneven" (p. 14). While there is a federal law that prohibits sexual orientation discrimination in federal employment (which passed in 1999), there is no federal ban on sexual orientation discrimination in the private sector. Leonard (2003) notes, "so long as there is no express federal statutory ban on employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, the legal status of sexual minority workers in America remains complicated, being a patchwork of constitutional case law, state and local statutes and ordinances, and contracts and torts case law developments" (p. 14). And while many corporations have adopted nondiscrimination policies,

case law has not universally supported those policies as contractually binding[6]. The result is that workplace discrimination continues to exist for lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees. For example, Degges-White and Shoffner (2002) report that lesbian women report earnings 5% to 14% less than the national average for women (p. 87). Ragins and Cornwell (2001) suggest that these formal policy protections (or lack thereof) have significant impact on employees' perceptions of discrimination. They note, "gay employees were more likely to report discrimination when employed in groups that were primarily heterosexual and in organizations that lacked supportive policies and were not covered by protective legislation" (p. 1244). Supportive formal policies, whether employees utilize them or not, affect their perception of their work environment.

Chung (2001) proposes an important three-dimensional model for understanding workplace discrimination. His analysis is critical because it provides depth to the concept of discrimination—individuals do not experience discrimination in a linear, clear-cut fashion. Intent, perception, and action all matter to both the measurement and the experience of discrimination. Chung distinguishes between *formal* and *informal* discrimination (institutional policy vs. interpersonal dynamics), *potential* and *encountered* discrimination (possible reactions vs. actual experiences), and *perceived* and *actual* discrimination. Perceived discrimination is the extent to which an individual determines whether the action of their employer is based on their identity categories. Real discrimination is the actual discriminatory practices within the opportunity structure against gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees. Chung (2001) notes, "people can only react according to their perceptions, so perceived discrimination (as opposed to real

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[6] Leonard (2003) reports that "a substantial majority of the largest corporate employers have nondiscrimination policies that cover sexual orientation. The Human Rights Campaign (2005) reports that 51% of Fortune 500 companies offer domestic partner benefits and 86% include sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination policies.

discrimination) is the principal factor operating in a person's decisions regarding coping strategies" (p. 36).

Chung's (2001) analysis is critical to measuring discrimination. It suggests that empirical data providing percentages of workplace discrimination may be measuring entirely different dimensions of discrimination, thus problemetizing comparisons between studies. Additionally, individual experiences of workplace discrimination can be enacted, encountered, and processed differently based on this complex model. Discrimination can be formal or informal, potential or encountered, and perceived or actual—and any combination of these factors. Therefore, the strategies utilized by non-heteronormative employees can differ wildly based on each individual experience and interpretation of discrimination.

The most recent literature on anti-gay workplace discrimination suggests that there has been progress, although the changes are not completely straightforward. Giuffre, Dellinger and Williams (2008) argue that gay men and lesbians are gaining more acceptance in the workplace. However, this acceptance is tempered a bit by what Guiffre et al. call an "incomplete" transformation. Their participants, while reporting mostly positive work environments, still "discuss evidence of stereotyping, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination in their work experiences" (p. 255). Although change is occurring, it is not occurring in a linear, progressive fashion.

Discrimination in sport.

While Chung's (2001) three-dimensional model in understanding discrimination is useful and can be applied to professional sport as a workplace institution, it does not address the persistent sexual prejudice and potential for discrimination in the sporting environment itself.

Anderson (2002), Rotella and Murray (1991), Muir and Seitz (2004), Baird (2002), Bredemeier et al. (1999), Griffin (1998), and Higgs and Schell (1998) all discuss the environment of professional or collegiate sports as having a particularly homophobic and oppressive dynamic which encourages employees to develop strategies to deal with the work environment.

Wolf-Wendel, Toma and Morphew (2003) bluntly state, "athletes and coaches are overwhelmingly homophobic and heterosexist" (p. 466). Interestingly, they point out that one of the features of masculinist team sports is to encourage "progressive conceptualizations of other forms of difference…[such as] race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sometimes gender" (p. 466). Yet, participants of team sports were often more likely to be homophobic. Wolf-Wendel and colleagues (2003) note, "the bottom line was that as progressive and successful as people in athletics are in building community from diverse groups in terms of race, ethnicity, geography, socioeconomic status, and so on, they lagged considerably in creating a supportive environment for gay men and lesbians on their teams[7]" (p. 470). Ultimately, the authors determine that it is a particular feature of team sports that discourages identity formation in general in order to promote team cohesion. They note, "the emphasis on team, cooperation, and community may retard student-athletes from developing their own sense of identity as separate individuals" (p. 476).

Beane (2003) argues that there are fundamental structural homophobic issues within professional sports. He notes, "these [gay, closeted] men and women need our support. Yet few in a position of power in baseball have bothered to step forward on their behalf. And there is no formal, league-wide policy protecting them from bias and bigoted mistreatment, and [the Commissioner] and his offices have largely been silent on the matter" (p. 250). An examination

[7] Certainly this is not to imply that racial and class discrimination no longer exist in sport. Additionally, there are significant differences between team and individual sports in terms of the emphasis on team-building and identity development.

into the hiring practices of the four major professional leagues in this country (Major League Baseball, the National Football League, the National Basketball Association, and the National Hockey League) reveals that only the NFL *advertises* that sexual orientation is a protected status in their non-discrimination policy, although MLB and the NBA have confirmed it is a protected status in their organization. The NHL has not responded with confirmation[8]. Additionally, at the college level the NCAA has added sexual orientation to the nondiscrimination clause in their charter (Wolf-Wendel et al. 2003). Yet it is interesting that the NFL, NBA and MLB *voluntarily* include sexual orientation, as it is not a requirement of federal law. This reveals subtle distinctions between formal and informal discrimination—on paper, professional leagues may appear to be nondiscriminatory, perhaps even welcoming, to non-heteronormative employees. However, the experiences of actual employees may reflect a different narrative. The NCAA charter promotes inclusiveness, but is not legally binding at individual universities, where campus-wide policy, city, or state law often overrides the NCAA charter.

Both Anderson (2002) and Muir and Seitz (2004) note that homophobia is entrenched in the institution of sports. Muir and Seitz (2004) state that "concepts of homophobia, misogyny, and machismo are salient ideologies embedded within male collegiate athletic subcultures" (p. 305). They focus on institutionalized homophobia within collegiate rugby, and find that the intersections between homophobia, machismo, and misogyny have particular consequences for reifying homophobia. Anderson (2002) notes that one of the features of the embeddedness of homophobia in sport is the normalization of homophobic language. He notes, "the transformative potential of gay athletes in sport is neutralized through potentially overt homophobia and also through covert mechanisms, such as the normalization of homophobic

[8] The Commissioner's Office of MLB confirmed in a phone call that sexual orientation is a protected status; participants who work for the NBA confirmed that sexual orientation was protected at their workplace.

language and the silencing of gay discourse, identity, and behaviors" (p. 863). Homophobia was part of the fabric of athletic institutions, partly because of this use of homophobic language such as "sissy" and "fag" as normal.

Implicit in this idea is the concept of silencing gay voices. Bredemeier and colleagues (1999) discuss the idea of the "code of invisibility" for lesbian coaches. They note, "one of the places the code of invisibility was strongest was in women's departments of physical education—whether you were a student, a coach, or a teacher" (p. 428). Lesbian coaches help reinforce this code by what Plymire and Foreman (2001) call "establishing normalcy." They note, "the constant struggle to establish 'normalcy' strains athletes, coaches, and administrators who may never be allowed to let down their guard and/or who may be accused of lesbianism despite their efforts to conform" (p. 3). This silencing of lesbian and gay voices helps contribute to the embeddedness of heterosexism and homophobia in sports. Hekma (1998) suggests that as long as gay people in sport stay silent, they actually "do not experience much discrimination" (p. 1). Hekma suggests that the visibility of lesbians has led to high levels of discrimination, but that gay men don't experience much overt discrimination because of their invisibility.

Higgs and Schell (1998) elaborate on informal forms of discrimination in the sport workplace. They discuss interaction between heterosexual and homosexual employees. They argue, "for lesbians, the workplace may be considered an 'out of group' environment where underlying tensions exist between the 'normals' and the stigmatized. Although tolerance of a lesbian's presence may be attainable, unconditional acceptance by the 'in group' generally is not possible" (p. 67). Rotella and Murray (1991) explain the distance between gay and straight teammates and employees as being inherent in the structure of sports, arguing that the "intense emotional involvements, closeness with team members, and many hours spent together in a

common experience" (p. 359) in sport lend towards self-segregation between gay and straight athletes. Essentially, researchers argue that the emphasis on emotion, togetherness, and teamwork within sport creates an environment where homophobia is "naturally" embedded within it. This is a similar justification for the continuation of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy in the United States military.

The most recent evidence suggests that the overwhelmingly homophobic atmosphere in sports is changing. Anderson (2009) argues that "university-attending men are rapidly running from the hegemonic type of masculinity that scholars have been describing for the past 25 years" (p. 4). He describes a shift, particularly among college-aged heterosexual male athletes, away from a culture of homophobia (and what he calls "homohysteria"—the combination of a culture of homophobia, femphobia, and compulsory heterosexuality) and towards more fluidity of sexuality. Anderson argues that these men no longer support homophobic dialogue and discourse in sport, and pass this notion down informally, from incoming class to incoming class.

Although the majority of the literature on homophobia and sport focuses on athletes, there is some literature that addresses the experiences of coaches (see Griffin 1998, 1999). There has been limited research done on lesbian and gay issues for athletic trainers (Mauer-Starks, Clemmons, and Whalen 2008). Beyond this, there has been virtually no other literature on sport employees. Griffin argues that lesbian college coaches have a continuum of "identity management strategies" in order to negotiate the unfriendly terrain in athletic departments. Rotella and Murray (1991) note that this experience for gay college coaches is particularly agonizing.

> Coaches who are homosexual commonly live in fear of being discovered. They fear that once an athletic director "knows," they will be fired. Even if the outcome is not termination, there is concern that the coach will lose personal, financial, and promotional support from his or her institution (p. 357).

While Rotella and Murray are discussing both gay male coaches and lesbian coaches, most of the research has focused only on the experiences of lesbian coaches. Muska (2000) points out that it was lesbian coaches who came out to him after the publicity surrounding his hiring as an openly gay athletic director, not gay male employees. He noted, "the *Chronicle* article brought me unwanted notoriety, but I have it to thank for something else. I started to receive e-mail messages and mail at Oberlin: letters and notes from closeted administrators and coaches (*mostly female*) throughout the country" (p. 66, emphasis added). Certainly gay men and lesbians experience discrimination differently and discrimination is enacted for enacted for different reasons. Historically, the institution of sport has both been hostile to sexual minorities and to women. Therefore, gay men still are in an environment that privileges their status as male. Lesbians are a double minority in that they are already stigmatized because of their status as women in a male-dominated environment. However, that stigmatized identity includes the stereotype that most female athletes are lesbians (Griffin 1992, 1998), which ironically may make it easier for some lesbians to come out, because they are not challenging stereotypes in the same way that a gay male athletes or coaches do.

Baird (2002) notes that lesbian coaches are in a particularly problematic position in attempting to advance on the corporate ladder within sports. She states, "the road to a coaching or leadership position for women generally begins with a successful athletic career. The harmful Catch-22 is that the characteristics that lead to success in the athletic arena (such as aggressiveness) are the same characteristics that can ultimately lead to stereotyping and discrimination [in hiring decisions]" (p. 35). Women in athletic careers, regardless of their sexual orientation, have to police the boundaries of acceptable behavior in order to succeed in the masculinist, homophobic area of professional sports.

A final point about discrimination and homophobia in the sport workplace: most of the studies on the topic are qualitative, focusing primarily on the experiences of lesbian and gay employees and their *perceptions* of discrimination. As Van Hoye and Lievens (2003) note, there does not seem to be quantitative support to back up at least the *overt* forms of discrimination such as hiring practices. They did not study the more informal means by which a hostile work environment is experienced by gay and lesbian employees. However, Anderson (2002) points out that the gay male athletes in his sample actually spoke positively about their experiences on predominantly heterosexual teams, even when they later disclosed homophobic incidents and homophobic language. Anderson noted that "these athletes seemed to compare themselves to those who had it worse" (p. 868). Both of the aforementioned scholars illustrate the difficulty in measuring the existence of discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees in any workplace, including the sporting environment.

The literature on workplace discrimination reveals a complex matrix of issues. It becomes difficult to quantify and measure discrimination based on potentially hidden identities. Furthermore, it makes the experience of discrimination confusing for the victims of such discrimination, especially if they have multiple stigmatized identities on the basis of race, sex, gender, and sexual identity.

Strategies Used By Gay and Lesbian Employees

A third theme in the literature focused on the strategies that gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees utilize in the workplace to combat homophobia and discrimination. While much of the research has focused on "outing" as a political strategy to promote tolerance (including Anderson 2002; Bredemeier et al. 1999; Chung 2001; Griffin 1998; Plymire and Forman 2001;

Rotella and Murray 1991; and Waitt 2003), other researchers such as Iannotta and Kane (2003) have critiqued this as privileging only one strategy for social change. Ultimately, four particular strategies emerged from the literature: legal redress, staying hidden or in the closet, coming out or disclosing non-heteronormative sexual identity, and presenting a consciously calculated gender and sexual identity.

Legal measures.

While many corporations are expanding their antidiscrimination policies to incorporate sexual orientation (and to a lesser extent, gender identity), the legal status of sexual minority employees remains complex. With local and state laws differing wildly between municipalities, and federal law stopping short of providing any real protection in the private sector, the legal status of non-heteronormative employees is unclear. Leonard (2003) argues that "enforcement of nondiscrimination guarantees remains uneven" (p. 14). It is understandable that employees who feel victimized on the basis of sexual orientation are hesitant to pursue legal options in a system that doesn't recognize them in the first place.

Baird (2000) discusses case law and court decisions that impact the ability for athletes and coaches to combat homophobia in intercollegiate athletics, particularly through Title VII the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, which argues that individuals may not be discriminated against on the basis of sex. Interestingly, in court cases where individuals have alleged homophobia vis a vis gender discrimination (such as in *Higgins v. New Balance Athletic Shoe,Inc.* and *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*) they have largely been successful in challenging discrimination. Ultimately, the courts have said that when masculine women or feminine men are discriminated against in the workplace, there is legal recourse via Title VII. While this is an important gain, it

provides no recourse to feminine lesbians or masculine gay men because of its focus only on discrimination based on non gender normative behavior. The lack of any federal law that protects individuals from sexual orientation discrimination continues to be problematic when employees seek legal redress. Additionally, Leonard (2003) argues, "it is likely that a majority of the nation's workforce lives or works in places where there is some form of statutory protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation" (p. 15). Yet the legal options for fighting discrimination, on a federal, state, and local level remain complicated and by no means guaranteed.

Staying in the closet.

Another strategy for dealing with discrimination involves staying hidden or "in the closet" about a non-heteronormative lifestyle. Parrenas (1998) writes in a column about her decision to stay closeted at work,

> I'm quite proud of my queerness. My sexual identity has a strong political edge in that I feel I have the right to hold my partner's hand the way heterosexuals do whenever we want to. I conscientiously try to liberate myself from heterosexual constraints of sexuality: from heterosexist ideals of marriage to orthodox sexual practices. When it comes to my queerness, I thought I could never contentiously hide and suppress my identity… The concept of eviction erased that idea from my head. I did not want to face job discrimination and not get a job because I literally couldn't afford to. I couldn't risk not getting hired because of my sexual orientation (p. 21).

Researchers who highlighted staying in the closet as a strategy argued for the practical nature of staying closeted on a personal level, rather than fighting the total structure of discrimination (even as they may have noted the benefits to coming out of the closet in the name of creating a safer work environments). They stressed the importance of personal safety—both physical and psychological—in utilizing the strategy of coming out to deal with homophobic discrimination.

Griffin (1998) recalls her own experiences as a high school and college coach. She notes, "Many lesbian coaches and athletes accept as fact that being publicly out and being in athletics are entirely incompatible… I would never have considered revealing my identity to anyone else in the athletic department. *Being a coach was too important to me*, and I did not want to forfeit the opportunity to do work I love" (p. 134 emphasis added). She goes on to argue that there is a deep structural root to the idea that it is "safe" to stay in the closet. "Given the overt hostility or conditional tolerance of many athletic departments, this belief is not merely a reflection of individual lesbian athletes' and coaches' internalized homophobia. There are real risks involved in revealing one's lesbian identity in athletics, and significant social pressures support the hostility and conditional tolerance most lesbians in sport face" (p. 134). From her own experiences and through interviews with other lesbian college coaches, Griffin develops a "continuum of identity management strategies," for lesbian and gay teachers, which include (at one end) being completely closeted, passing as heterosexual, and covering one's lesbian identity[9].

Henderson (1995) argues that gay employees generally use three strategies in dealing with potential workplace discrimination: staying in the closet or hiding, coming out or integrating, or avoidance of the issue entirely. In environments where the workplace was particularly hostile to non-heteronormative sexual identity (such as elementary schools), she notes that employees "formed subcultures where this prejudice was not an issue and worked to eliminate discrimination in other areas of society, such as related to feminist issues" (p. 150). In

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[9] Griffin (1998) includes six identity-management strategies in the continuum: 1) Completely closeted—concealing lesbian identity from all in athletic context. 2) Passing as heterosexual—intentionally leading selected others in athletic context to see self as heterosexual. 3) Covering lesbian identity—concealing lesbian identity from selected others in athletic context. 4) Implicitly out—allowing selected others in athletic context to see self as lesbian without naming self. 5) Explicitly out—intentionally revealing lesbian identity to selected others in athletic context and 6) Publicly out—revealing lesbian identity to everyone in athletic context. (p. 135)

these environments, "most lesbians stayed closeted or at least partially closeted to shield themselves from discrimination" (p. 150). Chung (2001) concurs, and notes "most lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons try to avoid discrimination by…[among other things] remaining mostly closeted in their job by using appropriate identity management strategies" (p. 40).

Degges-White and Shoffner (2002) also validate the idea that it can make sense at times to stay in the closet. They argue, "with very real threats to economic and physical survival, it seems that a lesbian would have strong reasons for maintaining secrecy regarding her sexual orientation. Conversely, using the high amount of energy required to accomplish this may interfere with job performance and satisfaction and may stall career development and advancement" (p. 87). This ends up being a Catch-22—they stay in the closet because it would hurt their career opportunities by coming out, yet the energy it takes to remain closeted can result in a poor job performance. Degges-White and Shoffner (2002) even argue that it may be *beneficial* for some lesbians to stay in the closet. They note, "individuals who were not completely open…about their sexual identity at work were more satisfied with their incomes and generally had higher incomes than those individuals who disclosed sexual orientation to employers and coworkers" (p. 89). However, this may be anecdotal; it was not a major theme in the literature on work discrimination.

Staying closeted generally involved omission of private life details, rather than outright hiding or lying. Higgs and Schell (1998) utilize Goffman's "front stage, backstage" analogy. They note, "one mechanism often used by closeted lesbians to appear normal [sic] in their work situation involves creating and maintaining a personal front that does not call attention to her true sexual identity" (p. 67). The main way in which lesbians stayed closeted at work was through this omission of personal details. They note, "gay women feared reprisals for acknowledging

their sexual preference, therefore many (78%) neither discuss their private lives at work nor display personal mementos, i.e. pictures of a lesbian partner" (p. 70). This process was part of a strategy to avoid work discrimination, but was also part of a larger degree of self-monitoring behaviors. Higgs and Schell (1998) note, "in addition to managing their work role by remaining silent about their sexual identity, the lesbians in this study refused to display visual symbols that contradicted or indicated their true selves because they believed such personal exhibits were inappropriate" (p. 74).

Anderson (2002) noted this strategy of self-silencing by gay athletes as well. Individuals were reacting to threats of discrimination, or potential perceived discrimination, prior to any real experiences of discrimination. Degges-White and Schoffner (2002) argue that discrimination and perceived discrimination can have similar effects on job performance. "Perceived discrimination can foster a sense of helplessness in an employee. This can be intensified for lesbians who work in settings in which discrimination is not legally prohibited" (p. 89).

Degges-White and Shoffner (2002) note that for some lesbians, staying in the closet is simply the best strategy to get along in the workplace. They note, "acceptance of formal discrimination is a choice many lesbians may willingly make in order to follow their chosen career path when the reinforcement values for continued employment are significant" (p. 91). For some, it is just not worth the risk to challenge social norms—the possibility of discrimination or the likelihood of losing one's job is more significant than the potential positive consequences to coming out of the closet. Sykes (1998) suggests that while the closet has "featured prominently in women's physical education" (p. 154), the rigidity of the in/out silence/speech boundaries have shifted, thus leaving space for social change potential from inside the closet.

Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger (2009) concur, suggesting that for some employees who decide between acceptance and visibility, the closet can actually be "gay-friendly."

Griffin (1998) makes a final point about closeted employees. She argues that it is problematic to assume that everyone in the closet is in fear of being more open. "Some very successful coaches and athletes who either cover their lesbian identities or are implicitly out are comfortable with the compromises they have made. Many would not even agree that they have made compromises. They do not feel a need to be more open about who they are" (p. 154-5). This is a significant point regarding closeted employees. Yet, research on work discrimination advances the idea that coming out is the likely and probable target for non-heteronormative closeted athletes (and employees).

Coming out/disclosing sexual identity.

By far the most popular strategy for dealing with discrimination that is advanced in the literature is coming out of the closet, or disclosing a non-heteronormative sexual identity in the workplace. Researchers overwhelmingly suggest that coming out is imperative to create social change around issues of sexual identity in the workplace (Bredemeir et al. 1999; Carroll and Gilroy 2001; Chung 2001; Degges-White and Shoffner 2002; Gough 2007; Griffith and Hebl 2002; Griffin 1998; Henderson 1995; Pitts 1997; Ragins, Singh and Cornwell 2007; Rees-Turyn 2007; Ward and Winstanley 2005; and Wolf-Wendel et al. 2001). This follows the "contact hypothesis"; the idea that exposure to diversity will help reduce prejudice (Allport 1954). Wolf-Wendel and colleagues (2001) argue that the case of gay athletes supports the contact hypothesis, which historically was offered as an argument toward racial integration. They note, "because of exposure, participants in team sports become less homophobic if someone on the team comes

out" (p. 473). While this is not the only strategy that is important in creating an environment where all sexual identity is valued, the argument is often that it is the *most* important and the most effective.

Henderson (1995) notes that much of the literature on anti-gay discrimination focuses on the existence of discrimination and not on the conditions under which individuals choose to come out or not come out of the closet. She notes, "few researchers have examined work sociality or the workplace conditions under which lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are willing to make their sexual orientation know. People in almost all work settings assume heterosexuality is an extended aspect of the relations and socioemotional climate of the workplace" (p. 149). While many researchers have focused on the process of coming out, not many have focused on what work atmospheres increase the likelihood of staying in the closet or coming out. While it stands to reason that openly hostile environments, or environments that enforce traditional gender norms, would create settings where employees are less likely to come out, there is not a lot of research that reinforces this point.

Still, researchers continue to reinforce the notion that coming out is the only way to create social change in the workplace. Degges-White and Shoffner (2002) note, "lesbians must determine the most efficacious strategy for career advancement while balancing the importance of "outness" on the job against the potential negative consequences" (p. 88). For Bredemeier and colleagues (1999), coming out is vital to creating social change and dealing with anti-gay discrimination. Employees who remain in the closet are hiding parts of their "authentic" selves. They argue, "for us, being authentic means having your sexual identity be part of your acknowledged identity" (p. 425). They discuss coming out as an issue of honesty or dishonesty, a word choice that ultimately has moral connotations. This desire for honesty creates a dynamic

in which lesbians feel tension between their personal and social identities. They note, "honestly identifying as a lesbian on a personal level contrasted with the need to be dishonest with others, creating boundaries that restricted our co-participants' engagement with others" (p. 424). Bredemeier and colleagues suggest that coming out of the closet is not only the *best* way to combat homophobia and workplace discrimination, but ultimately a moral issue of honesty in the workplace.

Griffin (1998) has written extensively on the identity management strategies of lesbians involved in physical education and sport, focusing particularly on lesbian coaches and athletic directors. She argues that there is a continuum of identity management strategies ranging from (at one end) being completely closeted and (at the other end) being publicly out. This continuum makes it clear that Griffin favors the benefits of being out as the ultimate step in identity performance. She makes a distinction between being "implicitly, explicitly, or publicly" out. Implicit outness is a management strategy that involves presenting a targeted or purposeful version of one's identity, and will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. Explicit outness involves "directly telling selected others that they are [lesbian, gay, bisexual]" (p. 143). Griffin (1998) notes, "for many lesbians [being explicitly out] is an important step because there is no returning to passing, covering, or being implicitly out once the line that separates direct disclosure from the other strategies is crossed" (p. 143). Clearly, this concept of outness treats sexual identity as a concrete variable that can not be "taken back" once someone comes out of the closet.

Griffin's final step in the continuum of identity management is being "publicly out," which she defines as "revealing lesbian identity to everyone in athletic context" (p. 135). While Griffin notes that "few lesbians fit into either of the two extreme ends of the continuum" (p.

135), she does treat the continuum as the progressive linear model that most lesbians in sport follow—beginning with completely closeted and working towards steps of coming out of the closet. Griffin, like Bredemeir and colleagues (1999), considers coming out of the closet and "living openly" an important step towards integrity and honesty.

Chung (2001) builds on Griffin's ideas when discussing "coping strategies" for gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees. He argues that coping strategies are categorized in two ways: vocational choice (or self-selection of career paths) and work adjustment. For Chung, the five stages of work adjustment include acting, passing, covering, being implicitly out, and being explicitly out. He notes, "the five identity management strategies follow a progressive order, from being totally closeted to publicly out, *from dishonesty to integrity*, and from separation of personal and professional lives to integration of both aspects" (p. 39, emphasis added). It is clear that Chung favors the same continuum—and moving along to the "out" end of the continuum is a matter of integrity.

Finally, Degges-White and Shoffer (2002) support the integrity concept—that coming out is the honest thing to do. In their study focusing on the work discrimination experiences of lesbians, they note "lesbians who choose to come out on the job, and face the possibility of negative consequences…have attached a high reinforcement value to the need to be open about their sexuality. Coming out and being honest about sexual orientation may be valued as the morally correct choice or it may meet a lesbian's need for recognition of her true self on the job" (p. 90). This idea suggests that it is not simply researchers who are placing a value of honesty and integrity on coming out—it may be a value that is reinforced by gay men and lesbians themselves—at least those who did come out on the job.

Presenting identity.

A final strategy for dealing with antigay discrimination involved consciously manipulating the presentation of identity to adapt to the workplace surroundings. Wait (2003) discusses how a "safe space" such as the Gay Games offers a site by which performance of identity is highlighted. He notes, "Gay Games' participants are actively choosing to perform their identities in ways they see as challenging to heteronormativity' (p. 169). In this type of setting, bodies are a political entity. Wait notes, " [participants] read participating bodies as sites of community resistance, producing queer spaces, which may help to destabilize unarticulated norms by trespassing on territory that is taken for granted as commonly asexual and whose participants are assumed to be heterosexual" (p. 180). For Wait, participants of the Gay Games used an activity (sport) and a place (an Olympics-type atmosphere) to challenge traditional norms about heterosexuality and sport. It some instances, participants relied on an exaggerated queerness to challenge these norms—contesting and deconstructing commonly held assumptions about sport.

For others, the best way to negotiate a workplace was to consciously present an image that does not reinforce stereotypes about homosexuality. Williams et al. (2009) argue that gay workers "either were compelled to downplay their homosexuality at work or were constrained by stereotypes about how LGB people were expected to look, act, and work" (p. 29). This led their participants to have to decide between acceptance and visibility in the workplace.

The idea of presenting an identity is similar to what Goffman (1963) terms "informational control." He notes, "the issue is not that of managing information about his [sic] failing. To display or not display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where" (p. 42). Social information about identity

is communicated though various symbols, and Goffman argues that people go through various steps to maintain invisibility of certain symbols. These strategies include "passing," disclosing to select others, and managing the visual symbols that represent an identity marker. In some cases, even, this informational control can include consciously manipulating symbols to suggest a different, more "normal [sic]" identity. Gay sport employees, then, engage in various actions of informational control to manage their identities at work.

Chung (2001) points out that, for some employees, sexual orientation simply isn't the main factor they consider as part of their identity performance. He notes, "still others consider additional factors (e.g. interests, prestige, earnings) more important than sexual orientation in making career choices" (p. 38). For heterosexuals, their sexual identity is only a minute part of how they present themselves. Chung argues that it is possible for the same to be true for gays and lesbians, although less likely due to the marginalized status of their sexual identities. Toren (1999) offers a similar analysis in her discussion of women and immigrants in the workplace. She notes that often individuals have a vast selection of identities to choose from in the workplace. She argues, "women in academia, like immigrants and other minority groups, have a repertoire of identities to choose from and may present one or the other in different situations and for different purposes. They can emphasize their identity [sic] as scientists and scholars, or their gender and sexuality (although the latter is usually frowned upon)" (p. 80). This process of constructing a conscious and particular identity to present in the workplace is a common and valid strategy for existing in a hostile work environment.

Griffin (1998) also concurs that many lesbian coaches go through a conscious process of identity performance, though she still argues that those who are not out or working towards outness are "hiding" or "lying" about their true selves. She notes,

> Consequently, many lesbian coaches and administrators are constantly assessing and monitoring how to present themselves depending on who they are and where they are. Most lesbian coaches and administrators are always vigilant, assessing subtle changes in colleagues' or athletes' behavior: Do they suspect? Can I tell them? I know they know, but can I actually tell them? The energy required to maintain this constant vigilance is enormous. The deception and secrecy required to hide or camouflage one's identity is debilitating. Managing this constant vigilance becomes part of the everyday experience of coaching for most lesbians, and the energy used to maintain this vigilance is diverted from attention to athletes and coaching and can affect a coach's relationships with everyone in athletics. Sometimes lesbian coaches are perceived as aloof or lacking spontaneity because they are diverting so much energy into monitoring the reactions of others and protecting themselves from potential exposure (p. 137).

While for Griffin there is not a very distinct line between consciously presenting forms of identity and staying in the closet, others note that identity performance is complex, shifting, and displayed in multiple ways. Higgs and Schell (1998) note that, "similar to stigmatized women athletes, employed heterosexual and homosexual women who fear being termed 'lesbian' knowingly (or unconsciously) manipulate their social and personal situations to abide by society's notion of gender-appropriate behavior" (p. 65). Rather than denying closeted women agency, like Griffin is wont to do, Higgs and Schell note that identity performance as a strategy to reduce discrimination can be a very conscious and important choice that employees make.

Toren (1999) argues that newcomers (such as women in a male-dominated sphere) have two choices: maintain their identity, or assimilate to the larger culture. She notes, "from their own point of view, newcomers are confronted with the dilemma of whether or not to be like the dominant majority, that is, to give up their identity and accept the prevailing values, norms, and modes of conduct of the new environment, or to preserve their own cultural traditions and particular identity" (p. 87). For Toren, it is a dichotomous system in which you can either present a conscious assimilated identity, or keep and maintain a different identity from the

mainstream. Scholars challenge this idea that identity exists on an either/or continuum, and that you can only perform one type of identity at a time.

Iannotta and Kate (2002) provide by far the most detailed critique of the "identity management continuum" advanced by Griffin (1998), Chung (2001), and others. They note that "previous research has routinely privileged coming out and being out linguistically—by this we mean an overt, public acknowledgement of one's sexual identity—as the most (if not the only) effective way to create inclusive and tolerant climates, while simultaneously marginalizing other, more subtle forms of identity performance" (p. 349). Iannotta and Kane are particularly critical of what they call the "linear model of outness as a step-by-step process" (p. 352). Unlike the performance continuum, they argue that there are many strategies to challenge a heteronormative work environment. They note, "we suggest there are multiple ways individuals can come out and be out—some of which emphasize linguistic strategies, while others involve nonlinguistic approaches one might interpret as 'acting queer' even if one is not *talking* about being queer" (p. 349).

What Iannotta and Kane find particularly problematic about the linear model of outness is that it is a model that treats closeted individuals as victims. They argue,

> Researchers may interpret the personal narratives of these 'less out' individuals as being in the grips of, and victimized by, homophobic forces. Within this particular framework, one could easily overlook acts of resistance by these 'non-out' lesbians…[the linear model] also assumes that all lesbians begin their process of identity formation from a place of powerlessness and self-loathing—in other words, a state of predetermined victimization (p. 352).

Iannotta and Kate (2002) instead argue for an acknowledgement that identity processes are complex and shifting, and recognition of the fact that identity can be fluid. Furthermore, there is a multiplicity of ways that lesbians and gay men can challenge social norms in the workplace environment. Ravel and Rail (2008) concur, noting that in keeping with queer theory, "the

heterosexual/homosexual binary, the idea of a fixed sexuality, and the linearity of the coming out process" (p. 4) is a problematic way to look at lesbian experiences in sport.

Iannotta and Kane cite Sedgewick's (1990) idea that "silence *is* a speech act, and what we do not say is equally important, and telling, as what we do" (p. 363). Silence around one's sexual identity can be a conscious strategy as well. They note, "[participants'] sexual stories revealed the complex and contextualized nature surrounding strategies of silence, as well as the intriguing possibilities open to scholars wishing to unravel such strategies" (p. 363). Openness does not only include a pronouncement of one's sexual identity—if that were true than countless heterosexuals could potentially be read as "hiding" their sexual identity by their unwillingness to openly discuss details of their lives in the workplace.

Finally, Iannotta and Kane (2002) argue for the concept of what they call "radical normalization." They define this as "the accumulated effect of various strategies of coming and being out that, in turn, help create a cultural space which normalizes queer sexualities and undermines heterosexuality" (p. 364). This process of radical normalization "shifts athletes' images of what behaviors are 'normal' and creates a social norm of inclusion that is self-perpetuating" (p. 365). Multiple strategies exist for challenging workplace discrimination or hostile work environments, and Iannotta and Kane argue that silence has been overlooked and discussed only as a victimization strategy. They conclude,

> Lesbian coaches use a multiplicity of strategies when engaged in performance of sexual identity. As we have seen, these strategies are non-linear, fluid, and contextualized. As we have also seen, the notion and performance of 'silence' where a coach has not explicitly named herself as a lesbian, but who engages in other types of nonlinguistic actions that clearly mark her sexual identity—is also extremely important for scholars to recognize (p. 366).

Overall, the literature suggests many strategies for addressing antigay discrimination in the workplace. These strategies can include legal redress through the court system, consciously

staying in the closet (or what some would call "hiding"), coming out of the closet to challenge others' views, or presenting multiple identities as the situation warrants. The focus of this research, then, will address the complicated toolkit of strategies (Swindler, 1986) that employees in professional sport utilize to confront working in a historically hostile environment.

Theoretical Perspectives

This project utilizes multiple theoretical perspectives, but emphasizes a symbolic interactionist framework. Focusing particularly on the process of meaning-making within the institution of sport, I am interested in how employees interpret their experiences in the workplace, and therefore use a symbolic interaction framework, which includes a reliance upon cognitive sociology to examine the interpretations that employees use at work. In addition to this framework, I utilize specific elements of queer theory to focus on the construction (and deconstruction) of identities and labels, specifically the ways in which elements of identity are performative (Butler 1990), and finally, the relationship between individuals' sense of self and society. As part of queer theory, I incorporate post-closet discourse to examine the process that individuals use to "come out," or to emphasize and/or deemphasize their sexual identity at work.

Symbolic Interaction and Cognitive Sociology

One of the central questions in this project is the process by which individuals negotiate both their understanding of identity and their presentation of their identity in an environment that is hostile to non-heteronormative sexual behaviors. This process does not necessarily take place in a progressive, unidimensional, linear fashion. Rather, constructions and performance of identity are often subtle, covert, and nuanced. A symbolic interaction framework helps analyze

those subtle processes. Blumer (1969) notes that the symbolic interaction perspective has three fundamental assumptions: 1) "that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them," 2) "that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows," and 3) "that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [sic] encounters" (p. 2). Snow (2001) expands upon Blumer's assumptions, suggesting four principles of symbolic interaction, including interactive determination, symbolization, emergence, and human agency. The first two are particularly useful for this project. Interactive determination involves the "interactional contexts or webs of relationships in which they are ensnared or embedded" (p. 369). As part of this idea, Snow discusses the idea of anticipatory strategic action. He discusses this idea specifically relating to social movements. "In anticipation of the possibility of negative and repressive responses of external groupings, some movements strategically engage in lines of action aimed at generating a positive public image and securing expanded elbow room in which to operate" (p. 369). In this project, I examine how employees perceive the sport environment, and how their actions are impacted by their perceptions. At times, their behaviors are anticipatory strategic actions based upon their impressions of sport for sexual minorities.

Snow (2001) also discusses the concept of symbolization. In doing so, he goes beyond Blumer's (1969) suggestion that meanings are interpretive, and notes "symbols and the meanings they convey are often, perhaps routinely, embedded in and reflective of existing cultural and organizational contexts and systems of meaning" (p. 371). He suggests that it is more complicated than simply focusing on the negotiation and construction of meaning, but rather that "the issue of meaning and interpretation…has both structural and constructionist dimensions" (p.

372). He argues that the ways in which individuals interpret their social world is at least partially embedded in the structure of institutions.

Using the symbolic interaction perspective, this research explores the subtle processes and experiences of participants to understand the institution of sport as a whole. Both Goffman's (1959, 1963) *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and *Stigma* are foundational texts for the theoretical background of this project, the latter focusing on how stigmatized persons manage precarious social identities and the strategies that they employ to do so.

In *Stigma*, Goffman (1963) references a concept he calls the "own" and the "wise." He notes, "I have considered one set of individuals from whom the stigmatized person can expect some support: those who share his [sic] stigma and by virtue of this are defined and define themselves as his own kind. The second set are… 'the wise,' namely, persons who are normal [sic] but whose special situation have made them intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it" (p. 28). This concept is particularly useful in understanding the intricacies of the social networks of closeted employees. How do individuals determine who is one of their "own," and how do they determine who is "wise" (or who represents a "safe space")? As employees navigate subtleties around their own presentation of self, how do they determine the relative safety of their actions?

Goffman (1959) examines the ways in which individuals construct meaning in their surroundings and also the ways they choose to present themselves to the world. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* he suggests that an individual's behavior is divided into front-stage and back-stage performances. Front-stage interaction is the "performance" where individuals present a particular impression of themselves—where aspects of behavior are "expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are

suppressed" (p. 111). However, there is another region of behavior—the back region, or backstage, "where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (p. 112). The backstage is a place where employees can consciously construct identity management techniques, and also where they can step out of the "character" they may be presenting in the front stage region. For employees who may be consciously constructing and/or manipulating the impressions of others regarding their sexual and work identities, it is useful to think of Goffman's frontstage/backstage metaphor.

Cognitive sociology dovetails with symbolic interaction in an exploration of how individuals construct meaning and interpret the social world. Zerubavel (1997) provides a particularly useful contribution with his concept of *thought communities*. Zerubavel outlines the six cognitive acts, including "perceiving, attending, classifying, assigning meaning, remembering, and reckoning the time" (p. 21). These cognitive acts are important in understanding how employees' perceptions about their work environment affect their construction of meaning about their work experience. Zerubavel notes, "as we become socialized and learn to see the world through the mental lenses of particular thought communities, we come to assign to objects the same meaning that they have for others around us, to both ignore and remember the same things that they do, and to laugh at the same things they find funny" (p. 15). Both symbolic interaction and cognitive sociology focus on how people interpret and construct meaning; Zerubavel adds another dimension by discussing how individuals remember and recall events from their experiences. Therefore, his concepts are useful in any qualitative research project that asks participants to recall their experiences.

Queer Theory and Post-Closet Discourse

Queer theory is another intellectual framework for this project. As referenced in the introduction, this project explores and examines the role of power dynamics within the institution of sport. Particularly, Foucault's (1975, 1978) ideas about the role of discourse in understanding the tension between power and agency offer a framework by which to understand these power dynamics. Sullivan (2003) notes that "Foucault has argued that power is productive rather than simply oppressive, and should be understood as a network of relations rather than something one group owns and wields in order to control another" (p. 42). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1978) uses the metaphor of the panopticon to discuss his model of power as productive. He was interested in ascertaining how and why individuals "went along with" rules that were imposed from the top down. The panopticon was an 18th century prison structure which essentially rendered prisoners self-monitoring. This metaphor extends to understanding how power can be both ascending and descending. Essentially, he makes the argument that individuals police themselves, thus producing and reproducing the structures which constrain them in the first place.

In the context of this project, then, it is often marginalized employees who preemptively police themselves in order to maintain rigid boundaries within the institution of sport. Thinking again of Chung's (2001) analysis, many gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees construct and present identities on the basis of *potential*, if not *encountered,* discrimination. They are actively constructing and negotiating varied and shifting presentations of self on the basis of a potential (and sometimes actual) threat. It is too simplistic to think of gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees as simply victims of an oppressive system. Rather, they are active subjects who are producing and shifting institutional norms.

As an emerging discipline, queer theory has multiple perspectives, ideologies, and critiques, some in great contradiction to the others. Even a definition of the discipline is problematic. Sullivan (2003) presents no less than ten varying definitions of the term "queer theory," including Jagose (1996) "neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics," Halperin (1995), "by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant, and Smith (1996), "defining a strategy, and attitude…queer articulates a radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality, and the family" (p. 44). A debate has continued on what exactly "counts" as queer and what does not. Sullivan (2003) notes,

> One way of avoiding the problems associated with the notion of queer as an identity—albeit a non-essential, provisional, and fragmented one—is, as Jakobsen (1998) suggests, to 'complete the Foucauldian move from human being to human doing.'…it may be more productive to think of queer as a verb (a set of actions) rather than as a noun (an identity, or even a nameable personality formed in and through the practice of particular actions (p. 50).

For the purposes of this project, key areas of queer theory are useful. The first is Seidman's (1996) definition of queer theory as "an analysis of the Hetero/Homosexual figure as a power/knowledge regime that shapes the ordering of desires, behaviors, social institutions, and social relations—in a word, the constitution of self and society" (cited in Sullivan 2003: 51). This dovetails nicely with the overarching theme in symbolic interaction which focuses on the presentation of self. An approach to queer theory that emphasizes the ways in which individuals come to think of their identity in relation to a larger structural world is extremely useful in understanding the actions that non-heteronormative employees use to manage their identities.

Second, the features of queer theory which focus on deconstruction, particularly the deconstruction of identity categories (including sexual identity) help frame this study. Sullivan (2003) notes, "deconstruction is not synonymous with destruction: it does not involve the

obliteration and replacement of what is erroneous with that which is held to be true…a deconstructive analysis would highlight the inherent instability of the terms (heterosexual/homosexual), as well as enabling an analysis of the culturally and historically specific ways in which the terms and the relation between them have developed, and the effects they have produced" (p. 51). Deconstruction exposes the unique and subtle processes by which identities are constructed, contested, and maintained. As a core feature of postmodern theory, deconstruction is a crucial theoretical concept for this project.

Elements of Judith Butler's (1990, 2004) thesis on gender (and identity more generally) as performative are important to this project. Sullivan (2003) cites Butler, "gender is the performative effect of reiterative acts, that is, acts that can be, and are, repeated…in and through a regulatory frame. These acts congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 82). Suggesting that gender (and identity in general) is performative is not the same as saying it is "a performance." Butler is not arguing that it is necessarily a consciously identified performance, but one that ultimately feels like "second nature" to the performer. As such, it [identity] goes unquestioned and unchallenged. Sullivan (2003) cites Butler, "gender is a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them" (p. 84). Butler's ideas about the processes by which identities are formed, constructed and maintained contribute to an understanding of the maintenance of sexual identities in the workplace. Non-heteronormative sport employees are not necessarily consciously manipulating or negotiating presentations of self—those performances have been reified and made concrete in historically and culturally specific ways.

Butler (1990, 2004) also contributes in suggesting there is a consequence for not putting on the socially sanctioned performance of identity. Sullivan (2003) cites Butler, "punishment/stigma of so-called unnatural actions/identities is everywhere…and we are all both agents and effects of disciplinary regimes" (p. 84). This idea builds upon Foucault's (1979) panopticon metaphor in suggesting that power is both ascending and descending and therefore a complex and nuanced variable for exploration.

Butler (2004) and Seidman (1996) both contribute to contesting the existing categories around identity (all identities, but specifically around sexual identity). Butler refers to identity categories as "cultural fictions" and challenges the idea that any identity exists. Sullivan (2003) notes, "sexual categories such as heterosexuality and homosexuality are cultural fictions, and if there is not an inner core, there can be no such thing as straight or queer, at least not in any essential sense" (p. 85). By suggesting that identity categories are cultural fictions, queer theorists do not suggest that there are not consequences attached to challenging such categories. Quite the contrary, they suggest that those who attempt to transgress the cultural boundaries are stigmatized, pressured, and even attacked for doing so. This concept is also vital to understanding the process of identity construction for the participants in this project. How do employees manage the stigma associated with the contestation of their identity categories—as athletes, as non-heteronormative people, and as employees?

A final element of queer theory that this project relies upon is post-closet discourse. Seidman, Meeks and Traschen (2002) argue that the metaphor of the closet as central to the process of "coming out" is problematic. They note,

> …By making the closet into the key focus of gay oppression, coming out and affirming a gay identity is often viewed as the supreme political act—as if mere gay visibility undermines heterosexism…Finally, the narrative of coming out of the closet creates divisions between individuals who are "in" and "out" of the

> closet. The former are stigmatized as living false, unhappy lives and are pressured to be public, without considering that the calculus of benefits and costs vary considerably depending on how individuals are socially positioned (p. 427).

Post-closet discourse maintains that the closet has "declining social significance." Seidman et al. (2002) state, "our research suggests that many individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual have 'normalized' (subjectively accepted) and 'routinized' (socially integrated) their homosexuality. Consequently, a double life involving patterns of concealment and sexual self-management is less defining of their lives" (p. 428). King (2008) argues that using the closet as a metaphor for social change and promoting the coming out imperative is problematic. She suggest that scholarship is limited when "[it] equates visibility and identity with power and legitimacy" (p. 419). As King and other queer theorists relying on post-closet discourse argue, the coming out of the closet narrative in scholarly work has limited our perspective and missed the nuances of individuals' identity performance.

As much of the aforementioned literature in both sport work environments and non-sport work environments focus on the importance of coming out visibly and linguistically, post-closet discourse provides an alternative (or perhaps coexisting) viewpoint. As sexual identity becomes less of a concrete, salient feature of people's lives (particularly younger people, as Savin-Williams 2005, suggests), the metaphor of the closet and coming out of the closet become less intellectually useful in interpreting individuals experience, actions, and constructions of meaning in their social and work lives.

Symbolic interaction provides a framework to address the research aims of this project, particularly on the ways in which employees create and interpret meaning in their work environment and identify allies at work. Queer theory provides a method for interpreting the ways in which employees construct their identities and the specific actions they take at work

regarding their sexual identities. Combined with a grounded theory methodological approach, this research dissects the subtle nuances of the sport atmosphere for non-heteronormative sport employees.

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY: RESEARCHING THE "INVISIBLE"

More than three years ago, upon the approval of my committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia State University, I began my research on gay sport employees. Initially, I intended to conduct in-depth face-to-face qualitative interviews with about 40 non-heteronormative employees working in professional sports. Over the course of more than two years in the field, I discovered that almost every aspect of my sample and design was more problematic than I originally conceived. These problems included the more obvious difficulties of accessing hidden populations, and less evident problems such as defining "sport employees." Over time, I expanded my sampling frame to include gay employees working in college, club, and national-level sport organizations. Additionally, I amended my sampling techniques to include recruiting via electronic sources, and I included interviews of respondents via telephone and email. These changes were the result of numerous discussions with key informants and my committee, and involved two formal amendments to IRB. The result was 37 interviews with non-heteronormative employees working in professional, college, club, and national-level sport organizations.

Epistemological Framework:

This study is informed by symbolic interactionism; that is, it focuses particularly on the ways in which participants constructed meaning for themselves. To that end, I focused my analysis on how participants spoke about their experiences. I focused on how participants described themselves and on their perceptions of their experiences. I tried to let the participants

speak for themselves and avoid categorizing them in ways they did not see themselves, except in very specific instances where their stated perceptions contradicted their actual behaviors.

I use a Grounded Theoretical Methodology (GTM) framework in this project. This methodological framework allowed me the flexibility to shift my perspective as the data collection and analysis occurred, and also allowed for changes in my target sample as recruitment difficulties emerged. I was able to shift my reliance on snowball sampling to one that incorporated non-participant key informants.

Finally, my own position in sport informed my experience as a researcher. I am neither a full insider nor a complete outsider to the sport environment. I began college as an athletic training major, and while I did not continue this path, I made connections with people who ended up being both key informants and outside readers on this project. I also worked for three years in an NCAA Division I athletic department, where I was able to begin to develop concepts that ultimately informed the creation of this research project. I was able to rely on my semi-insider status in sport as well as my insider status as a lesbian to establish rapport with my participants (some who asked me directly about both statuses). I believe this strengthened my rapport and allowed for richer data, and offered a unique insight into the experiences of non-heteronormative sport employees.

Difficulty of Identifying Hidden Populations

One of the central obstacles I faced in this project was the identification of appropriate research subjects. This was primarily an issue of accessing networks, but also included assuring participants that they would be able to participate in the project without risk. Some of the interview participants were entrenched in maintaining a closeted identity; they had more at risk

in identifying themselves as eligible for participation in this project. However, the hidden nature of gay sport employees extended beyond the closet. In order to access this hidden population, I shifted my sampling techniques from snowball sampling methods to ones driven by key informants. Developing a rapport with key gatekeepers in various social networks was essential in order to obtain access to this predominantly hidden population.

In order to connect with this population, I used research techniques designed to seek out elusive or hidden populations. The vast majority of literature on hidden population data collection refers to people who are engaged in illegal or deviant behavior. Lambert and Weibel (1990) suggest,

> "Hidden populations" euphemistically refers to those who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised: the homeless and transient, chronically mentally ill, high school dropouts, criminal offenders, prostitutes, juvenile delinquents, gang members, runaways, and other 'street people'—those we are all aware of to one degree or another, yet know so little about (p. 1).

Research strategies particular to hidden populations often focus on drug users or homeless populations. These strategies assume a stigmatized population—if there were no stigma, the population wouldn't be hidden in the first place. However, this assumption is not necessarily true. Singer (1999) notes that "hidden populations" can be defined as "groups that reside outside of institutional and clinical settings and whose activities are clandestine and therefore concealed from the view of mainstream society and agencies of social control" (p. 125). However, these populations do not just include groups engaged in illegal or deviant behavior. She states, "there are many types of hidden populations. Notable examples include…members of stigmatized groups who are 'passing' as members of the majority population" (p. 128). Non-heteronormative employees who work in a heterosexually dominated environment, particularly

those who employ strategies of staying in the closet to varying degrees, certainly fit this category.

Singer (1999) cautions that "within hidden populations, there may be particularly invisible subgroups" (p. 128). With rigor and care applied to recruitment strategies, every effort can be made to reach all members of a hidden population. She continues, "it is reasonable to think of target research populations in terms of a continuum: (1) those that are well-known and highly accessible, (2) those that are semi-hidden, (3) those that are hidden, and (4) those that are quite invisible and (intentionally or unintentionally) resist research initiatives" (p. 130). The sample for this project is definitely skewed towards those who were more publicly out; however I was able to recruit several participants who were extremely or totally closeted.[10]

Finally, it is important to have an understanding of why populations are hidden in the first place. Singer (1999) notes that "social concealment…is a reflection of two social factors: *intentionality and capacity*" (p. 131). Intentionality refers to the extent to which members of a hidden population intentionally conceal their activities. This can be due to the legal status of certain activities, or because of stigmatization. Singer (1999) states, "groups that are subject to social condemnation (on moral, religious, or other grounds) or even vigilante-style aggression commonly seek to hide their identities and activities" (p. 131). Capacity refers to the power to conceal behavior. For example, Singer (1999) suggests "hidden populations are especially common at both ends of the socioeconomic pyramid…far more is known about the lives of hidden populations among the poor than among the well-to-do" (p. 133). Those with means to conceal their identities are less likely to participate in a research study. Participants at the upper echelons of sport employment were underrepresented in this sample. This may be because they

[10] There was some discrepancy as to individuals' perceptions of their level of "outness" compared to their actual experiences and strategies; this will be discussed in later chapters.

have more to lose by participating (financially and otherwise). This may also be because they have the capacity to protect their status as a gay employee.

Recruitment Criteria

In order to participate in this project, individuals had to work as paid employees in professional, college, or club sports[11] and identify as, essentially, something other than heterosexual. The main criteria was that they *self-identify* as "not straight" (whether they used contemporary labels or not) and were employed in sports (in various capacities, discussed below). I use the term "non-heteronormative sport employee" throughout this project to describe my participants. This is with an understanding that identity is complex and nuanced, and that there are a multiplicity of ways people can label themselves. As discussed previously, I am consciously using the term "non-heteronormative" to refer to individuals who exhibit behaviors and have constructed an identity that is not typical (or normative) heterosexual identity. Primarily, I recruited individuals who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The recruitment materials for this project included the language "gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or any other sexual identity other than heterosexual" (see Appendix A for recruitment materials). While the term "non-heteronormative" can include people who identify as primarily heterosexual but do not follow norms regarding coupling or heterosexual marriage, this project used a narrower definition of non-heteronormative identity. The majority of my participants were comfortable with the language of "gay", "lesbian," or "bisexual, and only three participants expressed any hesitancy over using common labels. However, this may be a reflection of sampling; individuals

[11] National teams or National Sport Organizations were included as "professional" sports.

who are hesitant to claim a label may also be less likely to volunteer to a stranger to participate in a research study.

The second set of screening criteria involved employment in sports. Individuals who responded positively to the following questions were eligible: Have you worked for a professional sports team, NCAA Division I, III, or III sports team or league, or club sports team or league within the past five years[12]? Did you work in this profession for two years or longer? Did you identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, "queer" or another sexual identity other than heterosexual while you were employed by a professional sports team or league?

Although I had spent much attention to problematizing the meaning of "non-heteronormative" in my research proposal, I assumed that the terms "sport" and "employee" needed little definition. I quickly discovered, as I began to recruit participants, that defining these terms was also very complex. In professional, college, and club sport, teams and leagues are structured differently. In some professional leagues, individual owners own a single team; in others, an ownership group could own multiple franchises for different sports. In some leagues, the stadium or arena is owned as a separate entity (sometimes by a city or state), in other leagues, the stadium or arena is owned, operated, or managed by the team. Employees sometimes work for an ownership group, and therefore are involved in multiple roles (for multiple franchises and an arena or stadium). Employees who work for arenas or stadiums are predominantly in charge of sporting events, but may sometimes work in other event planning (such as concerts). Minor league teams may be independent clubs or owned by a major league team. Certain NBA teams

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[12] Professional Leagues included but were not limited to the National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Basketball Association (NBA), the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), the National Hockey League (NHL), Major League Soccer (MLS), the (now defunct) Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA), Women's Professional Soccer (WPS), Olympic or National Teams for various sports, and various minor-leagues. Olympic and National teams are included based on the model of Lapchick (2001) in the Racial and Gender Report Card.

own their sister WNBA teams (and employees work for both leagues); other WNBA teams are totally independent franchises. At the college level, employees (NCAA Division I, II, or III) may be supervised by an athletic department. At other schools, they work for club teams, which operate much like varsity sports but are managed by a Department of Student Life (the latter were identified as "club employees" for the purposes of this project) and were less immersed in the business of sport. University club teams may still compete against NCAA teams at other schools. In this study, "sport" included employees of professional (major or minor league) franchises or leagues, National Team or National Sport organizations, NCAA Divisions I, II, and III teams or athletic departments, club sports (defined as non-youth, non-collegiate sport), and arena, stadium, or ballpark employees. Hockey, baseball, football, soccer (men's and women's), basketball (men's and women's), track and field, rowing, lacrosse, volleyball, field hockey, and softball are represented in this sample at various levels (which will be discussed in greater detail below).

Sampling Procedures

My initial approach was snowball sampling techniques. Because the population of non-heteronormative sport employees is a hidden (or semi-hidden) one, snowball sampling, is an effective way for qualitative or ethnographic researchers to access hidden populations.

According to Heckathorn and Jeffri (2001), there are three methodological approaches to studying hidden populations, including location sampling and institutional sampling (which are not useful for this project), and chain-referral sampling, the best known form of which is snowball sampling" (p. 319). This commonly used technique is designed to access a hidden

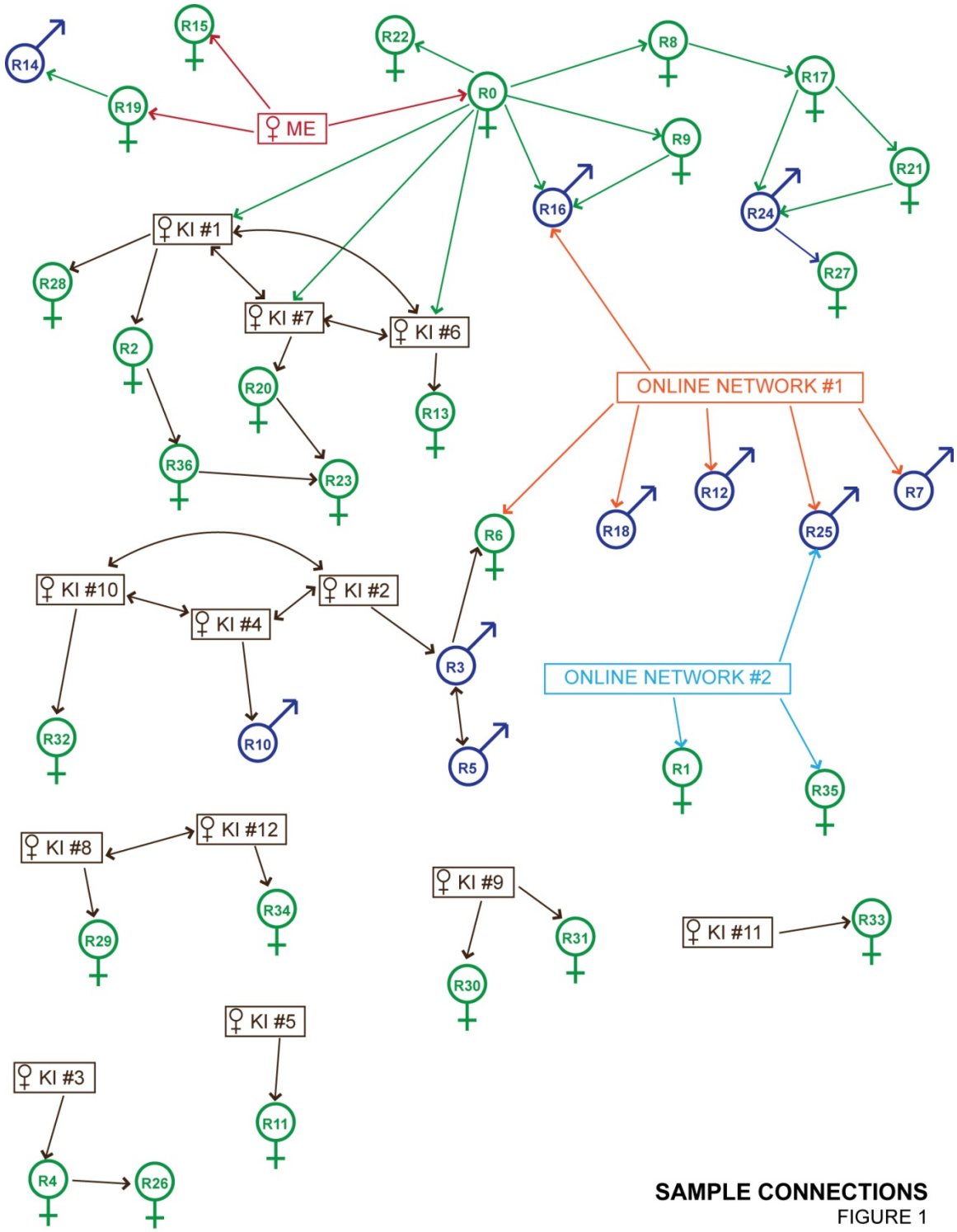
population through a few "seed" members, and then relies on referrals to grow the sample. Heckathorn and Jeffri (2001) argue,

> There has been a resurgence of interest in chain-referral methods because of their unique ability to reach those who would be missed by other methods, including those who shun public gatherings and institutional affiliations. Research on the "small world problem" suggest that any two people in the country are connected by no more than six network links, the now famous "six degrees of separation." The implication is that everyone could be reached by a minimally expansive chain-referral sample after only a handful of waves" (p. 309).

Snowball sampling is an ascending methodology; that is, it starts at the local level and extrapolates to the larger population. It involves identifying a few initial participants, and then asking for referrals within a social network for other individuals who meet the recruitment criteria.

Figure 1 represents the connections in the sample[13]. I began data collection with three "seed" members who were already known to me. I believed that those initial members would be able to refer me to other potential participants and the sample would "sprout" from there. This did not prove to be the case.

[13] "R" refers to respondents in the study; "KI" refers to key informants who were not eligible for study participation but were able to refer me to individuals who did qualify. Female and male respondents are represented by the symbols ♀and ♂, respectively.



SAMPLE CONNECTIONS
FIGURE 1

Very few respondents were able to provide any additional participants; R0 and R8 are the exceptions. Most participants were only able to refer one additional participant, if any. Twenty-four respondents referred zero participants. It took more than a year to recruit the first ten

participants in this study. As the recruitment criteria expanded to include college and club sports, the number of potential participants increased. As Figure 1 illustrates, snowballing alone, was not a particularly effective method of sampling in this project.

Due to the lack of referrals from existing participants, I began seeking out additional key informants who likely had contacts within the sporting environment who might be eligible for participation. These key informants were not eligible participants themselves, but had people in their networks that were able to participate. Most of these key informants were already people I knew from my own immersion in sport networks. I relied on friends who were athletes in college, or people who majored in sport fields, or people in academia who were likely to know potential participants. As Figure 1 suggests, some of these key informants were also part of interlocking social networks

A third tier of respondents came from social networking websites (Online Network #1 and #2 in Figure 1). Online Network #1 is a website targeting gay sports fans that appears to have wide visibility, particularly among gay men. Fifty percent of the sample of male participants came from this online network, either directly or indirectly. Online Network #2 is a popular social networking site where I posted repeated calls for participants that were forwarded to other potential respondents. Three respondents came directly from this strategy.

While there is a level of interconnectedness at certain points on the web of participants, essentially the sampling process demonstrates that the people who participated in this study either have very shallow networks of other non-heteronormative employees, or they were unable or unwilling to recruit others to participate. Several participants noted that they had gay coworkers or gay bosses; some even worked in the sport industry with significant others or partners. However, very few of those individuals ended up also participating in the project.

When I asked participants if they would be willing to forward my call for participants or give me contact information for potential participants, this was often met with hesitancy. Several participants expressed feeling awkward forwarding something to someone who they suspected was gay, but was not visibly out. It seems likely that the formal nature of the workplace environment contributed to the lack of effectiveness of snowball sampling. While participants noted that they knew other gay, lesbian or bisexual people at work, this rarely was an identity that was openly or visibly shared. Participants relied on non-verbal cues to determine who else might be gay; this did not translate well in terms of having participants help recruit additional respondents. Perhaps had the networking environment been less formal, such as a social club or team, snowballing may have been a more successful strategy.

My close relationships with the key informants also helped with recruiting participants. One of the key informants (KI #1) is a close personal friend. At the very beginning stages of data collection, I sent a recruitment flyer to several friends and contacts, and she referred me to a casual acquaintance who she felt might be willing to participate. Upon contacting her, the acquaintance declined to participate. More than a year later, I sent a new flyer with my updated criteria (see Appendix A) to the same friends and contacts. The woman who had once been a casual acquaintance of my friend was now her significant other. She responded to my second call for participants and was willing to be included in the study. I was no longer some anonymous person sending her an email; I was now a close friend of her girlfriend, which gave me a level of entrée I had not had previously.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the networks between respondents were, for the most part, sex-segregated. Recruiting male participants was a significantly bigger challenge than finding

willing female participants[14]. Four of the male respondents were referred by female respondents, but none of the female respondents were referred by males. Only one male respondent referred anyone for participation, and that referral chain ended up being a closed loop between R3 and R5, where each respondent referred me to the other. The male participants in this sample appeared to have significantly more shallow networks of gay sport employees. Half of the sample (n=5) came from the same website community, and they were unable to refer me to additional participants. It is also worth noting that half of the male participants were also publicly out in the media. Men in this sample represent some of the most visibly out participants and some of the least visibly out.

Late in the data collection phase, I enlisted the help of a well known author who has done several high-profile studies on gay men in sports. As my existing sample became more and more skewed with female participants, I decided to use targeted sampling to recruit gay men. I reached out to this author, who suggested several individuals and websites I might try to utilize to recruit participants. Every single suggestion he made was an individual I had already interviewed or an avenue I had already explored. I tapped into the most visible, well-known networks for gay men in sport; it appears that there is either not as strong of a network in sport for gay men as there is for lesbians and bisexual women, or gay men's networks are considerably more hidden or closed than lesbians in sport.

While initial snowball sampling techniques were not particularly successful, the multifaceted approach to recruiting participants ended up strengthening the sample. One common critique of snowball sampling is a bias of a sample based on limited number of

[14] This may, in part, be based on my own social networks and key informants, who were primarily lesbians and heterosexual women.

snowballs or social networks. As this sample had multiple starting points, this was less of a concern.

Description of Sample

There were 37 participants in this study. Twenty-seven participants were women and ten were men. Table 1 represents a summary of the sample data.

	%	N
Male	27%	10
Female	73%	27
Professional	46%	17
College	41%	15
Club	13%	5
Off-Field	59%	22
On-Field	41%	15
Men's Sport	43%	16
Women's Sport	35%	13
Co-Ed Sport	22%	8
21-29	27%	10
30-39	57%	21
40+	16%	6
Large Cities	54%	25
Small Cities	26%	12
Towns	20%	9
Northeast	39%	18
South	28%	13
West	13%	6
Southwest	7%	3
Midwest	4%	2
Canada	4%	2
Europe	4%	2
Upper Management	14%	6
Ump/Ref	5%	2
Sales/Promo/Marketing	10%	4
Communications/Video	10%	4
Operations/Events/Security	16%	7
Medical	7%	3
Front-Office	14%	6
Assistant/Head Coach	24%	10

Table 1: Sample Demographics

"Employee," for the purposes of this project, included anyone receiving a regular paycheck for their work in sport for at least two years. For most of the participants, their work in

sport was their full-time employment, but four participants were employed in sport in a part-time capacity.

Participants often had multiple experiences in sport at multiple different levels. As a result, the divisions between professional, college, and club sport were less distinct. The majority (35) had experiences as athletes, and many (22) worked in two or more different jobs as sport employees. Only two participants had no prior background in sport before their employment.

All ten of the men in the sample identified as "gay" (one identified as "either gay or homosexual"). Nine of the women identified as "lesbian," nine identified as "gay or lesbian," one identified as "gay," three women identified as "queer, homo, dyke, or lesbian," three women preferred no label but often used lesbian, and two women identified as "bisexual." Participants ranged in ages from 22 – 68 (at time of interview), with an average age of 33.75 years. Thirty-four participants claimed a racial identity of Caucasian or white, two as Hispanic, and one as biracial (white and Hispanic).

While there was variety in region, 67% of respondents were located on the East Coast, in either the Northeast or the South. Participants represent six different regions of the country, both in their most recent employment and in significant past employment. Eighteen jobs were located in the Northeast, 13 in the South, six in the West, three in the Southwest, two in the Midwest, two in Canada and two in Europe[15] [16]. While the majority of the participants were located in large cities, slightly less than half worked in small cities, towns, or college towns.

In order to maintain confidentiality, it is necessary to separate positions from specific leagues. With professional leagues having, at most, 32 teams, there is not enough anonymity to

[15] The Canadian and one of the European participants had at least one job experience in North America as well.
[16] N = 46; participants had sport jobs in multiple regions over the course of their career.

refer to a respondent as, for example, an NFL coach. However, there is also an important distinction between employees who work directly with athletes (such as coaches, assistant coaches, or athletic trainers) and employees who don't. Some of the explanations for the recurrence of "don't ask, don't tell" style ideologies in organized sport include the locker room factor – the fact that the workplace includes being around nude bodies. With that in mind, participant employment status in the subsequent chapters will be referred to in more generic terms as "on field/direct contact with athletes" positions and "off field/front office" positions.

In this sample, there are participants who work in the National Hockey League (NHL), Major League Baseball (MLB) – both major and minor league clubs, the National Football League (NFL), Major League Soccer (MLS), the National Basketball Association (NBA), the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), U.S. National Teams, the NCAA (Divisions I, II, and III), and various club teams. Seventeen participants worked in professional sport, 15 worked in NCAA sport, and five worked in club sport. Sixteen participants worked in men's sport, 13 in women's sport, and eight in both men's and women's sport. Twenty-two participants worked in front-office/off-field positions (five male and 17 female), and 15 participants worked in on-field/direct contact positions (five male, 10 female).

Finally, there are several different types of careers represented in this sample. The following jobs are represented at all three levels – professional, college, and club, but they are discussed in less specific form to maintain confidentiality. Six participants had positions in upper management (high status, high power positions). Two participants were umpires or referees. Four participants worked in sales, promotions, or marketing. Four participants worked in communications or video. Seven participants worked in operations, events, or security. Three

participants worked in medical-related jobs. Six participants worked in front-office positions. Ten participants worked as assistant or head coaches[17].

Data Collection

As previously stated, many researchers agree that qualitative methods are the most appropriate for exploratory research on hidden populations. For this project, I utilized in-depth qualitative interview techniques in order to acquire a significant level of depth. While face-to-face interviews were the preferred methodology, the wide ranging geographical spread of the sample made this prohibitively expensive. Therefore, the majority of the interviews (n=30) were conducted via telephone, while five were face-to-face interviews, and two participants answered questions over email (see Appendix B)[18]. This project uses modified grounded theory methodology as specified by Charmaz (2006). I used the constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin 1998), where I analyzed initial data and collected new data accordingly throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

I conducted what Charmaz (2006) refers to as "intensive interviewing." Intensive interviews "permit an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, [are] a useful method of interpretive inquiry" (p. 25). In contrast to traditional interview methods where the researcher has a detailed list of questions and prompts, intensive interviews "ask the participant to describe and reflect upon his or her experiences in ways that seldom occur in everyday life" (Charmaz 2006: 25). Charmaz notes that intensive interviewing is a method that complements a grounded theoretical analysis particularly well. She notes, "both grounded theory

[17] N = 42; five participants had dual-job statuses or had extensive experience in more than one sport job.
[18] Babbie (2001) argues that when done properly, survey techniques using "new technologies" (including telephone and internet) "do not appear to result in a reduction of data quality" (p. 265).

methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted" (p. 28).

Unlike a directed interview or standard survey in which researchers use a set of questions as a guide, in an intensive interview there are only a few questions that are prescribed beforehand; most of the questions flow from the direction the conversation takes. Therefore, a detailed interview guide is not necessary. Interviews focused on specific themes that evolved as the interview occurred, and shifted as the data collection process continued. I asked all participants about their background in sport, their feelings on the atmosphere of their workplace with regard to sexual identity, and about the strategies they used to emphasize or deemphasize their own identities (including how they identified allies in the workplace). More specific, nuanced themes emerged in individual interviews, but those general themes were asked of all participants. Interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 3 hours, 30 minutes, with an average of 1.3 hours per interview. The majority of phone interviews took place after business hours or on weekends, so participants were not in the office setting while participating in the interview. Of the five face-to-face interviews, three took place in participants' offices at work, and two were in the participant's home. The two email interviews were conducted using their work email account, although I suggested they use a personal account.

The two participants who participated over email did so because they were unable to commit the time for a telephone interview. This was not an ideal solution for several reasons: I did not, at the time, have an established interview guide that could easily be converted to an email questionnaire, I had to update the Informed Consent document that was approved by the Institutional Review Board, and I knew that I was unlikely to get the level of depth or nuance that I was seeking by doing intensive interviews. However, both of these participants were

members of underrepresented groups in my sample: men, and people over the age of 40, so I modified my original research strategy to include their responses. They were asked to complete an email survey with 11 questions about their job experience. The email interview guide can be found in Appendix B. These questions reflected the emerging themes from the existing data during the time period when the respondents participated over email. While I did not stick to as rigid a list of questions during the phone and face-to-face interviews, these questions do reflect the general types of themes I was interested in during interviews.

Interviews primarily covered their experience in their most recent sport employment, but some employees had experience in several levels of employment, and sometimes in several different statuses (professional, college, or club). Primarily, interview questions focused on most recent or longest employment in a particular status, but, where appropriate, research focused on additional sport employment in other statuses.

After initial data collection began, the themes in the data began to crystallize more fully. The longest interviews were at the beginning of the data collection process. As themes began to emerge, subsequent interviews were more focused, and often took less time to complete. Later respondents were asked about issues that emerged from earlier respondents, particularly the effect that age played on perceptions of atmosphere and how participants identified allies in the workplace. As the sample shifted to include college and club sports, my questions focused more on the range of experiences participants had in various workplace settings throughout their career. I abandoned some themes that I entered this research project with (particularly the notion that the sport workplace is a “hostile environment” and that participants felt they experienced discrimination). I expanded to include other themes (such as the significant role age and generation plays in perceptions of atmosphere and identifying allies).

While nearly all participants expressed a willingness to participate in follow-up interviews, this ultimately proved to not be necessary. As data analysis began (and continued throughout the data collection process), certain themes quickly emerged and approached near-saturation levels. Themes around the connection between age and identifying allies, for example, emerged very quickly, with 22 of the first 25 respondents discussing how age impacted their decision-making on who to come out to. Other themes, including the more nuanced strategies that people employed to emphasize or deemphasize their sexual identity, needed further exploration before subsequent respondents were not adding very much data to expand the concept.

Limitations of Sample:

The difficulties in recruitment led to some limitations involving the sample. First and foremost, those who are more publicly out are overrepresented in the sample (especially publicly out men). Men are underrepresented in the sample—outnumbered almost two to one. This is both a reflection of my social networks and what appears to be more shallow networks of gay male sport employees (when compared to lesbian sport employees). Many of the male participants expressed frustration that they knew comparatively few publicly (or visibly) out male employees, even though they "knew" there were other gay male co-workers. Younger participants are also overrepresented—people over the age of 40 only represent only 15% of the sample. The narratives of those who have been working in sport longer, and who potentially have more at stake with regards to both power and money, is significantly less developed than the narrative of younger employees. White participants make up 95% of the sample, so the experiences of racial minorities (and how a racial minority identity intersects with a sexual

minority identity) is lacking. Finally, some institutions are overrepresented, particularly at the collegiate level. Two universities account for six of the participants. While there are a few institutions that may be overrepresented in the sample, and while there is not much diversity in terms of age or race, in its totality this sample has a wide variety between institutions, job descriptions, and statuses.

Although I feel the flexibility in the sample and shifts from the original proposal ultimately strengthened this research, it did lead me to accept participants who might not have been "perfect" candidates. For those for whom employment in sport was only a part-time status, I had to modify my questions and my analysis of their experiences. I also would not have included the email respondents if recruitment was easier. Their participation did not add very much to the overall project, and I was unable to capture the nuances about workplace experiences that I was with those who I interviewed. Finally, while phone interviews were not ideal in terms of establishing rapport with participants, I believe ultimately it allowed them to feel like the experience was less formal than a face-to-face meeting, and they were therefore less guarded in their response. Two phone interview participants even went through the checkout line at the grocery store during our interviews! The less formal nature of the phone interviews ultimately gave me more entrée into their lives and their experiences.

Data Analysis

I recorded, transcribed, analyzed and coded interviews using a modified grounded theoretical (Glaser and Strauss 1967) approach. I utilized Strauss and Corbin's (1998) process of microanalysis throughout the analysis stage. Microanalysis is defined as "the detailed line-by-line analysis necessary at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories (within their

properties and dimensions) and to suggest relationships among categories" (p. 57). Microanalysis allowed me to develop themes regarding the ways in which employees' perceived their work environment and how they utilized strategies for negotiating the work environment. Via microanalysis and open coding, distinct categories developed from the data, which became theoretically saturated after repeated interviews with different respondents.

Charmaz (2006) and Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) provide practical guidelines for conducting rigorous grounded theory analysis while maintaining the flexibility and creativity necessary to construct a cohesive story based on the responses from the participants. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) argue that all versions of grounded theory include the following strategies (both the GTM advanced by Glaser and Strauss 1967 and Strauss and Corbin 1998), "1) simultaneous data-collection and analysis, 2) pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis, 3) discovery of basic social processes within the data, 4) inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes, and 5) integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the process(es)" (p. 161). However, they argue that grounded theory has become nothing more that a set of rigid rules to follow. Instead, they suggest utilizing a symbolic interaction framework with grounded theory by using Blumer's (1969) notion of sensitizing concepts. Charmaz (2006) notes, "consistent with Blumer's (1969) notion of sensitizing concepts, grounded theorists often begin their studies with certain research interests and a set of general concepts. These concepts give you ideas to pursue and sensitize you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic" (p. 16). I began this process with the sensitizing concept that sport was a hostile environment for sexual minorities, and as the data collection continued, this became less and less relevant. While employees do experience and perceive negatives in the sport environment, no one painted the

"hostile environment" picture that was advanced in the literature. What did emerge was a disconnection between perceptions and experiences, and perceptions and behaviors. As data collection and analysis continued, I incorporated these emerging themes into later interviews.

With a flexible, less deterministic grounded theoretical analysis, the focus is more on telling a meaningful story than on constructing one core category. This analysis differs from pure grounded theory in that the goal is not to create a single core category from the data. Rather, in this project the goal was to explore the narratives of employees of professional sport to provide insight on the ways in which their perceptions of the sport environment are informed by employees' sexual minority status, and the ways in which their behavior reflects their perceptions. Analysis focused on themes regarding those particular topics. While I did not set out to create one core variable (as Glaser and Strauss 1967, suggest), I was interested in constructing a "story" about the experiences of sexual minorities who work in sport. This ultimately meant that there were some themes that emerged in the data that either did not reach levels of saturation or did not fit into the story.

Grounded theory is significant in two ways: its use of the coding process and its use of the constant comparative method. Coding took place in three phases: open coding, where detailed line-by-line analysis provides for the emergence of initial indicators and themes, analytic/selective coding (called "axial" in Strauss and Corbin 1998 method),which involves the emergence of sensitizing concepts, and theoretical coding, which provides for the possibility of the development of core categories . The comparative method was used throughout each phase of the coding process. Charmaz (2006) notes that GTM with an emphasis on the comparative method focuses on three processes: 1) comparing data with data from the beginning of research, 2) comparing data with emerging categories, and 3) demonstrating relations between concepts

and categories. She notes that this process provides for an emphasis on context and content, meaning and action, and structures and the actor simultaneously.

LaRossa (2005) discusses what he considers to be five important principles of GTM. Among these five principles is the notion that "there is value in choosing one variable from among the many variables that a grounded theoretical analysis may generate and making that variable central when engaged in theoretical writing. It will serve as the 'backbone' of a researcher's 'story.' This central variable…will be one that developed in the course of the analysis and is well grounded in the textual materials being studied" (p. 838). The backbone of this project became focused around the ways in which sport employees saw their sexual identities interacting with their work and sport identities, and the particular strategies they utilized based on these conceptions.

As I began data collection, early themes began to emerge. Some of these themes ultimately became the central focus of this project – the ways in which individuals constructed their perceptions of the sport environment, often in the face of contradictory evidence and experiences, the role that age and generation played in perceptions of atmosphere, and the active and passive strategies participants used to navigate the work environment. Other themes that I was convinced would end up being central never approached saturation with subsequent interviews (particularly on-field/off-field differences, and differences between male and female participants). As data collection continued, certain features of these themes began to crystallize, and it informed the questions I asked later participants and the way in which the data was analyzed.

While I did not follow a strict linear process of open, selective, and theoretical coding, I was able to use concepts that emerged during open coding to construct themes which ultimately

helped tell the "story" of this project. Concepts became theoretically saturated towards the end of the interview process, where new participants essentially didn't add anything new to the data (beyond the specifics of their experiences). While I kept recruitment open for participants who were underrepresented in the sample (men and people over 40), I stopped recruitment when I reached theoretical saturation on the concepts that I identified to help tell the "story" of the experiences of sexual minorities working in sport.

CHAPTER 4.

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE SPORT ATMOSPHERE

In this project, I focused on two particular areas: the ways in which participants perceive the sport environment, and the strategies and behaviors they utilize based (or not based) on those perceptions. Throughout the interviews process, I was particularly interested in the ways in which employees constructed their perceptions of the sport atmosphere. Employees' perceptions of atmosphere emerged as interpretive, nuanced, and subjective. In particular, their stated perceptions of the environment are based less on actual experiences in the workplace and more on the accumulated events of their careers as athletes. Their perceptions are given meaning through their observations and interactions with other employees—both visibly gay and not. As the research questions and methodology evolved, this project became more of a piece on sport organizations—as total institutions—than on simply sport as a workplace. Participants in this project carried with them the accumulation of their participation in sport as athletes and their passion for sport as fans, and evaluated the institution based on the totality of their experiences, not only those they had as employees.

Blumer (1969) suggests that individual's act based on meanings, interaction, and interpretation. Participants' perceptions of the sport environment are subjective, based on their interpretations of the experiences they encountered at work and the meanings they construct from those experiences. Furthermore, as Zerubavel (1997) argues, individual thought processes are influenced by membership in what he calls "thought communities." These thought communities—based on shared perceptions among members from similar subcultures—actually influence the ways in which individuals "see" and understand their social world. Employees

working in sport, the vast majority of whom have accumulated experiences of a lifetime of involvement in sport, reported similar perceptions of their environment around issues of sexual identity management and sport as a near total institution. The lifetime of experiences led to shared ideologies and values about sport, most notably a "team first" mentality that encourages athletes to put the success of the team over their own individual needs and identity formations. As Wolf-Wendel et al. (2003) suggest, participation in sport, particularly team sport, leads to an emphasis on team and community over individual identity formation.

The "sport environment" is not a stagnant thing, but rather an ever-changing interpretive experience, constantly shifting through employees' interactions with what Cooley (1922) refers to as "significant others." These significant others had an enormous impact on employees' perception of the sport environment, both with respect to their own decisions about coming out at work and also informing their overall sense of the workplace environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

Employees voiced distinct perceptions about sport as a workplace. The totality of their direct and indirect experiences, their observations of others, and their prior background in sport informed these beliefs. They discussed how and why their perceptions changed, and reported behaviors that sometimes contradicted their stated perceptions of the environment. Overall, participants reported mostly positive *experiences*, even as their *perceptions* arced toward negativity.

Sport as a (Near-Total) Institution

As participants described their perceptions, experiences, and behaviors at work, they rarely discussed sport with terminology that suggested an awareness of the power of the

institution. They outlined what they saw where features of sport employment, and they discussed norms and values stemming from their participation as athletes, but rarely referred to sport in institutional terms. Yet it is precisely the institutional nature of sport that created the setting for their membership in thought communities reinforcing particular values and ideologies. Arnold (1997) proposed thinking about sport in two ways: as practice and as an institution.

> It is sufficient to note…that whereas a practice is a special kind of rule-governed activity which is characterized by the internal goals and standards that make it up, an institution is concerned also and necessarily with the promotion of such external goals as power, status, prestige, and money. Whereas the practice of sport is concerned only with its own goals, conduct and welfare for the benefit of all who participate in it, sport as an institution, which is typically a large-scale bureaucratic organization, is as much if not more concerned with its regulation and administration as well as its promotion as a commodity to be publicized, packaged and sold to those who wish to make use of it for one reason or another. Whereas sport as a valued human practice is or should be universal in its demands and expectations, sport as an institution is almost invariably subject to the particular political and socio-economic demands and pressures that are a part of its particular context (p. 2).

Participants in this project primarily described their experience through the lens of "sport as practice," while failing to see larger overarching connections to "sport as an institution" and their own experience.

Additionally, participants' framed their perceptions more around a conceptualization of the environment or atmosphere of sport, rather than as an institutional structure. They noted how the atmosphere could be gendered (particularly for women working in male-dominated fields). They focused on what some respondents referred to as a homophobic climate. They discussed their status as sexual minorities at work—yet these interpretations and perceptions lacked a cognizance of the connection between these forces. They talked about their workplaces environments as though they existed in a vacuum, without the structural components and built-in ideologies associated with a larger institution of sport. For these participants, the "atmosphere"

or "environment" of sport was interpersonal and specific to their experiences. They did not discuss or articulate a perception of how their experiences related to a broader structural understanding of sport as a whole.

Goffman (1962) proposed the concept of the *total institution*. He primarily used this concept to define settings such as prisons or mental hospitals—places where the population was controlled and regulated through regimented activity overseen by a constant authority. He identified five types of total institutions, including "those established to pursue worklike tasks and who justify themselves only on these instrumental grounds (e.g. the military), and those established as retreats from the world (e.g., monasteries)" which Atkinson and Young (2008) argue are applicable to sport organizations, most notably the NHL and the acceptability of violence within the culture. They suggest that the NHL possesses a "taken-for-granted license to create, through the showcasing of violence as part of sport, a retreat from the mundane or predictable world of everyday life, in which acts of physical aggression and the harming of others are normally prohibited" (p. 170). Sport acts as a retreat from the "real world," and in doing so carries elements of a total institution.

While sport does not represent a pure Goffmanian "total institution," it still carries with it elements of the type of institution Goffman described, particularly the blending of spheres between work and home/social life[19]. Anderson (2005) referred to sport as a "*near* total institution, particularly in the way athletes' experience the institution. He states,

> While I do not maintain that sports are a total institution (athletes do have the agency to quit sport), the myth of homogeneity of thought and action required to produce desireable athletic results is so strong that athletes willingly subject themselves to severe restrictions in their social lives…Much like the military, sport structures men into ranks and divisions. Athletes are obliged to dress in uniform, to follow the orders of coaches without question, and to think in

[19] Plummer (2003) suggests that the blurring of public and private lives is emblematic of the late modern world, noting that "the personal invades the public and the public invades the personal" (p. 68).

> alignment with their teammates, putting team expectations first. I maintain that a subtle but progressive ideology is imposed upon athletes that, like the soldier, in time, deconstructs their individual agency and restructures them as highly masculinized conformists in thought and action. The longer an athlete remains in the field of sport, the less agency he might have to come out (p. 66-67).

Given that so many participants in this project (and employees in sport in general) are former athletes, it is not surprising that these ideologies that Anderson describes are carried over into sport employment as well.

According to participants, sport employment has several unique features. First, they noted the skew, particularly at the entry-level positions, of young, single employees. Second, co-workers spend long hours together, and perceive this to be significantly greater than the amount of time those who work jobs with normal business hours spend with each other.[20] [21] Taken together, the numbers of young single employees working non-traditional hours led to a mixing of social and business lives for most employees, which influenced participants' sense of their workplace atmosphere. Compared to experiences outside of sport, participants felt that the boundaries between "friends" and "coworkers" were more fluid. This blurring of boundaries is emblematic of total institutions.

> A basic sociological arrangement in modern society is that the individual tends to sleep, play, and work in different places, with different co-participants, under different authorities, and without an over-all rational plan. The central feature of total institutions can be described as a breakdown of the barriers ordinarily separating these three spheres of life (Goffman 1962:5).

For participants in this project, their workplace became more than simply a place to earn a paycheck. It was the central operating force in their lives. Sport took precedence over

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[20] While this was universally true for on-field employees, even employees who worked in office positions noted that they worked hours outside of the traditional 9-5, especially on game days.

[21] Gamefacesportsjobs.com (2009), a website dedicated to finding employment in sport, concurs, noting in their section on sport employment tips, "this is an industry of long hours and long weeks. If you're in basketball, you may work as I did on Christmas day. If you're in hockey, perhaps it will be New Years Eve you'll miss. If baseball's your thing, you may not have a Fourth of July barbecue with the family and friends anymore. New Year's? Better get to bed early, because tomorrow you've got a football game to put on. People who work in sports must realize this is part of the price we pay."

families—participants noted that their hours required them to work on weekends and holidays when most people were spending time with their families. Sport took precedence over money—participants stated that they made very little money while working in sport (particularly those in off-field positions). Sport became more than a job—it became a way of life for these employees. Furthermore, sport became even more of a "total institution" for employees who worked in on-field positions that required travel during the season. When these employees were on road trips with their teams, their work, sleep, eating, and play were all part of their "work responsibilities." The overlap between "work" and "social" life, for Molly[22], a club sport employee, ultimately became the way she came out to her team. She stated,

> We're very close group of people and you know some of my [athletes], because I would have to drive them to [practice and events], so I'd have to have them in my car, which had a big old equality sticker on it… [my] car… had hundreds of stickers on it that were, you know, all about women and feminism and equality stickers and you know, get your laws off my body and things like that, so, the kind of person I was, was never really a secret, even before I started dating women, so I kinda just left it up to them…

Molly did not choose to keep political or gay stickers off of her car, knowing that her athletes would see them. In a work environment with more rigid boundaries between work life and social life[23], it would be less likely that co-workers would be in her car in the first place.

Anderson (2005) suggests that this blending between sport identities and social life begins early in athletes' careers in sport, and continue as part of an ongoing socialization process throughout their sport trajectory. He noted,

> Athletes are indoctrinated into the thinking of team sports at a very young age, influencing their identity to grow and center on their athleticism. But this also limits their social networks to mainly other athletes. Athletes befriend each other off the field, and their social lives are routinely dictated by their rigid schedule of practices and competitions and other team functions. In doing so, they have to

[22] All participant names are pseudonyms.

> shut out other cultural options, limit who they befriend, particularly those who do not fit the notion of orthodox masculinity (p. 67).

As the lines between big-time sports and entertainment are blurred, many employees had responsibilities that fall out of the purview of employment in other fields. Participants who worked in jobs that required them to interact with members of the public such as donors, boosters or sponsors noted that they often had to "wine and dine" clients, which required a different "presentation of self" than employees who worked in less visible positions. Employees who worked in more public positions that required direct contact with the general public, parents, sponsors, etc., described feeling greater levels of accountability than employees who worked in less public positions. The more social nature of these events, coupled with the frequent use of alcohol, also led to the mixing of social, business, personal and professional relationships.

For example, Tina, a 32-year old employee in the NFL who had multiple sport jobs in different fields, noted,

> And there was, you know, like a lot of sports environments there was a lot of drinking that would go on after work, and um, you know, it was very jovial, and it was a very casual environment. You know, we wore like khaki shorts and golf shirts and sneaks to work all the time. You know, and it was very, and you know, we all played softball together and we'd all go out drinking after that. It was very, you know, intermixing social with business a lot. And I think it, it actually came to the point where I had to make decisions about, like, lying. Because people would directly ask, oh, who are you dating Tina? 'No one.' 'You know, I haven't really met anyone since I've been down here.' 'I'm not really that interested.' 'I've got a lot of work.' And that is the only time in my entire career where I've lied about who I am.

For Tina, her experiences in the "workplace" didn't end when the workday was over, demonstrating the blurring of home and work lives. Her business and social lives were so intertwined that she found herself making strategic decisions about disclosing details about her dating life and her sexual identity in social settings to avoid the potential issues that could arise in the workplace.

Margaret, an NBA employee, had several sport jobs at different points in her career. She articulated that the effectiveness of sport as a total institution happens primarily at entry-level jobs, and the blurring of boundaries and importance of the intertwining of work and social life dissipates as one moves up the corporate hierarchy.

> As I've gotten older, my relationship with my co-workers has completely changed too. So as I said like when I was first out of college, we were all out of college, all first jobs, like living in a city that you know none of us grew up in, so being friends, we all went out in social settings and we all were like close friends and co-workers, where as now, like my co-workers are my co-workers and I like them a lot and I might like go have lunch with them or go grab drinks after work, but it's, it's much more like formal, like I don't really anticipate any of my co-workers becoming like my closest friends that I'm gonna like confide in about that kind of stuff.

Having been in the field for several years, Margaret no longer had as significant an overlap between her work and social lives, and was also higher up in the corporate hierarchy, and able to insulate herself from some of the more demanding aspects of the total institution of sport.

Passion for Sport

In sport, competition for jobs was high and available jobs were scarce.[24] Moreover, the perception of a tight labor market controlled employees' behavior. This led to a paradox for employees – while they reported some negative feelings associated with the workplace, they felt lucky to be employed in sport. For some, particularly the employees working at entry-level positions, this led to a basic cost/benefit approach to the workplace—while there were sometimes emotional costs, the opportunity to work in sport outweighed the potential drawbacks. Respondents' often discussed their passion for sport or love of the game as the driving forces for their employment choices. Alicia, a 25 year old NFL employee, notes,

[24] This bulk of this research was conducted prior to the global recession beginning in 2008. In December of 2008, the NFL laid off almost 14% of its staff in the wake of the recession (Klayman, 2008), demonstrating that jobs have become even scarcer in the current economic climate.

> In order to work here, you have to love the job, because you don't get paid that much…I get paid in experience is what I always tell myself. In order to work in sports you have to have a passion for it. Some jobs, you know, you can work for the money or you can work for, you know, just because you think it might be a good job that'll lead you somewhere, but in order to work in sports you have to have a passion for it.

This passion for sport contributed to an overall culture in the workplace that helped to clarify employees' perceptions of the atmosphere. In many cases, their love of the game or passion for sport superseded other attributes that affected the work environment, whether positive or negative. George, an NHL employee, saw this passion as a prominent feature of sport employment, and found it refreshing.

> Everyone seems, not seems, everyone IS so passionate about what they do and…I think everybody who's working in sports because they want to. Um, you know, I always tell candidates that if you're lookin' for the big bucks in sport, then you'd better know how to shoot a basketball or score some goals, because it's not in the front office… I could go across the street and make a lot more money than I am here… So it's really kind of refreshing that you have all these people that want to work in the environment and they're passionate about it.

George also illustrates the exchange that sport employees make—passion for sport or interest in the field takes precedence over monetary rewards. Employees demonstrated that they "put up" with the low pay and potentially negative environment because they love the field of sports and feel lucky to be employed there at all.

However, the argument that one had to be passionate about sports didn't only extend to those working in professional sports. The club sport employees were some of the most vocal about their passion for sports as a mediating factor in their employment. Both Darcy and Curtis, club sport employees, used the terminology "love" to describe their field, and Darcy expressed that she would do "anything" in sport so long as she was working in the industry. College employees at all divisional levels (I, II, and III) expressed gratitude and passion for their employment in sport. The "love of the game" ideology extended to employees at all levels of

employment in all fields. Employees working in sport are fans of sport, feel lucky to be involved in the institution, and think the success of the team is what "counts" the most at work.

Accumulated Careers as Athletes

Employees' passion for sport did not appear in a vacuum. The most commonly discussed unique feature of the sport workplace was the overwhelming number of employees who were former athletes (and, in the case of a few employees, still involved in club or semi-professional teams as a participant). Of the 37 participants in this study, 35 had prior experience as athletes – eleven through the high school level, twenty at NCAA institutions, and 4 at elite/semi-professional roles. They reported workplaces where 90% or more of the employees were also former athletes. This is significant for two reasons: participants' background in sport as athletes informed their experiences as employees, and co-workers' experiences as athletes informed their behavior in the workplace. One participant described her experience at the hands of a homophobic coach in college, describing her experience as an athlete as "pure hell" when she was "figuring out who she was." This experience caused her to cut herself off from being open with athletes because she internalized negative messages about lesbianism and sport. Jocelyn, an NCAA employee, discussed the experience of friends of hers who were college athletes who had an extremely negative experience under a homophobic coach. Jocelyn framed this experience as having a lasting impact on the coming out decisions of her friends.

> You know, it wasn't until fairly recently, you know, recently being now probably 5 years or something, where they became comfortable with themselves, and now they are both out and comfortable, one's married to a woman, and the other one is dating a woman and everybody knows about it and grandma and grandpa know about it, and everybody in their families know about it. But certainly, it was a long, a longer time in coming, maybe, then, somebody who had a different experience in college.

While the friends that Jocelyn described were not sport employees, they were athletes who had negative experiences in sport, and Jocelyn brought that knowledge with her to her sport workplace.

Tina, an NFL employee, suggested that having former athletes at work actually was an advantage and made her feel more secure in the environment. While there still were co-workers, primarily men, who used homophobic language, Tina argued that women who were former athletes had at the very least been exposed to the topic of lesbianism before.

> There certainly were the times where it was, you know, "fag" this and, you know "dyke" that, but a lot of the people who worked there had been athletes before. And the other women athletes, the other women employees there I think were pretty open minded. They weren't, you know, they had been around lesbians, they, it wasn't like a whole, like, oh, god, someone's gay! Like, you know? No one was like, thinking [a visibly gay co-worker] was hitting on them if she talked to them, you know what I mean? Like no one was a jerk, like, whether or not they knew I was gay, by the time I left the [team], everyone must have known I was gay.

Tina, like many other employees, noted a difference between male co-workers and female co-workers who were former athletes, which is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

When employees discussed their experiences as athletes, they focused on their own coming out experiences and interactions with teammates, and the experiences of other gay athletes. This had an enormous impact on their sense of the intersections between sport and sexuality, and they carried this perception with them to the sport workplace.

In addition to thinking about sport as a near total institution, Anderson (2005) refers to sport as a "closed loop system" whereby ideologies are continuously perpetuated as athletes move from careers as athletes to careers in sport, most notably in coaching. He argues that athletes who do not buy into the highly masculinized, conformist ideology in sport self-select out

of the institution at a youth or high school level, leaving only those willing to conform and be "team players" by reproducing and perpetuating the ideologies associated with sport.

> Much like the military, those who survive are promoted to leadership positions, where they reproduce hero genres to inspire a new generation. Complacency and overconformity get one promoted. Only highly devoted athletes (who usually were rewarded by sport) return to coach, denying sporting experiences and narratives of those whose experiences were not so wonderful. This closed-loop system serves elite athletes… Coaches largely learn their trade by modeling what their coach did. In other words, coaches tend to reproduce themselves because they both value the system they have progressed through and they are not required to critically analyze the institution. Without such intervention, there is little input to evaluate or change the system (p. 74).

It is easy to see how the institution of sport, as a near-total institution and a closed loop system, helps contribute to particular thought communities whereby former athletes reproduce the same sport ideologies as employees. In a work environment dominated by former athletes who did *not* select out of the institution of sport, the same attributes that privilege masculinity, conformity, and a suppression of individual identity for the good of team are continuously reproduced.

There are well documented arguments describing the prevalence of homophobia in sport among athletes and experienced by athletes (Anderson 2002, 2005; Baird 2000; Bredemeier et al. 1999; Caudwell 1999; Clarke 1998; Eng 2008; Griffin 1998; Harry 1995; Iannotta and Kane 2002; Krane 1996, 2001; Muir and Seitz 2004; Plymire and Forman 2001; Reimer 1997; Rotella and Murray 1991; Sykes 1998, 2001; Wolf-Wendel et al. 2001; and Woog: 1998, 2000). A workplace environment full of former athletes that is firmly entrenched in the institution of sport has characteristics that are distinct and makes the experiences of non-heteronormative employees in sport significant. While some of the concepts in this project have similarities with gay employees in other workplaces, this feature of the sport workplace creates a distinctly unique experience for gay employees.

Formal Policy Awareness

While many scholars have suggested that legal protections against anti-gay discrimination are imperative in creating a safe workplace for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender employees, this research suggests that for most employees, formal discrimination protection had little effect on their perceptions of the atmosphere. Only some participants were aware of legal protections extending to sexual orientation in their workplaces, although those who were *not* protected by formal policies were generally aware of that. Only seven total employees knew for certain the status of their legal rights at work—five who were not protected and two who were. Many of the NFL employees, in particular, were surprised to learn that sexual orientation was a protected status in their employment. The fact that employees were unaware of their formal protections (or lack of protections) suggests that for most of them, their awareness context[25] (Glaser and Strauss 1965) about sport as an institution was based more on more informal, nuanced interactions than on formal policies or interactions. Employees had more specific knowledge of whether or not they had domestic partnership benefits, but this skewed heavily towards employees with partners.

For those few who were aware of the formal policies at work, it did have an impact on their sense of the atmosphere. Steven, a 53 year old NCAA employee, said,

> Well, [the Chancellor] added sexual orientation [to the list of protected statuses]. Every year since then, every chancellor has been, keeps the words in there and so [our campus], without the power of state law, but through the power of the directive of the chancellor, they say, we don't discriminate here, on this campus, we don't discriminate. I read that… and I would be less honest if I didn't say that that didn't factor into my decision at that point in time to come out because it certainly did. Once I saw it in print, it made the process that I had already begun to do and think about doing, when I saw that that was now the chancellor's directive…it made that next step for me, so much easier…because I knew I could go back to that and say, well listen, this is what's on paper now…

[25] Glaser and Strauss (1965) define awareness contexts as "the context in which…people interact while taking cognizance of it" (p. 10).

For Steven, having affirming campus policies (while not legally binding) ultimately set the stage for his decision to come out at work. Shannon, a club employee, also discussed the significance of having formal protection, although she spoke more specifically about broad social protections such as gay marriage.

> Um, I don't think, I don't think it necessarily makes a social impact, but I strongly believe that it is a world of difference when you can say that the law is behind you. And you know, I've given a lot of thought to this because I would say, you know, this is something really empowering when, when, you know, if a parent were to speak up, if a parent were to speak up and say I'm not comfortable with this lesbian [working with] my daughter, and she brings her lesbian girlfriend around, there is something remarkable about being able to say you need, you know, you have no foot to stand on because…it's completely and utterly legal and the person and her wife, just like anyone can bring their uh, husband around, uh, you, you know, like it kind of takes the weight of the issue away because it's not like… like…I don't even know how to articulate it, it's just kind of nice to know that should anything come up, like it's their issue, it's undeniably their issue, not um, not mine…you know.

Molly, a club sport employee, went and checked the formal policies for her team prior to coming out at work. She said,

> When I did start dating [someone], I actually went and looked at the constitution of the… team and in my contract and at some point before in the years before, we had added a clause that said, you know, you can't be discriminated against for sexual orientation, and it was in the constitution of our team and in our, in my contract…So once I saw that in there, I was like, well, I guess I'm as protected as I can be legally…

Although only a few respondents were aware of the formal and legal policies in their workplace, those who were aware were well-informed about their potential protections.

Hannah, a 43 year old NCAA employee, discussed how the lack of legal protections and domestic partnership benefits on her campus was problematic.

> BC: How much do you think these policies affect the atmosphere?

> Hannah: Huge. We have a very homophobic campus. We have lost awesome professor candidates, law school candidates, um, because we didn't have domestic partners. We are well behind our peers with the research we have done and we have shown that to the Chancellor. Each time, uh, we are, uh, we are not even on the same page with a lot of the companies that we do business with, not necessarily local, but national companies. When you look at Fortune 500 companies, you know, you can see that…I think we are losing a competitive edge academically, research-wise, uh, with our peer institutions because people are not coming here, and not staying here, um, in this culture, without benefits.

However, Hannah spoke primarily about how the lack of legal and formal policy protections affected the campus as a whole. When asked about the athletic department specifically, she noted,

> BC: Do you think [people not taking jobs] happens in the athletic department also?
>
> Hannah: Um, less in the athletic department because a lot of people's motivation for being in the athletic department supersedes the other stuff. This is, our athletic department's kind of one of the pinnacle programs, so you're pretty much at the top when you come here.
>
> BC: So being in a successful program trumps a supportive gay atmosphere?
>
> Hannah: Right. And especially when you look at the type of personalities that work in an athletic department. That just comes first. Your identity, your identity is your success versus your happiness, and that's just reflected in the number of hours, and, you know, crazy schedules we have, etc.

For Hannah, as much as she lamented the lack of formal policies protecting sexual orientation, she knew that she was in an enviable professional position. And, like many other participants, she suggested that working in an elite athletic department outweighed the negatives of a potentially anti-gay atmosphere.

Only seven participants spoke knowledgeably about specific formal policy or protections for gay employees, and another three were able to speak specifically after prompting. This absence of clarity regarding formal policy and laws suggests that the majority of sport employees rely on informal interactions with coworkers and people in positions of authority. Through

direct interaction and interpretation of stories from significant others, sport employees developed an understanding of common norms in the sport workplace.

The Gendered Sport Atmosphere

The "sport workplace" is not a homogenous setting. Distinct differences in the perception of the atmosphere exist for employees who worked by level or gender of sport. The experiences of those who worked in men's sport were qualitatively different than those working in women's sport, regardless of whether the employees were male or female. Employees in men's sport tended to note a more overt sense of discomfort around issues of homosexuality. Of the eight employees who considered themselves totally in the closet at work, six of them worked in men's sport, one worked in both men's and women's sport, and one worked in women's sport[26], suggesting that employees' perception of the atmosphere in men's sport had an impact on their decision to come out at work. However, this cannot simply be measured by whether or not one publicly comes out in the workplace—regardless of the impact on employee coming out behavior, participants reported differences in the atmosphere between men's and women's sport.

The workplace in men's sport is one that is male dominated, and reflects values of hegemonic masculinity and exclusion of women. While both male and female participants noted this, the women in the sample working in men's sport emphasized this repeatedly. Katherine, a 29 year old Major League Baseball employee, noted,

> You know, and it's interesting because, it is definitely a very, still, um, getting a little bit less, but you know, male-dominated field. Hands down. And, you know, that, I guess I didn't think about that before, but, it can be a little bit intimidating initially, um, even as far as coming out and stuff. You know, like, there's guys everywhere…In men's sport there's probably… more of an assumption that everyone is straight. You know, and now that I think more about it too, and, just,

[26] The patterns of those who identified as closeted, out, or somewhere in-between is discussed in full in the next chapter.

> yeah. I mean I know quite a few people [working in both men's and women's sport], yeah I think that in men's sport it's, you don't see [gay employees] very much at all.

It was difficult for female participants to disentangle whether the atmosphere they experienced in men's sport was due to a more generalized sexist attitude toward women, or whether it was related specifically to their sexual identity. Their suspicions were that the more overt hostility in the workplace had more to do with their sex than their sexuality. Therefore, many of the female participants working in men's sport made sure to take steps to be taken seriously at work. Alicia noted,

> There's always that kind of weirdness but that comes with any girl whether you're gay or not…I have been lucky to deal with clients, big time clients and I've never had an issue being a female. But I also know a great deal about sports. I can talk to any man about any sport for hours. And speak very intelligently, speak about any teams…because I watch football all the time. I can watch SportsCenter 24/7, so I can speak very intelligently about something that they're interested in, which I think is important for women in general to be able to do. If you want to work in sports, you gotta learn the trade…So, you know, I think it's silly when women are like, but I don't know anything about sports… Well then read up on it. Read up on it, it's where you work!

Another focus from participants was on what one respondent called the overall "macho culture" of men's sport. John, a 33 year old NFL employee, said,

> John: I don't think anyone really thinks that there are gay people working, or gay players. As far as I know, I assume that they don't think anyone around them is gay right now.
>
> BC: And would your opinion be that you think most players would have a hard time with it?
>
> John: I think so, I really do. Um, and unfortunately, I think part of it is because the macho, machoness of the sport, in which…heck… I don't want to have any, I don't have any relationship with this gay guy, I don't want other players thinking I'm gay, you know? …Football is one of the toughest sports you can play. You know?

> BC: So do you think players being uncomfortable extends to employees not wanting to be seen that way?
>
> John: Oh there's no question employees don't want to be seen that way. I mean, I'm, I'll be honest, I'm one of them. You know, I don't be seen as a gay guy, but, it's funny how, for however many years, I've been doing this for what, 10 years, in professional sports, and that, it's never been brought up, hey, why don't you have a girlfriend? You know? Who are you going out with? I mean people ask me that question, but they don't say, hey John, you haven't dated anyone in nine years, are you gay? You know? They haven't asked me that because of how masculine I am…

For most of the participants, it was taken-for-granted that male sports were a place where hegemonic masculinity and machismo operated to make the environment uncomfortable for gay people. Yet, these impressions were frequently based on *stereotypes* about men's sport, rather than actual experiences. Jessica, 33, an NCAA employee, points out,

> Because men in sports are macho guys and they, I mean, this is what I'm assuming. They've never given me a reason not to trust them. I'm going to say that, first of all. But men in sports are macho, and if they had a gay male on their team, I don't think they'd be accepting of it. Where a female, you're probably going to have a gay female on your team, and if you want to win, then you can't really discriminate.

Jessica illustrates two significant points in this statement. First, while she has an impression that men working in sports would be less accepting of gayness, she's never actually experienced that personally. Second, she suggests that the atmosphere in women's sport is more accepting of lesbianism, almost by default because of the numbers of lesbians involved in athletics.

This proved to be a fundamental difference between men's and women's sport – those who worked in women's sport described an atmosphere where lesbianism was at least an "open secret," and at times very overtly expressed by employees and athletes. Jocelyn, a 30 year old NCAA employee who worked for both men's and women's sport, commented,

> Yeah, I think that's the one way probably that athletics, or athletic departments, whatever, um, are probably different, because at least on the women's side I think there's a pervading, um, I just think that homosexuality pervades women's

> athletics. Like, whether you're for or against homosexuals in general or whether you're homophobic or not, um, I think it's pretty pervasive. And people are always talking about it, whether its in the media or wherever…not necessarily at work, like oh, she's gay or she's gay, but um, I just think you're a little more open in an athletic environment. Maybe you expect people to be gay more than in a non-athletic environment.

While many respondents noted the presence of other gay women working in women's sport, this didn't necessarily translate into dramatically different behaviors for employees working in men's, women's, or coed sports. However, the difference in perceptions of atmosphere in men's and women's sport suggests that the reasons behind various workplace behavior strategies are significantly different, even if the actual behaviors are not.

Level Differences – College, Club, and Professional Sport

In addition to differences in men's and women's sport, there were perceptible differences between employees who worked in NCAA, club, and professional sports. To generalize, participants noted that college and club sports tended to be positive atmospheres and professional sports tended to be seen as the most conservative with respect to sexual identity issues. This reflects perceptions of the environment rather than direct experiences that were negative. Participants relied on observing others and their total experience as athletes, along with their experiences at multiple levels of sport employment to determine. Although the pattern of employee perceptions suggested a spectrum that ran from club sport as the most open and accepting to professional sport as the most negative and conservative, there were distinct nuances between each level of sport employment.

College Sport

Employees who worked in college athletics spoke more positively than negatively about the environment. Several factors mediated these perceptions. Employees who were visibly out were able to be involved in campus-wide diversity initiatives that were not restricted solely to an athletic department setting and work in the context of an environment of higher learning. This higher learning context provided a backdrop where student-athletes were already learning about concepts of diversity and other social justice issues, and therefore participants expressed that collegiate athletes might at least have the *potential* to be more accepting of non-heteronormative people. Hannah, an NCAA employee, discussed the "youth culture" of student-athletes as being partially an explanation for their acceptance of homosexuality.

> The youth as a whole…the whole coaches, coaches get very frustrated with the I-pods and the um, the lack of discipline and the entitlements and you know, some of that wears on me as well, uh, um, so I think some of those issues, they lump into the gayness, and it's like, it's just this whole generation, and the tattoos and the piercings and the you know, the clothes and wearing the jeans you know and the pants showing the underwear and you know, how, we're, we're going to hell in a hand basket with all that, and so I think they just kind of lump it in with sexual orientation. And I think they, they feel the youth are far more experimental sexuality-wise then their generation ever would have been…I mean it's probably based to some extent on reality…It's, it's in their movies it's in their you know, it's in their teachings more than was ever in our teaching, ooh, sex would have been a dirty word, you know, now it's, now they're describing the act with living color, so…

While Hannah discussed the "youth culture" in primarily negative terms, she observed the link between tolerance and acceptance of various issues relating to sexuality along with the generational differences she described. Participants who worked in college athletics frequently spoke of the environment as being positive because of the context of higher learning, enlightenment, and social justice causes.

However, there were also unique concerns perceived by those working in college sports, as well, primarily with the involvement of parents in the lives of student-athletes. Mallory, a 23-year-old working in an NCAA sport, stated,

> Part of it also um, for me is that, I mean my position is pretty much, aside from like an administrative assistant in an office, I'm the lowest position, you know, so I, I think that's part of it too, is that, like apparently that when, when you still do definitely have those parents who are, either very religious or um, I, I don't know, just sort of hateful towards gay people and they're not making their decision based on [my position] for their kid to come to the school or not, um, they're I mean they're making on you know, the head coach and that type of thing, but I think, I mean on recruiting visits and that type of thing, I'm definitely, definitely not out. Um, and that's, I mean, my boss has never said anything to me, like that, um, like you know, don't, don't make your sexuality known, when I have a recruiting visit, but um, I wouldn't do it for the point just to not hurt the cause, which I hate, but that's kind of the name of the game.

Even though college student-athletes are legally adults, there still was a sense among those who worked in college athletics that they had to be accountable to parents, and thus not disclose their sexual identity in the workplace. While accountability was a prominent feature discussed by employees who worked in more public, visible positions (like coaches), even background employees in college sports, like Mallory, expressed the sense that they were accountable to parents, and should deemphasize their sexual identity to be "professional" and responsible at work.

Occasionally, this sense of accountability carried over into discussions of the appearance of impropriety. Jessica stated,

> Plus, the athletes that you're [working with], a lot of times, they're going through the same things as a younger player, um, they don't have a lot of people to look up to that are the same as you are. You know? But, as long as I've been [an employee], I've never, I mean, all my players know that I'm married, and who I'm married to, but I'm not going to ask them about their personal life, you know? And whether or not they're doing OK with their girlfriend or, if they even have one, you know? So, I don't want to sway them in any way either.

Jessica, who worked in an on-field position, later stated that she was more distant with her gay athletes than her straight athletes. She was concerned that she would be targeted if she had close relationships with her gay players, so she was sure to keep a forced distance from her gay players.

Mallory worked in professional sport prior to her work in collegiate athletics, and when comparing the two, argued that in addition to being accountable to parents, college employees had to deal with the possibilities of negative recruiting in ways that didn't affect professional sports.

> I mean for me anyway, it's, I would say the atmosphere is slightly less friendly in college [sport] as a whole, um, just I mean, partially because you're dealing with kids and parents, um, and, and the thing is, with college [sport], um, you're recruiting their kids and people are constantly fighting for those kids, and if they can use your sexuality or someone on your staff's sexuality to hurt you, a lot of people are gonna use that, um, I mean there's, I read an article once, probably 4 or 5 years ago, um that intrigued me a bit, I'm sure you've read it, um, on [a rumored lesbian coach] asking for them, I forget who they were interviewing, but you know, somebody that they were interviewing that was talking about how coaches have tried to use [a rumored lesbian coach's] sexuality, or her perceived sexuality against recruiting.

Mallory expressed that these issues didn't take place in professional sport because the structure of the league was significantly different for athletes—they were signed to professional contracts rather than recruited by individual schools, and professional athletes made decisions based on potential athletic success rather than the perceived sexual identity of coaching staff or other employees.

Ultimately, while college employees noted many positives in the atmosphere regarding sexual identity, those in positions at elite, Division I universities with successful athletic programs expressed the sense that they had more to lose and more at stake, professionally, financially, and emotionally. Because of this, these employees reported some of the more

conservative atmospheres with respect to sexual identity. At those schools, as Hannah suggested earlier, being at the upper echelon of the athletic institution was what employees based their identities on. Employment at a top-tier, successful Division I NCAA athletic department was seen as the proverbial "holy grail" in collegiate athletics. Employees who worked for those kinds of programs wanted to stay employed there as long as possible (unless they aspired to work in professional sport). For college employees, especially those at elite-level athletic departments, the success of the team took precedence over any other issues they might have had in the workplace.

Club Sport

While there were only a few participants who worked in club sports (n = 5), these employees echoed many of the positive elements and some of the negative elements of the atmosphere in college sports. This is, in part, because some of the club sports were affiliated with universities, just not through the university athletic department. Club sport employees echoed discussed of the same concerns as in college athletics with regard to the age of participants (particularly in relation to the age of the employee). While club employees primarily discussed their workplace in positive tones, noting that since it was "just" club competition, and thus seen as more voluntary, there was less at stake, both financially and competitively, and, ostensibly, less to lose, they also firmly articulated the position of club sport as part of the overall institutional structure of sport. Darcy, a club sport employee, stated,

> I'm gonna say no, I think, um, it's not very open… um, like on an individual level, like person-to-person, it's fine, but as a general rule, um, I think because it's so competitive, uh, you know there's always people trying to get in, and there's probably you know, move the, whether it's an athlete or and administrator or a team or league or whatever the case is, um, I think that competition obviously drives the industry um, and I think that um, being gay can be a detraction in the

> competition… Um, that doesn't mean that I'm not ,not staying, that um, but you know, I just, I don't think, but I don't know that it's any better anywhere else…I mean, still a marginalized group of people…I don't really know how to…

Darcy articulated the nuances that some of the college employees suggested. Club sport, individually, was an atmosphere where her interactions were "fine" and almost universally positive, but her final sense of the structural components of the institution of sport were still framed in negative terms.

Other club employees discussed their experiences in club sport as being positive. Curtis claimed his experiences were "mostly positive. Um, I didn't really, like, get any negative feedback from [being gay], I didn't really get any, um, kind of, ignorance, I guess you can call it, from [club sport]." I asked Lucy, another club sport employee, if she ever had negative experiences while working in club sport. She said, "…not directly or personally being aimed at me, but I would say there's sometimes just a feeling that you're not the majority and heterosexual athletes or teammates might be just not as aware of their choice in words and how that may be hurting other people. Um, but not directly I would say."

Club sport employees picked upon some of the subtle informal nuances that they interpreted to be negative, but their overall experiences were primarily positive. This sense of a positive atmosphere for club employees was also backed up by behavior – 4 of the 5 club employees considered themselves out of the closet at work.

Professional Sport

In contrast to collegiate or club employees, professional sport employees framed their experiences more negatively. In professional sport, employees discussed the *potential* for a negative atmosphere, even if that potential wasn't necessarily realized. Employees who worked

in professional sport repeatedly discussed how their job performance was the most important thing. They frequently mentioned "letting work speak for itself," noting that the success of the team trumped any other workplace issue. Part of their emphasis on team first, self second has to do with the structure of the professional sport industry itself, at least for on-field employees. Most professional contracts for on-field personnel are only honored as long as the team was winning. It is common in professional sports for coaches and assistant coaches to be fired for poor production on the field. Employees who worked in on-field positions, whether in coaching positions or in more support staff positions, expressed feeling vulnerable about their job security. For employees in professional sports, the team comes first, and all other workplace issues are secondary. Gay employees did not want to call attention to themselves for any other reason beyond their successful job performance. Frequently, homosexuality was discussed in terms that suggested it had the potential to be a liability at work. John argued,

> I was always curious. Because I never signed a contract. It's very rare that employees, besides coaches and players, and the general manager would sign a contract with the team. So, um, I'm year to year. Always have been. I'm year to year even with the [current team]. So if they ever found out that I was gay, who's to say, if they fire…if they found out I was gay and they wanna fire me, who's to say, well, you didn't do the job we expected you to do. So, what proof do I have to go back and say, well, they fired me because I'm gay?

John and others working in professional sports felt that there could be retribution for disclosing gay identity. Professional sport, for nearly everyone in the industry, is seen as the highest achievement in sport employment. Many participants looked at college employment as a potential "stepping stone" to professional employment. This created a scenario where professional employees felt they had the most to lose by being openly gay at work.

Professional employees were the most likely to express that they would have difficulties being verbally out at work (regardless of their actual experiences with being out or not at work).

Marcus, an NFL employee, came out publicly, and noted he received phone calls from other closeted gay employees in the league.

> Well, I got a phone call from an [employee from another team] who was gay. And, uh, he said, I, I appreciate you [coming out], because I can't come out and work for this organization. There's no way. And, actually [later, this employee] asked me to help him [get a job in a city] where it was a more accepting atmosphere. Which, I'm not sure it really makes a difference. I really am not sure. I think, I think, uh, professional sports, whether it's [a liberal city] or, uh, [a conservative city] or wherever, you're still going to have, you know, some issues.

Marcus' experience coming out was positive, but he experienced other gay NFL employees discussing a negative environment, which helped shape his belief that any city or organization would have "some issues" for a gay person.

However, there were several professional employees who noted that while the potential for a negative atmosphere existed in professional sports, in their experience most professional athletes and employees were able to handle anything relating to sexual identity precisely because they were professionals. Mallory noted,

> Um, but I think, like in pro sports, I mean, it's a business. Their job is to come in there and play [a sport] and or whatever and, quite frankly you don't really like, you don't need them to be a good person and you don't need to have any input from them as long as they come out and score points, and that type of thing. And my being gay doesn't affect them.

Mallory, who began her career in pro sports and currently works in college sport, argued that being gay was less of an issue at the professional level, entirely because it was a business. As such, she did not feel any pressure to assist in athletes' personal growth or to assuage anxious parents. Thus, everyone was free to do their jobs without the stress of issues related to sexual identity.

Although there were differences in how college, club, and professional employees perceived the sport atmosphere, this did not always translate into clear differences in behaviors or strategies, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Components of the Sport Environment

While there were distinct themes in how employees perceived the sport environment, there were also certain factors that impacted those perceptions beyond the type of employment (i.e. men's, women's, co-ed, college, club, or professional sport). Employees discussed how their perceptions of the environment shifted based on contact with athletes (at all levels), the presence of other gay people (both visibly gay and not), the policies of the University or ownership, and the effect of one negative person. These factors had more specific effects on employees' perceptions of the sport workplace.

Contact with Athletes: Effects of Generation

One factor that influenced employee perceptions was the level of contact participants had with athletes. Participants expressed a sense that athletes, particularly but not limited to college athletes, were actually fine with topics relating to homosexuality. Steven stated,

> The other thing, though, that I think, you know it's interesting, is that the adults who work in college athletics are way, way, way behind the bell curve, vis-à-vis the student athletes…the student athletes are way ahead of us on this issue…um, and that's probably generational um, but uh, and I'm not saying that at [our University], we don't have a certain number of homophobic student athletes, but uh, these kids, get it a lot more…they understand. The student athletes, they understand the differences in sexual orientation….they're much, much more tolerant, they're much, much more open and uh, they're much more sensitive to the fact that they probably have gay teammates and for the most part, at this University, they don't care…

Hannah agrees with Steven's point, and notes, "that's why I think the athletic culture can change eventually, because our youth athletes right now, don't care, and I think that will carry forward." This supports the most recent work of Eric Anderson (2009), who suggests that homophobia and what he calls "homohysteria" is decreasing in sport, spurred in part by a new generation of athletes who have been exposed to concepts about homosexuality throughout their educational experience[27]. Elaine argues that this might not even be a new phenomenon. She said, "right, like people can know you're gay, or think you're gay, but as long as they're not seeing a partner at your workplace, your boss doesn't necessarily care. You know, um, and, and I think that probably, you know I, I, I think that probably would be the same, you know with, but I don't think kids really care, to be honest with you. I don't think the students have ever cared."

However, this perception that athletes were fine with homosexuality did not only extend to college students. Both Rachel and Marcus, NFL employees, suggest that even professional athletes demonstrated positive (or at least neutral) behavior regarding sexual identity. Rachel notes,

> Right, I mean as far as what [athlete's] did…they would talk, and you know, the thing is, it was always initiated by this one [employee]. And to be honest, because I was always in the room with them when they would you know, well, I can't say *always* when they talked about being gay, but uh, they really, I would say 90% of the time they just, they did not engage in the same type of [negative] bantering that he did.

The negative experiences Rachel had at work were almost exclusively at the hands of one co-worker, and rarely initiated by the players. Marcus had some negative experiences with players, but for the most part reported positive exchanges with players.

> On a day off, on a weekend, there might have been some players there that would see me there with this guy. And he wasn't the most masculine guy in the world. So they probably put two and two together, because by this time I'm, uh, over 40

[27] This idea is also supported by Egan and Sherrill (2009), who note that voters age 18 – 29 were the least likely to vote for Proposition 8 banning gay marriage in California in 2008.

> and I'm single. So, that's a pretty sophisticated group. Most of the older guys down there, they're pretty sophisticated. They probably figured it out.

Employees argued that often, athletes seemed to have little issue with sexuality in the sport environment (in contrast to popular media and scholarly perception). They expressed a perception that those in the administrative or upper-management levels were more likely to have a problem with having gay coworkers. This was sometimes attributed to age or generation, and other times this was attributed to power. Employees knew that those in upper management positions had authority to harm them professionally if they had a problem with their sexual identity. For participants who worked at the lower levels of employment, upper management and administrative employees were cited as the least likely to be a potential ally in the workplace. When asked hypothetically, employees said they thought their supervisors and administrators would be least likely to affirm their sexual identity. Yet their actual behavior did not reflect this hypothetical scenario.

Even though many participants suggested that (younger) athletes would probably accept homosexuality and (older) bosses would probably not, the actual behavior of employees was reversed. Employees, particularly those who worked in on-field positions, and particularly at the college level, were significantly more likely to come out to bosses and superiors than to athletes. This was done primarily for self-protection—even if participants' felt that their bosses might have a problem, they felt it was prudent to disclose their identity so that it didn't "come back and bite them" later. Greg explained his comfort hypothetically coming out to two of his superiors—one female and one male.

> [Negative reactions] are something that as gay people, we kind of have in the back of our head, it's coming out is supposed to be this scary thing, and uh, luckily for me, it is, you know, at this point, it's not as a scary thing. If it was somebody, you know, when I came out to my athletic director, it was uh, it was scary because I was coming out to my boss, but at the same time, she seemed gay-

> tolerant, so I knew she was gonna accept it. If I came out to a my immediate supervisor now, who's married with kids, um, you know, I would probably be sweatin' bullets, you know, trying to tell him, you know, even though I'm pretty sure he'd be completely accepting, I think It's just different, you know, not, he's my boss, and um, and, and straight, so… And I worry more about his, his future perception of me, see, is he gonna be worried about me, you know, doing this or doing that now that he knows I'm gay, more so than anything else, so…

Greg felt more comfortable coming out to his female athletic director because he perceived she wouldn't have a problem with his sexual identity. He discussed at various points in the interview how he felt protected, as an NCAA employee, by actively disclosing his identity to the athletic director for his department in advance of anyone "finding out." Yet his decision-making to come out to those in authority was still reserved for people who he already had a prior knowledge of acceptance—even if he thought his straight, male supervisor would be "completely accepting," he still hesitated in telling him.

While employees occasionally expressed hesitation in coming out to bosses or supervisors, they still did so more often than to athletes. Even though on-field employees hypothesized that athletes would probably be fine with their sexuality, they felt the potential drawbacks (such as the appearance of impropriety) outweighed the benefits of coming out to their teams.

Observation of Visible Others

Another major factor affecting the atmosphere in the workplace was the presence of other gay employees—both visible and not. As Cooley (1922) suggests, employees base their perceptions on interactions with significant others. When employees had an open, visible gay coworker, it impacted their perception of the atmosphere. Predominantly, other visible gay employees impacted the atmosphere positively—participants' were able to model behavior after

these visible others, and their presence helped affirm the employees' sense of a supportive atmosphere. Lesbian employees, in particular, discussed how the presence of other lesbians in sport helped frame their sense of the sport atmosphere positively.

Occasionally, the presence of a visible gay other impacted an employee's perception negatively—especially if the visible employee were treated poorly or discriminated against. Alternately, if there were suspected gay coworkers, particularly those in higher positions of authority, participants took cues from their silence. If the athletic director or head coach or team president was gay but was not open about their life, other employees took this as a message that the workplace was not a place where sexual minorities were welcomed and affirmed. Susan, an NCAA employee, had several gay co-workers, and a lesbian boss. She talked about when her girlfriend would come visit her, saying "it was kind of a more hush- hush, I think I took that cue from my boss, you know, who was like so overtly quiet about her professional life…she never brought her girlfriend around here's why I never felt like I was really, you know there to bring my girlfriend around." Barbara used similar techniques in evaluating her workplace. She had a lesbian boss who had never publicly confirmed her lesbian identity.

> She, um, [my boss'] girlfriend or partner, I don't know, I think she calls her, her partner, comes to you know, if there's a Christmas party, she'll be there, you know she's open, fairly open about it, but you know, she doesn't parade around with her, holding hands or you know, anything like that, you know she's of the older generation where I think it's kind of, this is my roommate and you know, we're roommates…uh, but uh, everybody knows it's her partner and if she was to talk about her to myself or some of the other, other um, gay women of the department, I'm sure she would say my partner…Um, but she, and she you know, with us never really quite acknowledged that you know, she knows about us.

While Barbara framed her own identity negotiations as oppositional to her boss, her actual behaviors and strategies closely mirrored the "don't ask, don't tell" ideology her boss demonstrated. The presence of visible and invisible gay others were one of the primary ways in

which gay employees subtly evaluated their workplace environment. They took their cues from these significant others and adopted strategies for behavior in the workplace.

Top Down Policies

The ownership of a team, specifically for those who worked directly for individual teams, was another frequently cited factor that influenced employee perceptions of the sport atmosphere. Several participants noted that their knowledge about the public stance the owners had towards gay issues had an impact on their sense of atmosphere[28]. This was only ever discussed if the ownership group expressed pro-gay policies; either employees who worked for anti-gay owners were not aware of the corporate policies or those employees are not represented in the sample. Dana, an NFL employee, suggests a progressive ownership helped her make the decision to work in the NFL,

> Um, the, the [ownership] is very open about supporting gays and being gay-friendly. They hire, you know, their upper administration, if you were to look at it, they hire a lot of openly gay people and have a lot of openly gay friends, um, so knowing that, I thought I was going into an environment that would be very comfortable and where I wouldn't be too concerned about.

Julie, another NFL employee, discussed in her interview that the overall conservative (and often religious) atmosphere that she experienced, particularly perpetuated by those higher in the workplace hierarchy, was mediated somewhat by her knowledge that the ownership group had progressive politics. She noted,

> I think that um, just like if I walk into a school each day and the tone is set by the principal, I think there's something to be said within an organization, that the tone is really set by the ownership. And our ownership is quite progressive. Um, and liberal in politics, I think. Um, though, and I, I think the president pretty much is also um, but as you start going through the ranks of the organization, the rest of

[28] In order to protect confidentiality, I do not elaborate on specific policies of particular ownership groups.

> the organization is incredibly conservative, um, politically and religiously uh, so, um, so I am definitely a fish out of water…

For those who worked in organizations that had a track record of progressive politics in general, their sense of the atmosphere was affected by this, whether their actual day-to-day experiences matched up. Dana actually experienced significant negativity at her job with respect to sexual identity, but her sense of the atmosphere was still that, compared to other NFL teams, her team had more progressive politics about homosexuality.

The Bad Apple

Finally, in the same way that positive ownership influenced employee perceptions, many employees noted the impact that only one person had on their sense of the atmosphere. Regardless of other factors that influenced the workplace, many participants noted how one proverbial "bad apple" really did impact their experiences. This only seemed to be a factor in a negative direction; that is, the presence of one positive person in a negative environment did not have nearly the same impact as one negative person in an otherwise neutral or positive environment. For example, when I asked Rachel, a 31 year old NFL employee, about her work atmosphere, she noted that it was a negative environment for both women in general and gay people specifically. Yet, during the interview, the events she stated that helped inform her opinion of the atmosphere were almost exclusively attributed to one specific co-worker. She described this coworker as "the most arrogant, um, homophobe, I guess, like, he's so crass, he makes constant gay jokes." Towards the end of the interview, however, she stated that actually, her negative experiences in the NFL were only at the hands of the aforementioned coworker and one player. The rest of the players, she stated, were rarely involved in homophobic gay joking. Dana, another NFL employee, quit her job after watching another gay coworker be falsely

accused of impropriety at work. She discussed the incident and her subsequent resignation as caused by the vindictive actions of a homophobic supervisor who targeted a publicly out employee. The incident and the lack of action by management led Dana to leave sport employment altogether, and caused her to have an overall negative perception of the NFL (with respect to sexual identity), even as the rest of her experiences (which spanned a five year period) were mostly positive.

People who had a "bad apple" at work often cited the overt religious beliefs of those coworkers that led to a negative perception of their behavior. Susan, an NCAA employee, started looking for new employment shortly after her old job changed athletic directors. She said, "Our athletic director retired, and they hired this football guy, who's, you know, who's just a, a good Christian family man, you know, who doesn't like gay people…and that immediately jeopardized my job." Anna, a 30-year-old NCAA employee, repeatedly discussed the actions and behaviors that a "conservative, religious, [person] who I don't believe I can trust" impacted her day-to-day experiences at work.

For those who reported a negative workplace environment, it is important to discern what specific events led to this perception, and how much of the environment is based on the actions of a few rather than an overall structural support of negative issues relating to sexual identity.

Actual Experienced Events: "But I'm One of the Lucky Ones…"

Employees' perceptions of the atmosphere for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in sport were slightly toward the negative end of the spectrum, but were far from the "hostile environment" that scholars have suggested for the past two decades. Furthermore, while employees tended to report a negative work environment, very few participants in this study had actual direct, overtly

negative experiences. Of 37 participants, four had extremely clear serious negative experiences, and three had less serious (in their repercussions) but still overt negative experiences. The vast majority of participants had neutral or even positive workplace experiences around sexual identity, but their actual perceptions about the atmosphere were still generally slightly negative. This is best illustrated by John's experience.

John, who works in an on-field position in the NFL, repeatedly told me throughout the interview that his workplace was extremely negative, and even potentially hostile, for gay men. He described the environment as "really conservative. Really, really conservative," with objectification of women and negative comments made about gay men. When he contemplated what might happen if a player discovered he was gay, he notes,

> I mean I already knew I would never come out in front of the team, or to a team, or, I mean… I'd like to do it maybe to one player, and I've thought about it before,… um, very very, I'm very selective as to who I come out with, I'm not going to go into work with a rainbow shirt on or something. You know? So, I don't think I'd… I'd probably get out of there alive….but probably no other player would ever talk to me again, I'm guessing. Yup.

John felt that the best he could hope for from a coming out disclosure was "getting out of there alive." He repeatedly stated throughout the interview that he could not come out at work. Yet John actually had come out to approximately fifteen people throughout his time working in the NFL, and every single time he was received positively. John's perception that there was "no way" he could come out at work did not match up with his actual experiences in coming out at work. John, like many other participants in the sample, was basing his perception of the atmosphere on hypothetical scenarios of what could happen, even in the face of contradictory evidence from actual experienced events.

As stated previously, there were a limited few participants who had overtly negative experiences, and those tended to be very extreme. Three of the participants felt they were fired for being gay. All three of these participants worked in on-field positions (and six of the total seven employees who identified specific negative events worked in on-field positions). One participant was fired from his NCAA position shortly after publicly coming out as gay, despite a playoff-caliber performance ever year he worked with the team. Another NFL employee was essentially forced to resign after allegations of improper conduct relating to sexual identity were falsely alleged. A third NCAA employee had no direct proof that she was fired specifically for her sexuality, but she felt very strongly that it played into her being let go, and subsequently affected her behavior in other sport jobs later in her career. She explained,

> I think, yeah, yeah I think um, you know, definitely at a the one, you know after being, I mean once you've been you know you've had a tremendously successful career and you get fired for being a lesbian, you know, even after being successful in turning a program around, you know, you definitely react and respond to how you're treated, so I think um, I was extremely cautious for a period of time. I mean you're at another school for a long period of time and you know, you kind of let your guard down a little bit, you know, I think after 10 years, you, you kinda say, ok, you know, these are the people that are safe, these are the people that aren't, you know, these are the people I don't know, and then you know, you just kind of go from there, so…

A fourth NFL employee worked in what would likely be considered a "hostile work environment" as defined by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, including nearly constant anti-gay and sexist jokes. An NFL employee reported positive interactions with most players, but was subjected to harassment and public humiliation from one player shortly before he left the sport. Another NFL employee drafted a resignation letter over what she perceived to be an anti-gay corporate decision before she was persuaded to stay by ownership. Finally, an NCAA employee overheard an ongoing anti-gay exchange between co-workers that dampened her perception of the sport environment until she left that organization and joined another team.

These events demonstrate that there still is a valid concern about the atmosphere for sexual minorities in sport. However, the fact that specific negative events were only mentioned by seven people (less than 20% of the overall sample) suggests that negative overall perceptions of the atmosphere, in contrast to the cliché, are actually *not* reality.

What is most striking is that although less than 20% of respondents experienced direct events that were negative, they still considered themselves "lucky." Although their neutral or positive experiences were by far the experiences of the majority of the participants, they frequently expressed relief or gratitude that they did not experience some of the most negative consequences regarding sexual identity at work. Molly, after describing her positive experiences with working in club sport, noted, "I have like a good story, no I'm just saying (laugh), there's not a lot of, I'm lucky, I'm a lucky gay…I haven't had a whole lot of problems…no I mean I think It's good, because it's rare." Molly's perception was that her positive experiences were the exception for gay employees, rather than the rule.

Some of this can be explained by the role of the media. Nearly half of the negative events in this sample were from people who are publicly out in the media (three of the seven people with negative experiences were publicly out, and three of the six publicly out people reported negative experiences). The relative paucity of mass media stories about gay employees in sport only serves to reinforce the fact that the atmosphere is a negative one, especially if the stories we hear about are ones where egregious cases of discrimination occurred for gay employees.

Conclusion

Given that most of the employees' negative perceptions of the workplace atmosphere are based on hypothetical events rather than actual experiences, it is reasonable to assume that these perceptions are based on the accumulation of their entire experience in sports – as athletes and as employees, and potentially even as fans. Many of the employees went through a coming out process in late adolescence and early adulthood, often during the time they were actively competing as athletes. This process shaped their entire relationship with the institution of sport—occasionally in affirmative ways, but primarily in negative ones. As they transitioned out of roles as athletes into roles as employees, they carried with them the accumulated baggage of their experiences in sport. This is a unique experience for those working in the industry of sport. As the overwhelming majority of employees in sport have this prior athletic experience, it is difficult to separate definitive explanations for the overwhelming sense that the sport workplace environment is a negative one for sexual minorities.

Whether or not their sense of atmosphere is based on actual or hypothetical events is less important than the fact that, for these employees, their perception is their reality. And this reality shapes their decision-making at work – in terms of the specific strategies they employ and the people they identify as allies and potential foes. When I asked Alex what he based his impressions that he could not come out while working in Major League Baseball on, he noted,

> You know what that's based on? It's based on nothing. Having left [baseball], it is, it's completely conjured up in our heads and I think in sports are probably more accepting and more open than we actually believe that they are, but we don't have, as gay individuals, we don't have any evidence of that. And you know, when I came out after I left baseball to you know, my close group of friends, uh, in baseball, other [coworkers], they're like you know, you could have told us during the time that you were in baseball, we could have protected you, you know, I could have been your one friend, and you know… That was great after the fact, you don't know that during, when you're in the game, and you certainly don't want to risk it, so, you know, after taking a step back and looking

> at it from a different lens, you know you probably, I look at it thinking yeah, probably I probably could have been, did ok.

Alex illustrates that while the justifications for fears of repercussion are perhaps not based in reality, the fear itself still feels real, and employees act on that fear to protect themselves. It therefore is necessary to look at the various strategies and behaviors used by participants in addressing their perception of a negative atmosphere in the institution of sport. The next chapter discusses the ways in which participants negotiated their identities in the sport workplace.

CHAPTER 5.

STRATEGIES FOR NEGOTIATING THE SPORT ENVIRONMENT: COMING OUT, BEING OUT, ACTING OUT

Employees had distinct experiences in their interactions with the institution of sport that influenced (and were influenced by) their perceptions of the environment. This chapter explores the impact that those perceptions and experiences had on employee behavior at work. Their perceptions of the environment did not automatically correlate with behaviors related to those perceptions; participants with positive perceptions were not necessarily linguistically out at work, while participants with negative perceptions were not necessarily closeted. Linguistic outness, defined by Iannotta and Kane (2002) as "an overt, public acknowledgement of one's sexual identity," follows the model of coming out that sees the process as part of a progression of events, from lying, to hiding, to deemphasizing, to implicitly and then explicitly coming out (Griffin 1998) linguistically. Furthermore, the dividing line between "out" and "closeted" is not easily discernable. "Coming out" is not a one-time event, it is an ongoing negotiation that shifts based on audience, self-comfort, and other circumstances. Nor is it often an "event" at all; coming out was rarely an overt, planned discussion with coworkers. The bulk of the participants' coming out experiences occurred when the opportunity came up rather than through any planned disclosure, although this varied considerably by age. As with perceptions of the work environment, participants' decisions about coming out at work varied for men and women, employment in professional, college or club sport, and employment in men's, women's or co-ed sport. Coming out disclosures also varied based on an employees' position in the workplace hierarchy, their job requirements, their experiences coming out in other parts of their life, and

their experiences as former athletes. This chapter focuses on variations in "outness" at work, the specific strategies that employees used to enhance or downplay their sexual identity, and the processes that they used to identify potential allies at work.

COMING OUT

"Coming out" is neither a singular event nor something that occurs in a vacuum. When asked, participants expressed a specific sense of "how out" they were at work. Thirteen participants described themselves as "totally out," eight described themselves as either "not out" or "closeted," and the remaining 16 participants put themselves somewhere in between (often using numerations like 50/50 or 75/25). There were variations based on many factors. Table 2 illustrates the number of participants who labeled themselves as out, not out, or in-between based on gender, level (professional, college, or club and men's, women's or co-ed sport), position (on-field or off-field), and age.

Table 2: Self-Identification of Outness by Gender, Level, Position, and Age

	GENDER					LEVEL			POSITION		AGE		
	Male	Female	Men's Sport	Women's Sport	Co-Ed Sport	Professional	College	Club	Off-Field	On-Field	21-29	30-39	40+
OUT	4	9	5	5	3	6	4	3	8	5	4	5	4
NOT OUT	3	5	6	1	1	6	1	1	3	5	2	5	1
IN-BETWEEN	3	13	5	7	4	5	10	1	11	5	4	11	1
TOTAL	10	27	16	13	8	17	15	5	22	15	10	21	6

Gender

Sport is an overwhelmingly masculine environment. Gender differences emerged on both an individual and institutional level. Men and women utilized different strategies for disclosing their sexual identity, and had different perceptions of the sport atmosphere. Employees in men's, women's, and co-ed sport (whether male or female) also differed in their

strategies and perceptions. While almost twice as many women identified as "out" than "not out," a slightly larger proportion of male participants identified as out (40% of male participants compared to 38% of female participants. The number of women who considered themselves to be "somewhere in between," as opposed to out or not out, was striking. Nearly half of the female participants described themselves as somewhere in-between out and not out. While there is not a direct correlation between this identification and identity labels participants used to describe themselves, an unwillingness to conform to traditional labeling strategies around both self-identification and the "coming out" model of disclosure may be interrelated. All of the men in the sample identified as gay, while only nine of 27 women identified as lesbian; there was significant variety to the language women used to describe their sexual identities (including lesbian, gay, gay or lesbian, queer, homo, dyke, no label, and bisexual). Savin-Williams (2005) argues that "young women…in particular, have not been well served by standard sexual taxonomies" (p. 211). Female respondents appeared to have more ambivalence about the terminology of what one calls oneself; they appear to have similar ambivalence about the distinct labeling of "out" or "not out."

Three of the four men who identified as "out" in the sample were publicly out in the media (and two of the men who identified as "not out" while working in sport later came out publicly). This may be partially explained by a sample bias—50% of the men in the sample were publicly out, and four of the five were recruited from the same online network. In contrast, only two of the nine out women were publicly out. Gay men in sport get more coverage than gay women by both the mainstream and gay media. Both mainstream sport media and well-known gay sport media (such as Outsports.com) focus the majority of their attention on gay male athletes. While media attention is focused on gay male athletes who come out (such as John

Amaechi, the first openly gay former NBA player), there is less discussion of out lesbian athletes[29]. It is unclear, then, if female employees are not out publicly because they are hesitant to do so or if because there is less media interest in their coming out.

In addition to differences based on male and female employees, there were differences based on men's, women's, or co-ed sport. While there were nearly equal numbers of men's sport employees in all three categories, only one employee each in women's sport and co-ed sport identified as "not out." This supports the contention of researchers (Anderson 2002, 2005; Gough 2007; Harry 1995; Messner 1992, 2002; Muir and Seitz 2004; and Woog 1998, 2002) that men's sport, in particular, is a site of homophobia predicated around hyper-masculinity. Both men and women who worked in men's sport expressed more reluctance to come out than those working in women's or co-ed sport. Katherine, an employee in Major League Baseball, discussed how her experience working in men's sport differed from friends' experiences working in women's sport.

> I mean maybe [my friends who work in women's sport] feel more safe in that environment, you know, when you're dealing with female athletes, because, most often than not, you're gonna have some gay female athletes. You know? And, yeah, and obviously like people you can relate to, maybe not directly in contact, obviously, but you know, its around, and you know if you get caught in the middle, or in a tough spot, there is indirectly some kind of support there…But I think that, like, no I don't believe that just because I'm a female working in sports period that there's a stereotype [of me being a lesbian]. In men's sport there's probably… more of an assumption that everyone is straight. You know, and now that I think more about it too… yeah I think that in men's sport it's, you don't see it very much at all. And, you know, do these women in men's sports, do they feel, I guess, you know, it could go both ways… Do they feel more protected in this environment because… they are probably a minority, even if they are… definitely a minority, especially in my situation working in men's sports, but if they feel protected because they are a minority as women and there are a lot of

[29] The Outsports discussion boards had a 14-page thread discussing the coming out of John Amaechi in 2007; in 2005 when WNBA star Sheryl Swoops came out, it garnered only a 5 page thread.

> men, you know, seeing their work and whatever. I think it's just, yeah. It's interesting.

Katherine expressed that she felt less comfortable as a lesbian working in men's sport than her friends who were lesbians working in women's sport, and this discomfort translated into her lack of disclosure about her sexual identity at work (she identified as "not out").

Employees in men's sport reported different experiences than those in women's or co-ed sport, even as those experiences did not necessarily translate into coming out behaviors. Those who were out in men's sport were out in the media—four of the five out men's sport employees were publicly out. While the experiences of gay men and lesbians in sport are different (and for different reasons), it appears as though *men's sport* employees also have significantly different experiences, whether the employees are male or female.

Level

Employees' experiences and behaviors differed based on the level of sport, as well. The level of play by participants (club, collegiate, or professional) dictated how employees looked at the institution in terms of the "stakes"—both financially and emotionally. There were equal numbers of professional sport employees who identified as "out" (6), "not out" (6) and "in-between" (5). Those who identified as "not out" all worked for one of the "big three" leagues of men's sport: the NFL, MLB, or the NBA. Messner (2002) argues that the "big three" sports of football, baseball and basketball have been the "uncontested institutional 'center'" of attention. Employees who worked for one of the big three leagues were in environments that were perceived as being sites of hegemonic masculinity predicated on homophobia (Anderson 2002; Gough 2007; Messner 2002; Woog 1998, 2002). The majority of professional sport employees who identified as "out" or "in-between" worked for leagues or teams with less media attention,

had lower salaries, and received less overall mainstream attention (like the WNBA or Olympic National teams).

Despite the amount of scholarly attention to lesbians and gay men in collegiate athletics that reports negative (or potentially negative) experiences (Baird 2000; Griffin 1998; Kauer 2005; Mauer-Starks et al. 2008; Muir and Seitz 2004; Muska 2001; and Wolf-Wendel et al. 2001), only one college employee identified as not out. As discussed in Chapter 4, college employees perceived the work environment to be "safe" and tolerant as institutions of higher learning. Even several employees who worked for universities that are considered "elite" athletic institutions considered themselves to be out or in-between at work. It appears as though big-time collegiate sport, while similar to professional sport in terms of their competitiveness, media attention, and public scrutiny, is an environment where more employees feel comfortable coming out than those in professional sport.

Proportionally, club employees were the most likely to consider themselves out at work. Three-fifths of the sample stated that they were totally out at work, and the one person who identified as "not out," stated that she had no particular objection to being out, the opportunity simply hadn't presented itself. While club sport employees were equally passionate about their role in the sport environment, they also were more likely to express a sense that their employment was not as metaphorically life-and-death as those who worked in professional sport. They felt they had less at risk in coming out, and therefore less to lose by doing so.

In sum, level had the biggest impact on employees who identified as "not out." Professional employees were the most likely to identify themselves this way, while only one collegiate and club employee identify as such. The financial and emotional stakes of

professional sport, described by many as the ultimate goal in sport employment, functioned to motivate employees to deemphasize their sexual identity and emphasize their work identity.

Position

The amount of contact employees had with athletes also had an impact on their behaviors in the workplace. Those who worked in on-field positions were equally as likely to identify as "out" as "not out," but this finding was surprising. Early in data collection, John, an NFL employee noted,

> You know what's interesting though, is that, if I work in accounting for [an NFL team], I probably would have an easier time coming out, knowing everything that I do, than if I'm the [on-field position] or the head trainer or the equipment manager. Or a coach or a player… because you're in the locker room, you know? You have to deal with these players day in and day out. You have to, you know, then they start to wonder, are they looking at me? Is he hitting on me? Or something like that…Whereas, you're hardly ever going to see an accountant walking through the locker room. You're never going to see a ticket guy walking through the locker room…I mean because, otherwise, to me it's just another job, because there aren't many jobs where you have to see people naked…And there aren't many people that have to deal with that. You know? Fortunately or unfortunately for me, I've got one of them. So, depends who you ask. I mean, I love my job, and heck, for me, maybe that's a perk! You know? I get to see these hot guys…

John illustrated the issue that many of the "not out" on-field employees discussed. He argued that the locker room presented unique challenges for gay employees. Rosie, a 32 year old NCAA employee articulated this viewpoint as well.

> I guess, I mean, [not disclosing to athletes], it, it's a protective thing in that I've learned that it just takes one person to get somebody fired, and because it has no bearing on how I [perform my job], one way or the other, um, it should be a non-issue, and I don't want them to ever, ever question me. When I, I mean my job as [an employee] is to watch them constantly um, [in their sport], they wear sport bras and spandex, I don't want them to ever, ever question when I'm watching them or what I'm looking for and what I'm looking at, because to me, that line just should never be crossed, so and I don't want one person to get the wrong impression and then tell someone, because it becomes their word against

> mine…And that's, like I said, it's more of a protective, it's, it's not as socially acceptable as being heterosexual, so it's not as much of an issue for heterosexuals, like I have a male staff member and it's not… I don't think he worries about that, because he's heterosexual, but it's his heterosexual, a lot of his heterosexuality is feeling more accepted, so it's not weird, it's not unknown, so it's definitely a protective mechanism for sure.

For John and Rosie, there were significant perceptions of the myth that links homosexuality to predatory sexual behavior. Along with other not out on-field employees, they reported being very aware of the locker room factor—and took precautions to not give the appearance of impropriety. As John stated, rarely do gay employees in other fields have to be conscious of nudity—their own or that of other, presumed heterosexual, coworkers and athletes. For these employees, an awareness of this unique situation dictated how open they felt they could be in the workplace.

Yet, for other employees, they came out *specifically* because of the stereotype of predatory behavior. Steven reports the following about his exchange with a college student-athlete,

> And the whole thing and you know, just the banter back and forth and later that same evening, one of the captains of the team, we ran into each other at the grocery store, were actually standing in line to pay and he said to me um… I know, you know, we give you a lot of crap from time to time, but uh, you know, I hope you know that um you are a real role model to the people on our team and we look up to you and we respect you and because you're totally honest with us, um we know that, you know, we have nothing to fear. Um, you know I've had kids say you know if you were single and you were your age and you were still hiding in the closet, and you worked with us on a day to day basis, we would more likely to be far more fearful of you or suspect of your motives, um and because you are out, and honest, um, we don't have to worry about that…we don't have to worry about what you're thinking or not thinking because we know what you're thinking…um, and we respect that honesty.

Steven is illustrating what many of the on-field employees discussed – an awareness of the delicacies of the locker room situation in sport. Whether employees used the stereotypes and

potential issues to stay closeted or come out differed, but many noted an awareness of the potential difficulties.

In terms of position within the workplace hierarchy, employees who were at the upper echelon of the hierarchy (for example athletic directors and upper management) and at the lowest end of the hierarchy (entry-level positions) were more likely to be out than those who worked somewhere in the middle. Those in the upper levels were more insulated, both financially and with greater levels of power, from the potentially negative consequences of coming out. Paradoxically, they also have the most to lose, financially, but their position in the workplace hierarchy provided security to come out. For example, I asked Hannah, a 44-year-old NCAA employee if she could identify people who might be less accepting of gay people. She stated, "Oh yeah, I can identify those fairly quickly…I mean, I don't care, I hold a little bit more power than most of them anyway, so I don't care…they don't [mistreat] me because I've been here longer than they have and I have more administrative authority, supervisory experience, etc. And I'll outlive most of them anyway."

Sandra, a 35-year-old NCAA employee, discussed the aforementioned paradox that employees at the upper levels of the hierarchy faced when deciding their behaviors in the workplace.

> I have both positive and negative thoughts about it, you know…I think positive in that it's back to that responsibility that I feel, that if I'm gonna be a leader, then I can't like about who I am. You know, on the other hand, as you progress in this profession, it's not necessarily an asset, you know… interacting with [the public] and people who may not understand or agree with that, it puts you at greater risk… I was talking to [someone] not long ago about career aspirations and I said, you know, if I ever become an athletic director…if I have that opportunity…being a lesbian certainly isn't going to help.

Sandra was out at work, but was cognizant of the fact that this could harm her career or prevent her from advancement in athletics. However, she felt coming out was more important than protecting herself from potential future discrimination.

Those who work at entry-level positions were also more likely to consider themselves out than those in the middle. Some of this was mediated by an age effect (discussed in more detail below). Entry-level employees tended to be younger, without the total responsibilities of adulthood such as mortgages or families. Most of the entry-level employees had also not been in the sports workplace for very long—they had less time invested in careers in sport. They also were usually the lowest paid employees, and many of them noted that they would just "work someplace else" rather than work in an environment where they had to hide their sexual identity.

Those who work in more middle positions within the workplace hierarchy were in a bind—they had invested too many years in their career to risk losing their jobs by coming out, but they had not yet risen in the ranks and acquired a level of power to insulate themselves from the potential consequences of coming out. Additionally, they had greater financial responsibilities, so for middle-level employees, the risk was often greater than the reward for coming out at work.

Age and Tenure in the Workplace

One of the most glaring differences in employee perceptions of their level of outness was around issues of age. While there was a spread among all age groups between being out, closeted, or in-between, participants in their 30's had a greater proportion of not out employees than any other age group. However, the more significant difference emerged when participants discussed the *ways* in which they came out at work. These differences affected how they saw

their own levels of outness at work. Participants over 35 most often framed their coming out as an event, an active, planned disclosure where they sought out deserving others to share information with. Participants in their 20's and early 30's tended to come out as the situation warranted, usually as it happened to come up in conversation. Consider the descriptions of several participants in their 20's about the ways in which they came out at work.

> And I'm kind of the type of person that doesn't think about it, like I don't come into a job interview going… I wonder is me clearly being a lesbian is going to matter? You know, whatever, I don't, I think, you know, my credentials speak for itself, my resume speaks for itself, and if you aren't picking me because of that, I don't want to work here anyway. So um, but being here, I mean I don't obviously walk in and introduce myself hi I'm Alicia, I'm a lesbian, but it comes up in conversation, you know, blah, blah, blah, you know, what was your last boyfriend like? Well, my last girlfriend was kinda… or something…But I mean it definitely comes up in conversation, but that's how I want it to be brought up, just in normal conversation, how it, you know if someone had a boyfriend, or someone had a girlfriend that's how it would come up anyway…
>
> Alicia, NFL age 25

> It's more like [a coworker] was like…she asked how I, cause I told her my friend and me were living together in one room and sleeping there of course, and she asked me we do if we bring a girl home how we have tell each other. And I said uh, we don't bring girls home. You know… why… and then she got it and she was, like, flabbergasted.
>
> Seth, National Team, age 24

> Um, I think, it was kinda, it was kinda like a joke at first. It was, uh, you know she was saying, you know, this is my girlfriend, and, you know, I said ok, that's great, and everything… And I said, joking like, oh, I can relate to that, kind of, lifestyle. And they were like, oh, really? And, you know, I told them. So. Yeah. The other girl, um, in a separate, separate instance was, um, we'd just gotten together for coffee, and, you know, just was hanging out after practice, I just, told her. Um, so, I think she'd asked if I'd been seeing anyone, or, if I had a girlfriend or anything. And I said no, sorry. We play for the same team (laughs).
>
> Curtis, club sport, age 23

The youngest members of the sample discussed their coming out in terms of it simply coming up in conversation. For the most part, their coming out disclosures were spontaneous as the situation occurred. Anna, a 30 year old NCAA employee, was only out to one person at work,

but not because she felt the person was particularly deserving of the information (in fact, she stated that if she were planning to come out, she would not choose this particular person to disclose to). She just happened to have a conversation with this coworker where to not disclose her identity would be what Anna considered to be dishonest. These employees framed their disclosure in terms of truth-telling—for them, deflecting or deemphasizing their identity when it came up in conversation (or when they were directly asked) was about honesty versus dishonesty. The youngest members of the sample discussed this scenario of situational coming out repeatedly.

Mallory discussed what she saw as a rapid shift from when she was a college athlete only 3 years prior to our interview – she articulated a change from preoccupation with identity to just simply coming out and getting it over with and getting on with life.

> I think that…like I'm not sure if it's changed so drastically in the last 3 years or 4 years…but like a bunch of girls that I went to college with, were always very concerned about who knew on campus that they were gay…and our kids don't really seem to be that concerned, um, and, and again, they are, like they're out to us fast, which I think is huge, because that's, I mean I've never, I mean, in college, like that was, that was never the case.
>
> Mallory, NCAA, age 23

Her impression of the rapid change from planned to spontaneous coming out is supported in the literature (Floyd and Bakeman 2006; Grierson and Smith 2005; and Savin-Williams: 2005).

Older members of the sample came out in different ways than the younger participants. While a distinct division is arbitrary at best, those from about age 35 and up tended to have more conscious, planned, direct disclosures. People in their mid 30's were adolescents during the 1990s, when "coming out" as a social change strategy was advanced by prominent visible gay people, such as Elton John, Martina Navratilova, Melissa Etheridge, and Ellen Degeneres. Consider the coming out stories of participants over age 35.

> I told the [closest employees], uh, and we had a long protracted discussion on whether or not to tell the team and uh, it was my decision not to tell the team. And uh, my theory was [another employee] knew and so if anything arose as a problem, they would be able to raise the flag for me and tell me what was going on and uh, you know, oh Joe is telling everybody that you're gay or whatever, you know, uh, if somebody asked them about it, that they would be able to say I've known for years, no big deal… and so I felt like sitting the team down and telling them, while honest, would also be an excuse for them to make a big deal out of it because I was making a big deal out of it and I, I still am not sure whether it was the right or wrong decision, decided that uh, if I was straight, I would not sit them down and say I was straight, and so I'm not gonna sit them down and tell them I was gay, it's none of their business uh, and we'll just go from there.
>
> Frank, NCAA, age 38

> I mean if I like had to rate it on a scale of one to ten, with ten being like the most out, like and waving around a type of flag every day at work, I'd probably be like an eight, um, you know, not, I don't hide my identity from anyone, I am little different than some of my [position] cousins that are in Division 1, generally, like not just here at the college, but my colleagues in various sports, but mostly in [my sport] I would say there are probably, there's still a generational gap, where I think my age group, you know, under 40, are probably more comfortable talking to, not talking to a recruit about it.
>
> Diane, NCAA, age 37

> So in thinking about the position, I thought, you know, uh, I am not gonna come to a place where I'm closeted, so before I accepted the position, I went and spoke with the owners, and I was really frank with them, and I said, look, I want to tell you something, um, I want to make sure that you're comfortable fully with who I am, in order for me to take this position. If you have any discomfort with what I'm about to tell you, I'd really like you to tell me…I have no problem with that, we just shake each others hands and we'd walk away, um, but I really need to know, so I told them that I was lesbian, and that I would be out in this position, whatever out meant, you know, not in people's faces about it, but, I, I wouldn't hide who I am, you know, the photos on my desk, the partner at the holiday party, you know, whatever it is, I was just gonna be myself and want to bring myself , all of myself to the job, um, in order to do a good job. And if I couldn't do that here, then, you know, so be it.
>
> Julie, NFL, age 46

Participants older than age 35 relied almost exclusively on the direct disclosure of sexual identity, most often disclosures planned in advance strategically. This model of "coming out of the closet" has been the one most commonly understood, and even advocated (Griffin 1998) by

researchers over the past two decades. Yet the data in this project suggests that younger gay people are not articulating their identity or "coming out" in the same way as their older counterparts.

There was not always a simple, straightforward correlation between chronological age and coming out disclosures at work. This relationship was also complicated by the age at which participants came out or formed their identity as gay, lesbian, or bisexual and the length of time they claimed this identity label. Many of the female participants came out later in life, some after lengthy relationships with men. These participants did not use the same strategies or have the same perceptions as other participants who were the same age, and members of similar thought communities around issues of identity disclosure.

Finally, participants' age was also mediated by their tenure at the workplace. The older employees also were also more senior in terms of workplace hierarchy, and this influenced their coming out decision-making at work. Those towards the upper echelon of the workplace hierarchy used different strategies and had different perceptions of their level of outness at work. Newer employees were more likely to perceive themselves as out at work (and were less willing to compromise on being out at work), while those who had been employed for several years (and thus had time, money, and emotional energy invested at work) saw themselves as more "in-between." One explanation for this is that the longer they were employed at one particular job, the less they had to "actively" disclose on a regular basis. "Coming out" became much less of an active event for those who had been at one workplace for a significant length of time.

Chronological age, age of identity formation, and workplace tenure all influenced employee perceptions of their behaviors and the strategies they used to emphasize or

deemphasize their identity. The strategies that participants used are discussed in greater detail below.

Cognitive Dissonance and Coming Out as a Process

Participants' behaviors and strategies around coming out varied considerably. Yet they were able to clearly state "how out" they were (even as their behaviors didn't necessarily correlate with their perceptions). For many participants, their level of comfort in sexual identity at work (and subsequent coming out decisions) had as much to do with their own individual coming out processes outside of work as they did with any influence of the sport environment. Those who identified as "not out" or "in-between" told stories of conflicts with family, friends, or religious institutions about their sexual identity in "real life," noting that their decision to deemphasize their sexual identity was not solely influenced by their position working in sport.

Additionally, participants were asked about their perception at a specific snapshot at the time of interview. Their sense of how out they were only reflected how they felt at that specific point in time. Many of them described fluctuations throughout their work trajectory, either moving from less out to more out the longer they worked, or occasionally from more out to less out. For those who felt they were more out now than they were earlier in their employment, they expressed regret about their prior behaviors, often using language such as "hiding" and "lying" to describe their actions. The few who moved from more out to less out did so based on specific experiences that were negative. Elaine is an NCAA employee who worked at three different universities. She moved

from a lower-tier Division I program to a more competitive program where she felt she was fired for being gay, and now is working at a third university. She noted,

> I think it's just a matter of, you know, trust level, you know, and your past experiences. I mean if you've ever been fired before for being gay, you know, if I had just stayed at [my first job] my whole life, I would have thought that everybody was cool, everybody was fine, you know, my athletic director didn't care, you know, my second um, the women's athletic director didn't care, in fact uh, he would you know when I, when I actually resigned, they were both very disappointed, upset, they called me three times to come back, you know, um, you know you kinda, you could have thought everywhere was like that, but, it's certainly not.

Elaine reported being more out at her first University, but now she is significantly less out at her current job, based on her experiences at her second job. Had I interviewed her during her first job, her perception of how out she is would likely be much different.

Finally, there was an interesting disconnect with a few of the participants between their stated descriptions of how out they were and their statements throughout the interview about their disclosure behavior. John, an NFL employee, repeatedly stated throughout the interview that he was totally in the closet and could not fathom coming out to anyone at work. Yet throughout the course of the interview, he noted specific experiences of coming out disclosures to 15 different coworkers. His perception of being closeted did not match with his experiences in disclosing his gay identity to others, and he eliminated the potential cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1956) by repeating throughout the interview how the sport workplace in general, and the NFL specifically, was not a place where one could come out safely.

Jessica, an NCAA employee, reported a similar disconnect. She noted very early in the interview that "nobody knows" that she is a lesbian, "at least I've never told anybody." Yet, throughout the interview she mentioned linguistically coming out to two

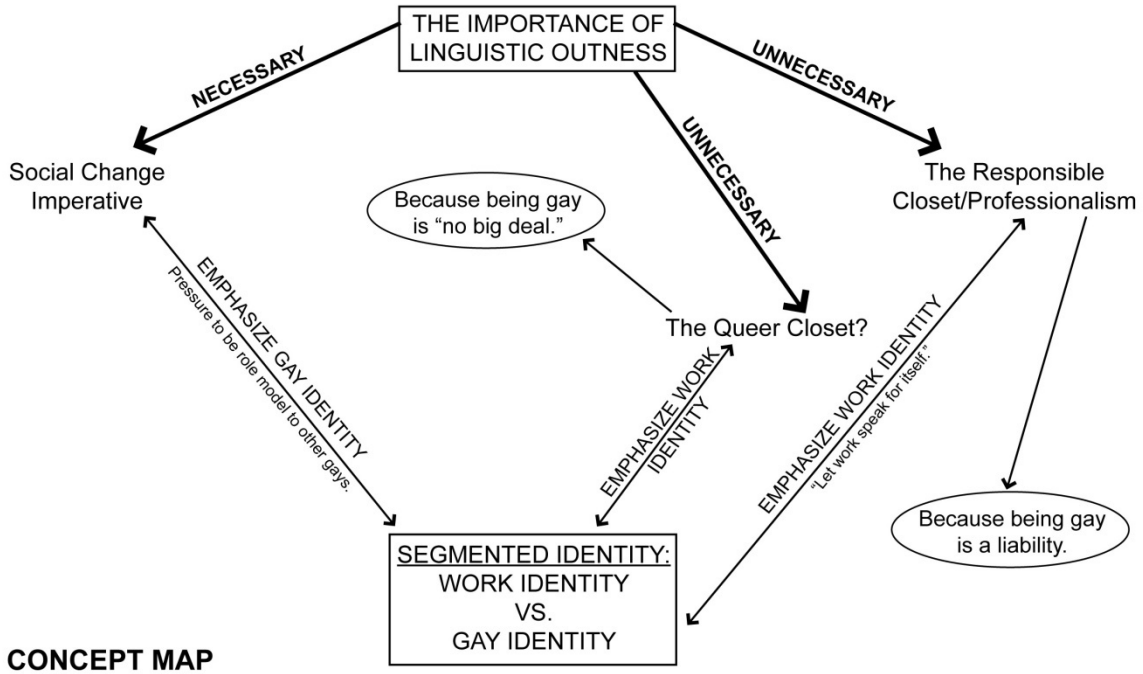
employees in Human Resources and four coworkers in the athletic department. Both John and Jessica reported the *perception* that the sport environment was not one that was positive for gay people, even though their actual experiences were almost universally positive. They report a similar perception of their out status at work, even though their actual disclosure experiences don't back that up.

Participants' self-report on whether or not they were out at work illustrates important patterns regarding the interplay between perception and reality. The rest of this chapter will focus on the actual motivations and behaviors for "being" and "acting" out, which sometimes stand in contrast to employees' stated perceptions of how out they were in the workplace.

BEING OUT?

Research that focuses on the experiences of LGBT employees primarily focuses on the ways in which employees make their sexual orientation known (or don't). This discussion has primarily been framed in the discourse of "coming out of the closet." This discourse privileges coming out linguistically—that is, declaring one's sexual identity to the world—as the final stage of a progressive process. Griffin (1998) discusses these as stages on an identity-management continuum, where being "explicitly out" is at the end of the continuum (and thereby the goal one should aspire to). Others have critiqued this perspective, pointing out the multiplicity of ways one can "be out," and linguistic outness is not the only, or even the primary way in which individuals manage their sexual identity (Iannotta and Kane 2003). For participants in this project, only some considered themselves as "out" at work (n = 13), and their conception of "out" primarily meant linguistically. Those who considered themselves not out or somewhere in between often expressed many behaviors that could be interpreted as outing, but did not rely

upon linguistic outness as a primary way of coming out. Even in their own descriptions of their level of outness, they described themselves as being "less out" than someone who was linguistically out.



CONCEPT MAP
FIGURE 2

Participants in this project were split on the level of importance they attached to being linguistically out. Figure 2 illustrates a concept map that demonstrates the level of importance different groups of participants placed on linguistic outness, and the explanations for their differing strategies. One group of participants felt it was extremely important to come (linguistically) out, both at work in general and in sport in particular. This group is labeled "Social Change Imperative" in Figure 2. The majority of this group included people who considered *themselves* linguistically out, but there were a few participants who attached importance to coming out linguistically, even if they were not linguistically out themselves.

These participants felt that coming out was a moral obligation and that they had a responsibility to other gay people to be role models. Coming out was part of a broader social change imperative for these participants. Sandra, an NCAA employee, discusses how the lack of out role models she had as an athlete affected her coming out decision-making as an employee. She was asked if she didn't come out as an athlete based on any direct event.

> Sandra: No, I wouldn't say direct events, um, just my comfort level with what it meant for me and you know, the perception that other people might have, um, and the idea that there weren't really very many people around me that were out and comfortable, you know, that was, part of it, which probably contributes to my attitude now. I don't, I'm not interested in, in not being that person that others come up to, to as an example of how to live your life, so…
>
> BC: ok, um, so would you say that you sort of take being out as maybe more of a responsibility kind of, if that makes sense?
>
> Sandra: kind of, yeah, I guess so, I mean socially I think it makes sense and because of maybe the era so to speak and then I get what it is to be really uncomfortable and where I come from, you know, like I mentioned, people that live out here and have lived here all their lives, they don't, you know, that perception's very different, you know, they look at it differently, and the age thing, younger people probably take it for granted, which I think is great, it's good that they do, but for me, I, I guess that it's important to have role models and have people that look like you, act like you, who make you feel comfortable.

Sandra, along with others in this group, felt they had a responsibility to athletes who might be questioning their sexual identity. They also expressed a sense that they wanted to be a positive representation of gay and lesbian people to their heterosexual co-workers and to the outside world.

A second group of participants, "The Responsible Closet," attached importance to specifically *not* being linguistically out at work. These participants argued that the workplace was not a site where articulations of sexual identity should happen, and to do so would be unprofessional. For these participants, it was professional and even responsible to deemphasize their sexual identity at work, and they often discussed the potential liabilities to disclosing their

sexual identity. For example, Shelby, an NCAA employee, noted that she was much less out when she had to work with the general public in a fundraising capacity.

> I would say probably like, if I, it's kind of weird, if I could put like a percentage on it it's probably like 75/25 as far as like at work, like, direct coworkers. Like, my job, and I put a percentage because I feel like 75% of the people I am open with, I talk to about it, and I'm not… you know, but then there's like my boss who, I know he knows, but he doesn't know that I know, you know?...But then with [fundraisers] and stuff I think it becomes more of an issue of, you know, that I'm not just representing myself, I'm representing the organization, so I probably would say that it is, um, about 10% open there, at the most. Maybe 5%. And that's just because it doesn't have anything to do with raising money, so. You know, I don't think I need to be open about it there.

Shelby consciously deemphasized her sexual identity when dealing with the public, even as she was more out with her coworkers. For Shelby, "representing the organization" meant not being publicly open about her sexual identity.

A third group of employees also placed little importance on linguistic outness at work, yet did not frame their identity as a liability or as a question of moral importance. For these participants, labeled as "The Queer Closet?" in Figure 2, sexual identity was simply not particularly important to their conceptions of themselves or their work experience. These participants may not be linguistically out, but not because they feel any need to "hide" their identity per se. Using the progressive linear coming out continuum, these participants might be labeled as "closeted," but their motivations for being closeted differ significantly from those in the "Responsible Closet." Darcy, a club sport employee, describes her experience as a collegiate athlete prior to her employment in sport. She discusses how she observed other gay athletes around her, and based her conceptions of her own identity through her observations of her teammates.

> And I mean that was something that changed rapidly um but it was, it was mostly you know, a group of people who didn't like, for them, their orientation existed, and that's just the way it was…it wasn't like oh, it's a big deal, it wasn't like oh

> my God, I'm gay…I mean it became that way um, over the next couple of years on the team but when I joined the team, women who were gay were gay and that was great and women who were straight were straight and that was good…and it was just sort of like…acceptable I guess is sort of the way I put it…like there was a lot of…it was fine and that was something that I never, I never had experienced before.

Darcy considered herself "not out" at work, but this was not because she was hiding her identity. For Darcy, her identity was not something that needed articulating, or could even necessarily *be* articulated. She didn't claim any particular label with respect to sexual identity; she used lesbian, gay, queer, dyke, and homo to describe herself throughout the interview.

Age and generation had a significant impact on whether participants ascribed to the social change imperative, the responsible closet, or the queer closet. Savin-Williams (2005) argues that "coming-out models appear more applicable to some and not other cohorts. Perhaps those who entered adolescence during the 1960s and 1970s, when the models were proposed, followed the models… Contemporary young people experience a truncated or more rapid identity development process, coming out to others while still in their teens. Their lives do not faithfully mirror the stages in the published literature" (p. 76-77). Younger participants were less likely to identify strongly with a label, less likely to see importance in linguistic coming out, and used different strategies to come out. Age/generation cannot explain all of the differences in the importance participants placed on being out, but particularly for the youngest participants, it had an impact on their perceptions. "The Queer Closet" was occupied primarily with younger women who worked in off-field positions. Savin-Williams (2005) suggests that "the balkanization of sexuality…is especially prevalent among artists, students, cultural explorers, and young women. They prefer an alternative, self-generated identity label or no label at all rather than those typically offered in research investigations" (p. 211). These participants illustrated behaviors that are articulated in the post-closet theoretical perspective—namely, that

they don't see themselves as "in" or "out" of any metaphorical closet. Their sexual identity is as relevant an identity at work as is whether or not they like vegetarian food.

In contrast to the "Queer Closet," those who saw coming out as part of a social change imperative tended to articulate perceptions and strategies similar to what Seidman (1996) calls the ethnic-minority model of sexual identity. Seidman argues that the social constructionist theoretical approach followed "prodigious efforts at gay and lesbian community building in the seventies" (p. 9) which "traced the social factors that produced a homosexual identity which functioned as the foundation for homosexuals as a new ethnic minority" (p. 9). These participants reflected ideologies advanced in the gay liberation segment of the gay civil rights movement (Jagose 1996). These ideologies include the sense that coming out publicly was the most significant way to cause positive social change. Jagose (1996) suggests, "the logics of coming out assume that homosexuality is not simply a private aspect of the individual, relevant only to friends and colleagues. Instead, it is potentially a transformative identity that must be avowed publicly until it is no longer a shameful secret but a legitimately recognised (sic) way of being in the world" (p. 38).

Those who felt it was professionally responsible to stay in the closet most closely resembled the models illustrated by Griffin (1999), Degges-White and Shoffner (2002) and Higgs and Schell (1998), who posit that sport employees' behaviors exist on a spectrum ranging from explicitly hiding to linguistically out. Those who felt they had a professional imperative to stay closeted were conscious of their attempts to deemphasize their sexual identity in the workplace (or with particular segments of the workplace, such as interaction with fundraisers or the general public). They did not articulate their behaviors as shameful or hiding (in contrast to

how it is suggested in the literature), but rather than their deemphasis was justified based on social and economic conditions of the sport workplace.

The "Social Change Imperative," "Queer Closet" and "Responsible Closet" were not mutually exclusive categories for all participants. As previously discussed, Elaine, an NCAA employee, moved from a social change model towards the responsible closet after her negative experiences at work. The most common movements for participants were between the responsible closet and the social change imperative. Participants attached importance to staying closeted for the sake of the job, or coming out for the sake of society (and/or other gay employees/athletes) based on their experiences at work. After distinct negative events, like harassment, discrimination or termination, participants sometimes changed their strategies and attachment to being publicly out. Alternately, when employees had experiences to change their perspective positively, they sometimes had less attachment to the notion that it is professional to stay closeted. Steven, an NCAA employee, described that when he first began his employment, the Athletic Director was a "very conservative, born-again Christian," which led him to think about his own sexual identity as a liability. However, when that athletic director retired and a new AD was hired, Steven began to re-articulate his conception of his sexual identity and framed it in less negative terms. Ultimately, he came out fully at work because he felt it was important to be a role model.

Finally, as Figure 2 illustrates, participants who ascribed to the social change imperative, the responsible closet, or the queer closet differed in the strategies by which they emphasized or deemphasized their sexual identity. As Anderson (2005) noted, gay athletes tended to think of themselves in terms of segmented identities, splitting their identity construction between their "sporting self" and their "gay self." Participants in this project articulated a split between their

"work self" and their "gay self," regardless of what value they placed on being out linguistically. Those who felt coming out linguistically was important to act as a role model for other people emphasized their gay self or the integration of their gay self and work/sport self. Those who felt it was responsible to stay closeted emphasized their work identity over their gay identity—often using language such as "I let my work speak for itself." Those in the queer closet also emphasized their work identity over their gay identity, but their motivations were different—for these participants, their gay identities were simply a less salient feature of their sense of self.

Figure 2 can potentially be useful in understanding larger workplace experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees. However, sport is the larger context in which participants in this project articulate their identities, attach importance to coming out strategies, create meaning for their experiences, and participate in thought communities whereby the team comes first and individual identities are secondary. In relying on this process of identity segmentation between work identities and gay identities, sport provides a unique setting to examine larger workplace issues for non-heteronormative employees.

ACTING OUT

Regardless of employee perception of their level of outness or the importance they placed on linguistically coming out at work, they utilized various strategies to negotiate the sport environment and identify allies in the workplace. These strategies ranged between active and passive techniques to emphasize or deemphasize their sexual identity at work, and were linked to the importance they attached to linguistic outness. Whether participants were emphasizing or deemphasizing their sexual identity, their actions existed on a spectrum ranging from active, overt events to passive, subtle events.

Active Strategies

Participants utilized a range of active behaviors to emphasize or deemphasize their sexual identity. The most common active strategy involved expressing or acknowledging the presence of a significant other. If participants were in relationships, they often relied on the existence of a significant other to actively come out. Alternately, they made active decisions to hide or not acknowledge their significant other in order to actively deemphasize their sexual identity.

Half of the participants who considered themselves "out" at work were in relationships with significant others at the time of interviewing. When I asked them what "out" looked like, nearly every person mentioned how they bring their significant other to office parties or events and discuss the existence of their partner openly. For these participants, their active disclosures at work were less about sexual identity per se than about relationship status. Hannah, an NCAA employee, relied upon the existence of her partner to be out at work. She noted,

> Obviously, my whole staff knows that I'm out and so it's very open about oh, well what'd you do this weekend you know, with your partner or we can talk along without watching pronouns, um, and so that's very nice, and really the rest of the department is like that as well, um, they know that when I'm coming to an event, my partner's coming with me, so that's, that inclusion is very nice, but that took a little while in coming, um, and that was from education and, really, it was just starting to do it, just do it, just gonna do this, you know, and then it just became like a commonplace.

For Hannah, she was "out" at work because she talked about her partner openly. For the entire length of her employment, she was partnered, so she was unable to note other ways she might be actively out had she been single. Julie, who worked in the NFL, was also with a partner for the length of her employment.

> There's lots of ways for opportunities to present themselves, so you know, the ownership has a company picnic at their home every year or there's the holiday party at the stadium every year, so company picnic I'll bring my family and I'll introduce my son and my life partner, um, or at the you know, holiday party, you know, they all know [my partner] now after all these years, and the rookies that

> come in, they just end up finding out or I'll introduce her. Um, the, when a comment is made or a derogatory comment is made, I'll speak up like I indicated…it's so much a part of my daily life, and who I am, and the photos on my desk and the, that I don't really think that much about it. Um, I don't think like I don't strategize, oh here's an opportunity… you know what I mean? It's just part of conversation.

Julie's relationship status had an enormous impact on the specific ways in which she was visibly out—it became the public indicator of her lesbianism and the strategy for coming out. She actively came out through the existence of her partner and son, even if the opportunities for coming out were more spontaneous than planned.

While relationships gave participants the means for active disclosures of their sexual identity, they sometimes also presented motivation to stay closeted. Shannon, a club sport employee, came out directly to an athlete's parent through answering a direct question about her girlfriend. Yet, later in the interview, she noted how she consciously chose not to bring her girlfriend to a work event.

> So fast forward to when I was partnered with [my girlfriend]. [She]…in terms of her appearance, would, people would probably think that she is a stereotypical lesbian…[and I probably "pass" as heterosexual to most people]. I remember having, like for example, um, my Christmas party [at work]… [my girlfriend] was in town and I consciously did not bring her to the Christmas party because I did not want to deal with the fact that this would have been the first time my co-workers, my, basically my place of employment would be, visibly seeing my relationship, do you know what I mean? And her, she was without question, gay, and in that setting, I was kind of like, you know, I'd rather, I'd rather not be, you know when you just don't want to be like looked at, or you know that people are gonna be like staring and judging and I'm like you know what, I just want, I wasn't planning on staying there very long, I showed up, I showed my face, I talked to two people that I wanted to talk to, and then I got out of there, but I made a conscious decision of not bringing my girlfriend.

Shannon consciously chose not to bring her girlfriend to an office party because she felt she might be visually identified as gay through her girlfriend's appearance. She discussed prior relationships where her partner passed more effectively as straight (and also was involved in

sports), and noted that she would often attend events together with that partner. For Shannon, however, this avoidance of the holiday party was an isolated incident in otherwise publicly out strategies at work.

Other employees noted how they were restrained in their coming out decisions in order to protect their partners, particularly if those partners also work in sports. Barbara worked in NCAA sports and was dating someone who also worked in NCAA sports. She noted,

> Um, I'm more, I think that I, which is funny because I'm coming out way later that my girlfriend is, but I think I'm a little bit more open and easier to tell people than she is, so it's kind of on her terms, you know, if she wants people to know, because I would be perfectly fine telling everybody. Um, but she's been here for 4 or 5 years and I think there's kind of a um, some of the other couples that work here, um, and I don't want to say, acted inappropriately, but kind of have used their being gay in… I can't even really put this in any way to say it, but, except that they like run around with their, with their flag like, you know we're gay, we're gay and that's not really how we are, so it kind of makes it difficult for us because we don't want to be in that category of making people uncomfortable to that point…

While Barbara suggested she would have no problem being more out at work, she deferred to her girlfriend (who had a more visible position) in making the coming out decisions for them as a couple. By remaining closeted about their relationship, Barbara also remained closeted about her own sexual identity. She discussed her decision to not come out directly to college athletes.

> Uh, yeah, I mean I definitely was not open with the team, um at the time, and it was just more because of my fear of them finding out who my girlfriend was…I didn't really care if they knew I was gay, but that conversation never happened, um, because I'm sure that they're, you know, college kids and they…I don't think that they, it really would have threw them one way or another if they knew about me, but I guess I just in my mind, I didn't…I just definitely wasn't comfortable being out at the time and knowing who my girlfriend was.

Barbara's decision to deemphasize her individual sexual identity was predicated on a sense that she needed to protect her partner's status in a more visible position working directly with athletes, along with taking cues from other visible gay employees about how not to behave.

While she noted that she would probably be more out were she not in a relationship, this was a purely hypothetical scenario. As an employee in a relationship, she at times actively hid her relationship and frequently left out details of her personal life at work.

Rachel, an NFL employee, demonstrated the most explicit active deemphasis of her sexual identity and her relationship. She referred to her girlfriend as her boyfriend and described a hypothetical man when asked for details. However, she also eventually "came clean" about this relationship as a way to come out to a coworker.

> And um, I just of course didn't say anything, they knew uh, I was in a relationship, but it was long distance um, because she lived [somewhere else]. I would always refer to her as him, her name was [name removed], so it wasn't hard because it was a pretty androgynous name, um, so I just did that and I constantly would do this well he this, he that, and um, kind of go with that and um…I had this long distance relationship for awhile and um, I would leave work early and [my boss], you know, he knew I was going to go see him, quote unquote, um, but it got like you know six, seven months in the relationship and um, I was having a hard time lying and I had become friends with um, one of the [coworkers]…we would joke and we would talk after work and stuff um, so I told her one day I was like, I just couldn't hold it in anymore, it was after work and I was like, look…you know I'm dating a guy...I was like well he's not a he, he's a she…

Rachel's relationship status was a source of active hiding while at work, but eventually became the way in which she actively came out, as well.

Relationships pushed to the forefront decision-making about sexual identity disclosure at work. It caused participants to confront the direct and indirect ways in which their behaviors reflected their sexuality. This left single participants free to emphasize or deemphasize their identity in less overt ways. They did not confront the same issues that relationships presented, specifically whether or not they had to hide the existence of another person. Jocelyn, an NCAA employee, noted early in the interview how, "luckily," she did not have to deal with a lot of the overt coming out issues at work because she was single.

> BC: So the time, you mentioned that you didn't really feel like you had to particularly hide things, and you mentioned not being with someone as part of that, so hypothetically, had you been dating someone, how would that have impacted, maybe, your level of openness, or um, lack of openness or those kinds of things. How does that play into it?
>
> Jocelyn: Um, I think that on a daily level, its talking about what you're doing, who you're doing it with, how you're going to refer to that person…and do you have pictures around, and certainly I would have had, if I'm in a relationship where that's more than just a couple months old then I probably would have had a picture or, you know, I would have been talking to people like "Oh, so-and-so and I are going out to dinner tonight. We're doing this for Valentine's Day." You know, it just comes up, in the workplace, you know, wherever you work.

Jocelyn hypothesized that had she been in a relationship, the decisions she made about being out at work would shift. For Jocelyn, as with many other participants, the existence of a significant other, not sexual identity itself, became the impetus for coming out at work in active ways.

While relationships presented the context in which many participants made their decisions about coming out strategies, it was not the only way in which they actively disclosed or deemphasized their sexual identity. Participants expressed many varieties of the "direct tell" coming out strategy, whether as a consciously planned event or a spontaneous disclosure as the situation warranted. As discussed previously, both strategies were mediated to some extent based on the age of the participant. When participants planned coming out, they targeted specific others to make their disclosures to. When they came out spontaneously, it was most often in response to questions about relationships, and occasionally in response to a negative comment about sexual identity.

Directly telling someone they were gay was one way in which participants actively disclosed their sexual identity. Some participants also used active strategies to hide their sexual identity. Tina, an NFL employee, discussed specific strategies she used to keep her status as a lesbian hidden.

> Um, I would definitely, um, like just little things. Like I would, I mean I would like outright, I mean about things like pronouns, like, oh, what'd you do, oh I went to go see a concert. Who'd you go see? And I'd make up a different band than like, the Indigo Girls. Little things like that, and you know, like I probably call it lying now more than I would have then. Because I look back and I realize it was silly. But it wasn't silly to me then.

Tina consciously changed or withheld details about her life in an attempt to keep her coworkers from guessing that she was a lesbian. She also, in retrospect, felt shame about her actions to hide her sexual identity. At the time of interview, Tina identified as "somewhere in between" being out and not out at work. She did not necessarily take active steps to disclose her sexual identity, but she no longer took active steps to hide it.

Active strategies were the easiest actions participants could recall in an interview. These were actions that stuck in their memory about their work experience and the decisions they made at work. However, they only represent a fraction of the behaviors that employees noted regarding the management of their sexual identities at work.

Passive Strategies

While the active strategies were overt and easy for participants to remember and identify, most of the participants relied more heavily on subtle, nuanced passive processes to emphasize or deemphasize their sexual identity at work. The most predominant passive strategy that participants relied upon was to frame their outness at work as dependent upon whether or not they were directly asked about their sexual identity. When asked about how out they were at work, these participants suggested that they may not offer details about their sexual identity, but if "anyone asked, [they] wouldn't lie." While coworkers directly asked some participants if they were gay, the majority of participants were never asked. This allowed them to continue to frame

their lack of disclosure in passive ways –they weren't out because no one asked them, not because they chose not to come out. George, an NHL employee, discussed this in his interview.

> George: I'm honest about myself and it's just I don't feel the need to like really talk about it because, I guess, it's just kind of weird because when you talk about being gay, it's so closely linked to, well it is, sexuality, and I wouldn't want my straight employees talking about their sex lives or sex in the office…So I'm just going to live, and if they ask questions, I'll answer 'em.
>
> BC: Have people asked questions ever? Or...
>
> George: no, not, I mean not in the uh, not working in sports. Um, certainly before that, yes, I've had co-workers that like bugged the crap out of me like and then it was like all right, I'm gay …

George expressed no disconnect with this revelation – he continued to maintain that if people were to ask him directly if he were gay, he would tell them, even though no one had asked him at any point while he was working in sport. Jessica, who worked in an NCAA position, had a complicated way of explaining her thoughts about offering details about her sexual identity as opposed to being asked about it.

> If they ask me about my personal life, I would certainly tell them and be honest, but I'm not going to just, I'm not going to shove it down their throat or anything like that… [Later in interview] Right. Yeah, if they ask me, I'll be honest. If they don't ask me, then I'm not going to bring up my personal life…But I think, I mean, you look at me, you probably would guess that I'm gay. And I think people don't ask me those questions because they know what the answer would be. So it would probably make them uncomfortable. So if they're not asking me the questions, then it's probably uncomfortable, you know, whether it be an uncomfortable or comfortable issue, so, obviously I'm not going to say, hey, I just went on a weekend vacation with my wife, we had a great time, you know? So, I think that people who are comfortable with gay and lesbian relationships and going outside of the box asking me questions are the ones that are worth my time talking about my personal life to. You know? At least, that's the way that I look at it.

Jessica constructed a whole scenario whereby she would not come out unless people asked her, so as to not make them uncomfortable, and she backed this up with the fact that no one had asked her if she was gay, and therefore they must be uncomfortable (and therefore, she wouldn't come

out to them in order to increase their discomfort). This circular explanation helped justify to Jessica that her workplace was not a place where a lesbian could come out and be comfortable.

Along with framing sexual identity disclosure around the potential of being asked directly, participants expressed that there was no need to directly discuss their identity because they assume everyone already knows. This strategy was primarily utilized by individuals who conformed to what they claimed were stereotypically gay appearances and mannerisms. Consider Elaine's explanation of how the "entire campus" knew she was gay:

> Elaine: oh, definitely, oh yeah, the whole campus is [aware].
>
> BC: ok, but is it something that is, is aware because of word of mouth, or is it aware because you've ever said anything specific?
>
> Elaine: um, I think they just see me and know… It's that obvious… No wedding ring, 46 years old, definitely.

Elaine relied upon stereotypes, namely her appearance, age, and marital status, to do the work for her in terms of coming out. To explicitly come out, for Elaine, would be redundant. Alicia, an NFL employee, actually was surprised when people thought she was heterosexual, because she felt her appearance gave away the fact that she was a lesbian. She noted,

> And that's happened… "Oh, so do you have a boyfriend?" Really, a boyfriend, me? Do I look like I would have a boyfriend? And they go, "well I didn't know, I mean…um, I just, I didn't…" And I'm like, you can make an assumption because if I [looked] straight I would assume you would make the assumption that I'm straight.

These participants relied upon their appearance to be out at work, and generally avoided articulated discussions of a gay identity. Employees who had more of a stereotypically heterosexual appearance (particularly feminine women and masculine men) had to rely upon more active coming out strategies at work (and often noted that people were surprised by their coming out disclosures).

Passive strategies, such as relying on being asked about sexual identity and assuming others already know about sexual identity were significantly less likely to be articulated in conscious statements by participants. When I asked participants about how they emphasized or deemphasized their identity at work, they stated active strategies first, and only recalled passive strategies after probing (and sometimes didn't recognize passive techniques as strategies at all). Their cognitive recall about their experiences revolved around the active, conscious steps they took to emphasize or deemphasize their identity.

Identifying Allies

When this project began, I hypothesized that the process by which employees identified allies in the workplace was going to be the biggest theoretical contribution to the field. However, as data collection continued, it emerged that identifying allies was only a significant process for those who fit the "Responsible Closet" section of the model described in Figure 2. Those in the "Queer Closet" were less interested in categorizing people as allies or adversaries, because they did not attach meaning to their sexual identity in a way that made it necessary to identify allies or adversaries. Participants who felt coming out was part of a larger social change imperative came out regardless of whether or not they had individual support from allies (although they relied upon institutional support). The identification of potential allies was only a significant process for those who were consciously deemphasizing their sexual identities while at work.

When I asked participants how they identified potential allies at work, age emerged as a significant attribute that participants relied upon. In the first 25 interviews in this project, 22

participants noted that age played a role in their determination of who to disclose (or not disclose) their sexual identity to. Nearly all of these participants expressed hesitancy in coming out to older co-workers (although their definitions of "older" varied based on the age of the participant). Consider the descriptors by several participants about how they identify allies.

> BC: The people… who you are open with, how are they different from the people you're not? What's the difference between the coworkers who know and the coworkers who don't know?
>
> Shelby: Um, probably age. It's a big age thing, I think a lot of the people that do know are a lot, are around my age or, um, maybe even a lot of them are younger. I would say the majority of people are within 5 to 10 years of my age, and so a lot of the other folks are older, more senior staff that I don't even have a, like personal relationship with, and so, if I were just to bust out with that. But it's not something that I intentionally hide, it's just not something that's discussed. So. (Shelby, 30, NCAA employee)
>
> Well the [coworkers] that I work for are much older, like my grandparents age, so, they just come from a time period where they're just not as accepting of [being gay]. And, um, so, and, we're trying, not that its not unprofessional to be gay, but, I mean, we're just trying to keep that, we're trying to keep that, uh, look as to where we don't offend any clients or anyone, and you don't want to come across in any way that could, so… You never know who might be… (Maria, 22, NHL employee)
>
> What I see of our older staff who are lesbians or that aren't or, or gay, that aren't out, um, per se, I think they find some relief in that there's, there's some representation by others, whether it be the youths or even myself as kind of probably in the middle, so that they can sit back and at least feel um, uh, represented without them having to make noise. I think, I think a lot of folks are sitting back and are very happy that I'm doing what I'm doing and that they don't have to, and they're reaping the benefits from it, and I'm, I'm A-OK with that, I have no problem with that whatsoever. Obviously, it would be a little easier if they would help and join some forces, but you know, everybody's in their own place. (Hannah, 44, NCAA employee).

These participants articulated a sense that older co-workers, whether they were heterosexual or gay themselves, were least likely to be accepting of linguistic outness. The workplace hierarchy mediated some of this—older co-workers were also more likely to be in positions of power, and therefore in a position potentially affect the career outcomes of gay employees.

Participants also mentioned factors like religiosity, relationship status, and political affiliation as clues to determine whether a person was a likely ally at work. However, the only other common pattern beyond age involved the level of close relationship between the participant and the potential ally. As many participants noted, sport is a workplace with non-traditional hours where you can spend an inordinate amount of time in close proximity with each other. The amount of time participants spent with their coworkers had an impact on whether or not they identified them as a potential ally. Jessica, an NCAA employee, worked with multiple sports in the athletic department, spending significantly more time with one sport. She was explicitly out to her coworkers in that sport, and not explicitly out with the coworkers she spent less time with. When pressed, she noted that the amount of time she spent with them was the primary reason she came out to the coworkers that she did.

Ultimately, participants came out to those they were closest to, and those allies were generally people who they developed a friendship with outside of work. The discussion of identifying allies became less about how they targeted specific people based on their potential receptivity to sexual minorities, and more about how they selected friends, which, while an interesting question, is beyond the scope of this project.

Conclusion

"Coming out" at work has been the subject of significant scholarly attention (Baird 2000; Brendemeir et al. 1999; Carroll and Gilroy 2001; Chung 2001; Clarke 1998; Cushing-Daniels and Yeung 2009; Gough 2007; Griffith and Hebl 2002; Griffin 1998; Henderson 1995; Leonard 2003; Peplau and Fingerhut 2004; Ragins and Cornwell 2001; Ragins et al. 2007; Rondahl et al. 2007; and Ward and Winstanley 2005). This project suggests that the processes by which

employees negotiate their workplace environments (and, particularly, sport as a workplace) are complex and nuanced. For non-heteronormative employees working in sport, their processes of coming out, acting out, and being out were mediated by many factors, including age, type of sport, workplace hierarchy and identity formation processes. These employees utilized active and passive strategies to negotiate the sport environment and identify potential allies in the workplace.

A final point to consider—regardless of how participants identify allies or what strategies they utilize to emphasize or deemphasize their identity, at some point they lose control of the information. Amaechi (2009) noted that the only thing he regretted about coming out publicly (in a book) was that he lost the ability to control giving the information to those who deserve it. Stephen, an NCAA employee who came out more than a decade ago, noted that he rarely had to do anything to be "out at work."

> I think I started by telling my co-workers, specifically in [my] office, and then once you tell one person, well, you know, it's over. I mean you know…you…it didn't take an email, all it took was word of mouth and most of the work was done for me… I certainly, if their perception is that I'm straight, I correct it and um, you know, in a lot of ways, the student athletes that I, who are close to me, they do the work with every succeeding uh, freshman class that comes in, they sort of like, give them the heads up that I'm gay and uh, that way, it doesn't lead to any embarrassing situations and uh unnecessary comments and whatever and it leads to a lot of a, a lot more of a comfort situation…

Stephen did the work of coming out explicitly to his coworkers and a few student-athletes more than a decade ago, and today he rarely has to overtly or linguistically come out. Even with constant workplace turnover with new athletes, coaches, staff, and co-workers, the "work" of coming out or emphasizing a gay identity is rarely something that has to take place on a day-to-day basis. The active and passive disclosures that participants utilize only tell a part of the story about the sport workplace environment and its interaction with sexual identities.

CHAPTER 6.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

When this project began, I anticipated adding to a significant gap in the literature about the experiences of non-heteronormative employees in sport. At the proposal stage, I had not conceptually connected the experiences of gay athletes directly with those of gay employees; I thought of the experiences as related, but representing different ideas about the institution of sport. As data collection began, and my research questions shifted and expanded, this project became less about only sport employees and more about sport organizations—about sport as an institution, in all of the capacities in which and mechanisms by which it operates. The shift in focus emerged from the data, as recruitment and data collection continued, and suggested a larger story about sport as a workplace, as a site of contested ideologies around sexual identity, and as a near-total institution.

Discussion of Findings

This research began with three major objectives: 1) ascertaining employees' perceptions of the overall atmosphere of professional, collegiate and club sport, particularly with respect to sexual identity; 2) uncovering the strategies and processes employees use to negotiate the workplace atmosphere, including the ways in which they make their sexual orientation known (or don't); and 3) determining how employees identify potential allies (or people who may not be allies) and adjust their behavior, strategies and negotiations accordingly. Identifying allies emerged as relevant only for one segment of participants—those who felt staying closeted was part of "being professional" at work. The story of employees' perceptions of sport as a

workplace and the strategies by which they navigate the institution was one that was complex and nuanced, revealing informal mechanisms structured around meaning and interpretation. This project highlights some of those mechanisms.

It is significant that employee perceptions of the sport atmosphere were not overly negative. While they tended to report subtle negative undertones to their perceptions, this was far from the hostile environment and overtly negative atmosphere that scholars had been reporting for decades. While movement towards a more positive environment may be a recent emergence, it is likely that previous studies are reporting on *perceived* environment rather than *actual* experiences. This gap between perceptions and experiences is one of the more important findings of this project. It suggests that any social change around sexual identity issues in sport has to be part of an overarching, holistic process that goes beyond mere formal changes.

The strategies that employees use to negotiate the contested terrain of sport suggest simultaneously that the model of "coming out of the closet" as a linear process is neither accurate nor particularly useful for the majority of participants in this project. Rarely did any participant utilize the "direct tell" of their sexual identity—most relied upon informal means to disclose or emphasize their sexuality. Furthermore, primarily only those participants in relationships moved toward more direct disclosures of their sexual identity—those who were single were able to rely upon informal means or wait until they were asked direct questions about their sexual identity (an event that rarely actually occurred).

My findings suggest that the informal actions—the nuanced processes by which individuals navigate sport as an institution—tells a more significant and accurate narrative about sport than previous studies suggest. It is not enough to focus on formal policies, or solely on employee perceptions—focusing on actual experiences along with the ways in which employees

interact with both informal and formal mechanisms tells a larger and broader story about sport—one that reveals pockets of empowerment and agency for gay sport employees even in the confines of potentially limiting structural constraints.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this project focused on the ways in which individuals create, construct, and interpret meaning in their social lives. Central to meaning-making are the cognitive processes by which individuals interpret their social worlds. Zerubavel (1997) suggests that thought communities—groups in which we have social membership, such as "churches, professions, political movements, generations, nations" (Zerubavel 1997:9)—actually impact how we think. He notes that "while we certainly think both as individuals and as human beings, what goes on inside our heads is also affected by the particular *thought communities* to which we happen to belong" (p. 9). Participation in sport as an institution—as athletes, as fans, and eventually as employees—creates membership into sport-as-thought-community, subtly influencing the cognition processes for participants so that they see a gay identity incongruent with a sport identity, and a sport identity that supersedes all others. When employees discussed the mentality that "the team" mattered more than individual concerns or issues, they were reflecting membership in a thought community that is seen as central in organized sport. The team comes first—over concerns of physical health (Messner 2002), or over other forms of identity (Wolf-Wendel et al. 2003).

Zerubavel (1997) notes that people can be members of different thought communities (p. 22). However, he fails to discuss how individuals manage potentially competing thought communities. I am suggesting that sexual minorities working in sport have membership in at

least two competing thought communities: sport-as-thought-community and gay-as-thought-community. This research proposes that there may be a process by which individuals create a hierarchy of thought community membership. In the case of gay employees in sport, the membership in sport-as-thought-community supersedes all other thought communities, similar to Hughes (1945) conception of a "master status." Hughes spoke primarily about the way in which individuals construct their identities—a superseding thought community goes beyond identity and suggests that the cognitive processes that individuals experience actually structure the way they think and see the world. This research points to a hierarchy of communities, with a superseding community in which customary considerations like workplace homophobia are pushed to the sidelines or otherwise moderated.

Thought communities represent only one part of the process by which norms are learned, interpreted, and reinforced. Bourdieu (1973) argues that the structure of institutions (in his research, the educational system) produces "agents" who ultimately reproduce the structures themselves. In sport, the system by which one moves up the hierarchy (particularly for on-field positions) replicates the existing structure of the institution. As Anderson (2005) argues, the "closed loop" nature of sports as an institution makes this cultural reproduction especially possible for those entrenched in sport. Those who make it in sport as athletes are those who believed in the ideology of the system, much like Bourdieu argues those who succeed in the educational system are those who fulfill the norms and obligations set forth by the institution.

Another important theoretical consideration is the discrepancy or dissonance between perceptions and actual events and experiences. Is this discrepancy simply explained by the primacy of "sport identity" vis-à-vis structural socialization and cognition from thought communities? Is this dissonance an adaptation to the incongruent identities that participants

encountered while working in sport? Participants are clearly interpreting their environment based less on actual experiences and more on hypothetical scenarios and experiences from other visible gay people, as well as from their total accumulated experiences as athletes. More research is needed into the subtle, nuanced processes by which employees base their interpretations of their social world to further explore this dissonance.

Finally, this project reveals the limitation of "the closet" as a theoretical construct, and highlights a generational shift in coming out processes. For participants in this project, "the closet" was not necessarily a useful construct, nor was it something that individuals "came out of" per se. The experiences of these employees working in sport did not follow a linear coming out process, whereby they were "closeted," and then at subsequent points in their career, came out in a step-by-step fashion. Based on their experiences, individuals emphasized or deemphasized their sexual identity in various ways at various points in their career, but rarely in a linear fashion.

While the differences between the "Social Change Imperative," "Responsible Closet," and "Queer Closet," are not mutually exclusive, these categories do highlight differences in both strategies for emphasizing or deemphasizing identity and approaches to thinking about sexual identity at work. Both those in the Queer Closet and the Responsible Closet emphasized their work and sport identities over their gay identities, but their motivations for doing so were significantly different. Those in the Responsible Closet deemphasized a gay identity because they saw it as a liability, while those in the Queer Closet did so because they felt being gay was "no big deal." Without the level of nuance that this research provides, both of these groups of participants might have been grouped together as "in the closet," an inaccurate descriptor.

The fact that the great majority of the Queer Closet participants were young suggests that there may be a broader cultural and generational shift around issues of sexual identity. As social movements around sexual identity shift strategies from assimilation to radical action (with an emphasis on coming out) to broader social justice movements (Jagose 1996), individuals at the earliest stages of identity formation adjust their strategies as well. This research suggests that there is a significant link between conceptions of sexual identity and strategies for emphasizing or deemphasizing sexual identity with generation and/or chronological age.

Methodological Considerations/Implications

This project presents several unique methodological considerations for research in sexual identity generally and the institution of sport particularly. The first consideration is one about sampling and social networks. Traditional methods to access hidden populations were not especially effective in recruiting participants for this project. Snowball sampling was ineffective; participants were unable or unwilling to refer others for participation. Key informants were able to provide additional participation, but no participant was referred by more than two "degrees" of separation. This led to a sample that was institutionally diverse, but extremely shallow. The vast majority of participants were the sole representatives from their institution[30], or sometimes even league. Having multiple starting points for the sample ultimately strengthened this research and allowed for a more broad-spectrum narrative of sport in its various institutional capacities and levels.

However, a broader methodological question emerged through the sampling process. *Why* was it so difficult to recruit additional participants, especially as so many participants

[30] Four participants worked at some point in their career at the same institution; three participants worked at another institution at some point in their career—no other institution, team, or league had more than two participants represented.

discussed working with both out and closeted co-workers? Even employees who reported working with their significant others were unable (or unwilling) to refer additional employees for participation. Perhaps it was a simple issue of incentive—as nearly all participants suggested, sport employment involved non-traditional hours and long time commitments. Lack of referrals and sampling difficulties may only represent people's unwillingness to dedicate time to a person they don't know and a project they don't see as impacting their lives. Yet the overwhelming lack of referrals seems to speak to a larger methodological consideration about studying both sexual identity and workplaces.

Workplaces are formal settings—even sport workplaces, which may be more casual in dress and non-traditional in schedule. That alone may have led to participants' reluctance to ask co-workers to participate in this project. The fact that this project also involved sexual identity likely led to further reluctance. Asking coworkers to participate in a project about sexual identity might have identified the participant as gay also, and for the more than half of the sample who were not overtly out at work, this may have posed a problem. Furthermore, workplaces are the site where individuals earn a living, and participants might have felt uneasy about the potential to disrupt a colleague's source of income.

Intersections of sexuality and work are often fraught with more formal potential legal considerations as well. Consider the discussion of John, an NFL employee, about his experiences at work. John discussed having a co-worker who he suspected was gay (and turned out to not be). He "almost" came out to the coworker, and discussed the experience in retrospect as a "near miss" situation.

> And of course, I put my foot in my mouth, so. I was just hoping to find someone to talk to. Someone else. Nope. But oh well. But he was fine with it. He was like, by the way, I'm not gay, and so…it was alright. And that, I mean, you talk about coming back and doing a, I guess sexual harassment or whatever, I mean,

> granted, I didn't say hey by the way, I want to kiss you. You know, but…. I don't know. I don't know if trying to come out to someone would constitute harassment. Who knows?

John wondered if perhaps simply trying to have a conversation about sexual identity at work might be construed as sexual harassment. In this overarching context of anxiety around sexuality and the workplace, it makes sense that participants felt reluctance in referring additional participants.

A second important methodological consideration is more specific to studying sport as an institution. There is perhaps no other institution where employees carry with them a lifetime of experience in the institution. This makes it possible for individuals with very little "workplace" experience to still have distinct and entrenched perceptions of the institution as a whole. In that sense, then, it is less useful to think of individuals navigating the structure of sport as athletes and as employees as though those are mutually exclusive, separate categories. Any study of those involved in the institution of sport in capacities other than athlete has to consider the significance of the athletic trajectory for participants. In no other industry, except perhaps education, do the vast majority of employees come from within the ranks of the institution itself (whether as former athletes, fans, or lifelong participants), and therefore reflect and reify the values and norms of the institution.

In this regard, then, sport represents a wholly unique setting by which values of masculinity, heteronormativity, and sexual prejudice are experienced, contested, and reinforced. While there are some institutions that may have comparisons with sport, notably the military, the police, fraternities (Yeung and Stombler 2000) and, as noted, education, the accumulation of experiences for former athletes who transition into sport as a workplace represent both the closed loop and near-total institutional (Anderson 2005) constraints of sport, thereby making it a wholly

unique institution. As the institution of sport adapts to accommodate broader societal acceptance of homosexuality (Anderson 2009), it will be interesting to examine the emergence of the experiences of those entrenched within the institution. Although there will be an institutional lag between societal acceptance and broader structural changes in sport, Anderson (2009) argues that change is already occurring. As more gay athletes grow up in an institution that allows for broader expressions of masculinity and sexual identity sport as a workplace will continue to expand to accommodate these changes. Methodologically, then, it is important to explore sport within the sociohistorical context, and not focus only on individual members of an institution (whether they be athletes or employees). Longitudinal approaches—whether through retrospective data collection or studying the same institutions or people over time—are crucial to measure the change that is occurring within the institution of sport.

Limitations/Directions for Future Research

While this study is a rigorous examination of the experiences of 37 gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees in sport, there are a few limitations to the study. First and foremost, while the sample boasts institutional diversity and a wide range of levels and occupations within sport, there is a serious dearth of racial or class diversity. This is, to some extent, indicative of institutional racism within sport—while many of the leagues are overrepresented by racial minorities as athletes, they are seriously underrepresented in the front office, ownership, and coaching ranks (Lapchick 2001). However, this study tells the experience, almost exclusively, of white, middle- and upper-class gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees, and those employees expressed no articulated awareness of their racial or class identities, suggesting they see themselves as "neutral" within the institution of sport. Not a single participant discussed any

sense of their racial identity interacting with any of their other identities or with a larger sport context. The only time social class (or income) came into the discussion was in the context of financial considerations for staying closeted or to discuss the salary of sport jobs relative to other professional careers. Further research is needed into the ways in which multiple marginalized identities intersect in sporting contexts at the workplace level.

Gay men proved to be extremely difficult to recruit for this project. Half of the gay men in this sample are publicly out, and the other half were among the most closeted participants. Additionally, gay men were unable to refer any participants, even as they discussed having gay co-workers or knew of other gay men in sport. This suggests a different narrative for gay men and lesbians in sport—one that has been explored separately by various researchers, but rarely has included both gay men and lesbians in sport together in the same study. Gay men appear to have distinctly different social networks than lesbians within sport, perhaps stemming from different accumulated experiences as athletes and fans. More research into the distinctions between sport for gay men as compared to lesbians is needed.

Another limitation of this project is the fact that I only have the perspective of the people who talked to me. This was not a random sample, and I knew many of the key informants and some of the participants prior to conducting research. These networks helped me gain legitimacy when trying to recruit participants—particularly among lesbian participants, who were more apt to be "friends-of-friends," and therefore more willing to return an email or phone call. Gay men were significantly harder to recruit, and those who did agree to participate were often publicly out. The narrative of those who were *not* willing to respond to a flyer, an email, or a message board posting from a stranger, likely tell a even more complex and nuanced narrative about the institution of sport.

While I have a significant amount of information about the experiences of the individuals who participated (with lengthy, in-depth interviews), I opted to recruit a sample of participants who represented sport in many broad capacities, from different types of sport, levels of sport, and positions within the hierarchy. Had I focused only on the experiences of on-field employees in men's sport, I might find a different report about sport as an institution. Without in-depth, specific focused information, it is difficult to have the "total" picture of the near-total institution of sport.

There is a regional overrepresentation of participants from the Northeast and South. While one might expect someone who lives in the Northeast to have more positive associations about sexual identity in the context of broader institutional forces, the opposite might be true for those living in the South. Politically, the Northeast has more progressive politics towards sexual minorities, while there are more restrictive statutes in the South. More research is needed to fully enumerate the regional differences in employees' perceptions of the interaction between institutional structures and sexual identity issues.

Finally, while this project boasts institutional diversity between professional, college, and club sport, some sports and leagues are overrepresented, and others are underrepresented. As a result, difference between contact, non-contact, team, and individual sports were not as apparent as the more overall level differences between college, club, and professional sport. As Anderson (2005) suggests, there are distinct difference between individual and team sports for gay male athletes—this is a difference that needs further exploration in subsequent studies.

Conclusions

The experiences of non-heteronormative employees working in sport suggest that sexual minorities have made headway since the groundbreaking work of Griffin (1992). It is no longer accurate to refer to sport as a hostile environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. The current landscape is more complex.

It remains to be seen whether the emerging changes within sport will continue in the direction they are currently headed. It is possible worsening economic conditions will create an even tighter labor market, leading employees to move toward thinking about their gay identities as a liability in greater numbers. It is also possible that the generational shifts suggested in the research will continue to impact the institution positively, as young employees remain in sport and create change from within.

Sport is not necessarily a welcoming or affirming environment just yet. However experiences of explicit hostility are becoming more rare. Participants still expressed hesitancy in their status as gay employees, often emphasizing their sport identity over any other form of identity. Furthermore, they still perceive an environment that is not accepting of sexual minorities, even as their experiences belie those perceptions. This reflects a larger ideological underpinning of sport as an institution, which will take some time to change. The marked distinction between older and younger employees in their perceptions, experiences, and strategies at work, however, imply that the institution is already in the process of that social change, ultimately leading to a more open and affirming experience for all sexual minorities in sport.

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APPENDIX A – RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

HELP WITH RESEARCH

Do you work in sports? Do you know someone that does?

Do you, or that person, identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or another sexual identity other than heterosexual? I am seeking participants for my dissertation about sexual identity and sports.

I am looking for paid employees of sport (not athletes), including professional sports (such as the NBA, NHL, MLB, NFL, minor league teams, Olympic or National teams), NCAA Division I, II, & III sports, and club sports (non-youth, non-collegiate). If this person has worked in sport for at least two years and identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, then they qualify for this research study.

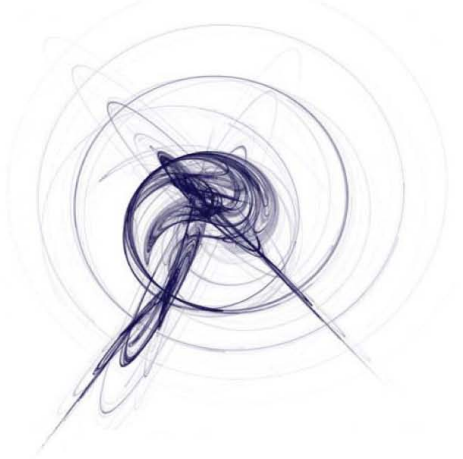
All volunteers will be asked to participate in an interview, either face-to-face or by telephone, for approximately 60-90 minutes. All responses are confidential, and participants will not be compensated for their involvement. This research is approved by the Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University.

If interested, please contact Beth Cavalier, a graduate student in Sociology at Georgia State University, at bethcavalier@gmail.com.

Thank you!

Looking for GLBT employees of professional sports!

A study on the experiences of gay, lesbian, and/or bisexual employees of major or minor league professional sports teams.



For more information or to participate in this study, please contact:

Beth Cavalier at cavalier.beth@gmail.com
(A graduate student in Sociology at Georgia State University.)

Qualifications include:

- Over 18 years old
- Currently employed by a professional sports team or have worked as an employee for a professional sports team within the past five years (not athletes)
- Interested in taking part in this study

Study participation involves:

- Confidential interview with researcher in person or over phone
- Possible follow up interview in person or over phone

Further information:

- This research is approved by the Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University.
- All responses are confidential, and no identifying information will be used in the written work that stems from this research.
- You will not be financially compensated for your participation.

APPENDIX B- EMAIL INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your current job title and description? How long have you been at this position? What other positions have you held in the field?
2. Did you participate in organized sport at any point in your life? What sports and in what capacity?
3. What is your age, sex, race, and level of education? What label do you use to describe yourself with respect to sexual identity? At what age did you claim this label? Have you identified under a different label at another point in your life? If so, what label and when?
4. Overall, how comfortable do you feel in your current job around issues of sexual identity? What specifically has had an effect your level of comfort (about sexual identity) at work? How comfortable (about sexual identity) did you feel in other jobs (both sport and non-sport related) compared to your current job?
5. Have you experienced any conflicts at your current job around your sexual identity status? If so, what have you done to handle these conflicts? Did you feel any conflicts about your sexual identity in other jobs (both sport and non-sport)?
6. How open would you say you are about your sexual identity at work, in your current job? At other jobs (both sport and non-sport)? In other areas of your life?
7. Are there specific strategies you employ at work to emphasize or deemphasize your sexual identity? What are they?
8. Generally, what is your relationship with your coworkers? How open are you about your sexual identity with them? How, specifically, do you identify which coworkers to be more or less open with?
9. In general, how accepting is the sport you work for about homosexuality or bisexuality? Do you think there are similarities or differences in the experiences of athletes and the experiences of other employees? Does an athlete coming out affect the experience of an employee?
10. Overall, do you have positive or negative feelings about your workplace, specifically around sexual identity?
11. Are you willing to answer more questions or clarify your answers if the need arises?