



# **The Lived Experiences of Non-Straight Football Players at FBS Colleges**

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# Outline

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- **Methods**
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- **Final Comments**

# Introduction

- What Study Is About?
- Presenter Introductions
- Why Here?

# Definition

- **Non-straight** – sex ≠ gender ≠ sexual orientation; individuals whose sexuality and gender identity do not fit within the hegemonic, systemic assigned identity where one's sex assigned at birth dictates one's acceptable gender identity, which in turn dictates one's sexual orientation (i.e. a male = masculine = sex with women)

# Overview

- Only the beginning
- Anonymity and confidentiality
- Responsibility
- Some issues/quotes may be tough.
- Positioning



**Background**

# Background

- College Sports & the Effect on Society
  - College sports = **“front porch of the university”**  
(Suggs, as cited in McDonagh & Pappano, 2008, p. 246)
  - “I hope to build a university of which our football team can be proud” – George Lynn Cross, OU President, 1943-1968 (Cross, 1977, p. 145-146)
  - Football = **Flagship** of sports in US (Suggs, as cited in McDonagh & Pappano, 2008)

# Background

- “Homosexuality and Sports” survey by Sports Illustrated in 2005,
  - **68%** ...*hurt an athlete’s career to be openly gay*
  - **65%** ...*society is more accepting of gays in individual sports than contact sports*
  - **51%**...*gay athletes will not receive the same endorsements, despite their athletic performance*
- **50% of college football players know a gay teammate** (Feldman & Hockensmith, 2009)



# Background

- Perceptions of Coaches
  - **“We judge players based on one thing: Can they play football? If you can play football, you can get into the locker room,”** Lovie Smith (Buzinkski, 2009)
  - **“He wants nothing more from his players than for them to feel comfortable being who they are.”** Jim Tressel (Smith, 2010)

# Background

- Student-Athletes Who Came Out
  - Adam Goslin, Div. III football & baseball
    - Supportive teammates (Forman, 2007)
  - “Tim,” Division I football
    - “Don’t ask, don’t tell” (Anderson, 2009)
    - Protective teammates

# Background

- Coaches Who Came Out
  - Eric Anderson, HS track coach
    - First coach to come out in US (Zeigler, 2000)
    - “...Couldn’t lie and hide anymore...” (Zeigler, 2000)
  - Kyle Hawkins, college lacrosse coach
    - First college coach to come out (Garber 2007)
    - Fired after he came out

# Background

- Professional Football Athletes Who Came Out
  - David Kopay, NFL running back (1964-1972)  
(Kopay & Young, 1977)
    - First professional athlete to come out
  - Roy Simmons, NFL offensive lineman (1979-1983)  
(Buzinski, 2006)
    - 1992 on the Phil Donahue Show
  - Esera Tuaolo, NFL defensive lineman (1991-1999)  
(Tuaolo & Rosengren, 2006)
    - Guilty by association

# Background

- Why are non-straight football players not coming out?
  - Macho nature of the sport
  - Fear the reaction: *teammates, coaches, and fans*
  - Solely defined by their sexuality
  - Don't want to jeopardize: *playing in NFL & endorsements/contracts*
  - Media circus
  - Easier after retirement



# Review of Literature

# Masculinity

- **Power at Play** (Messner, 1992)
  - 30 “former” male athletes
  - Sports were “just the thing to do” (p. 24)
  - Masculinity
    - External
    - Internal

# Masculinity

- **Power at Play** (Messner, 1992)
  - Hegemonic Masculinity
    - Misogyny
    - Homophobia
  - Male approval
    - Conditional self-worth
  - Sexual athlete



# Masculinity and Femininity

- Relationship between masculinity and femininity (Anderson, 2007)
  - Hegemonic masculinity
    - Team sports influence boys to devalue:
      - Women, femininity, and gay men
    - Feminine sports (i.e.. gymnastics & cheerleading)
      - Thought of as gay
      - Femininity influence (Anderson, 2007; O’Conor, 1998)

# Heteromascularity

- Male College Cheerleaders Who Played Football in High School (Anderson, 2007)
  - Heteromascularity – perceived as heterosexual and masculine
  - One-time rule
  - Two groups
    - Heteromascularity among orthodox cheerleaders
    - Heteromascularity among inclusive cheerleaders

# Positioning

- Perceptions of Other Athletes
  - Cannot have gay athletes because (Anderson, 2005)
    - Hypermasculinity
    - Especially football and wrestling
- Disclosure = loss of “masculine capital” (Tontz, 2008)

# Athletes v. Non-Athletes

## Student-Athlete Identity

(Rankin, Sorgen, Mersen, Chang, & McHale, 2010)

- Same
  - Maintain academic success
  - Classroom demands
- Different
  - Public scrutiny
  - Time demands
  - Isolation and loneliness
    - Especially football and basketball

# Heteronormativity Status

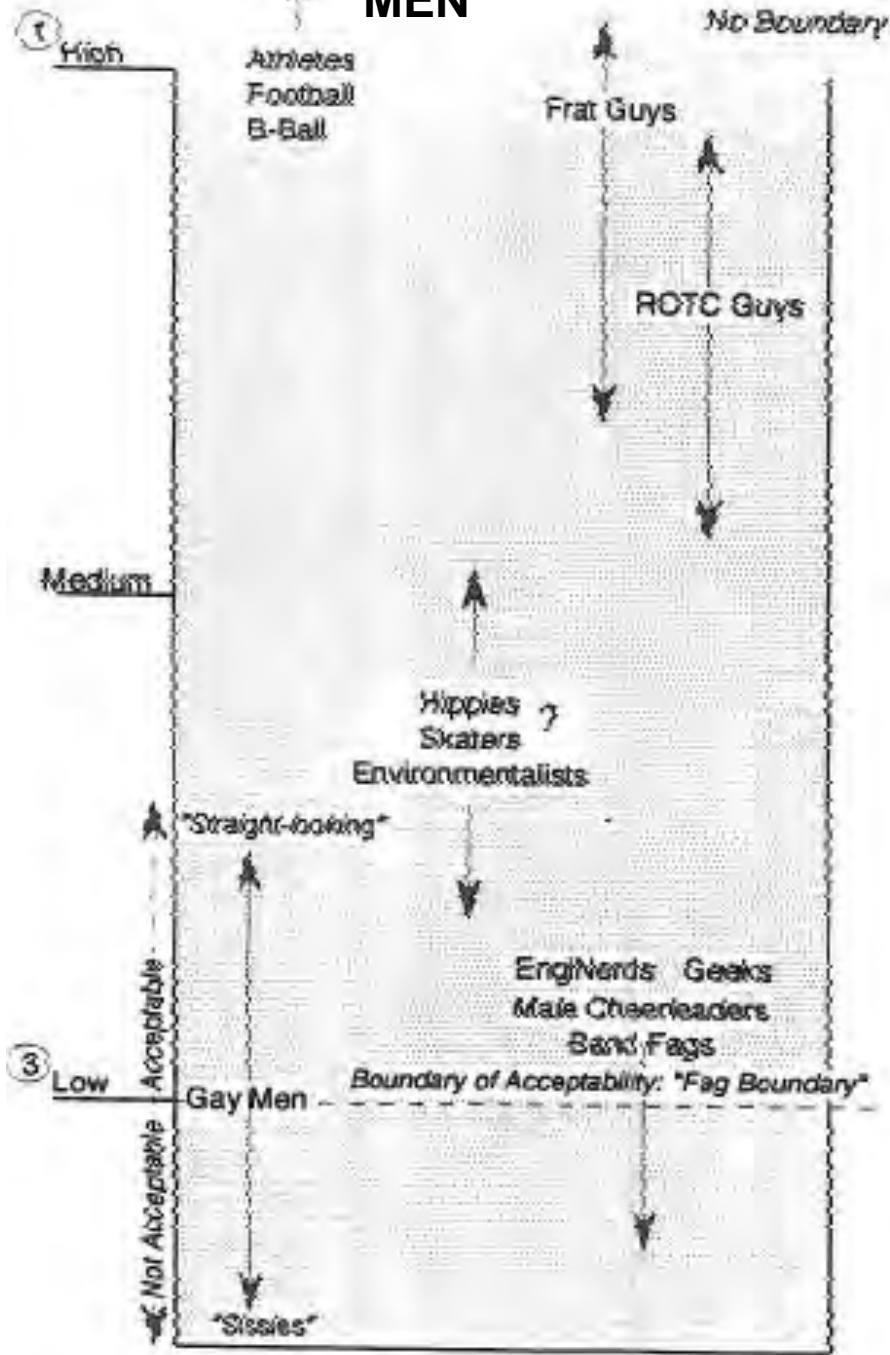
- O'Connor (1998)
- Women
  - More flexibility
  - Police Upper Boundary
- Men
  - No upper boundary
  - Police Lower Boundaries

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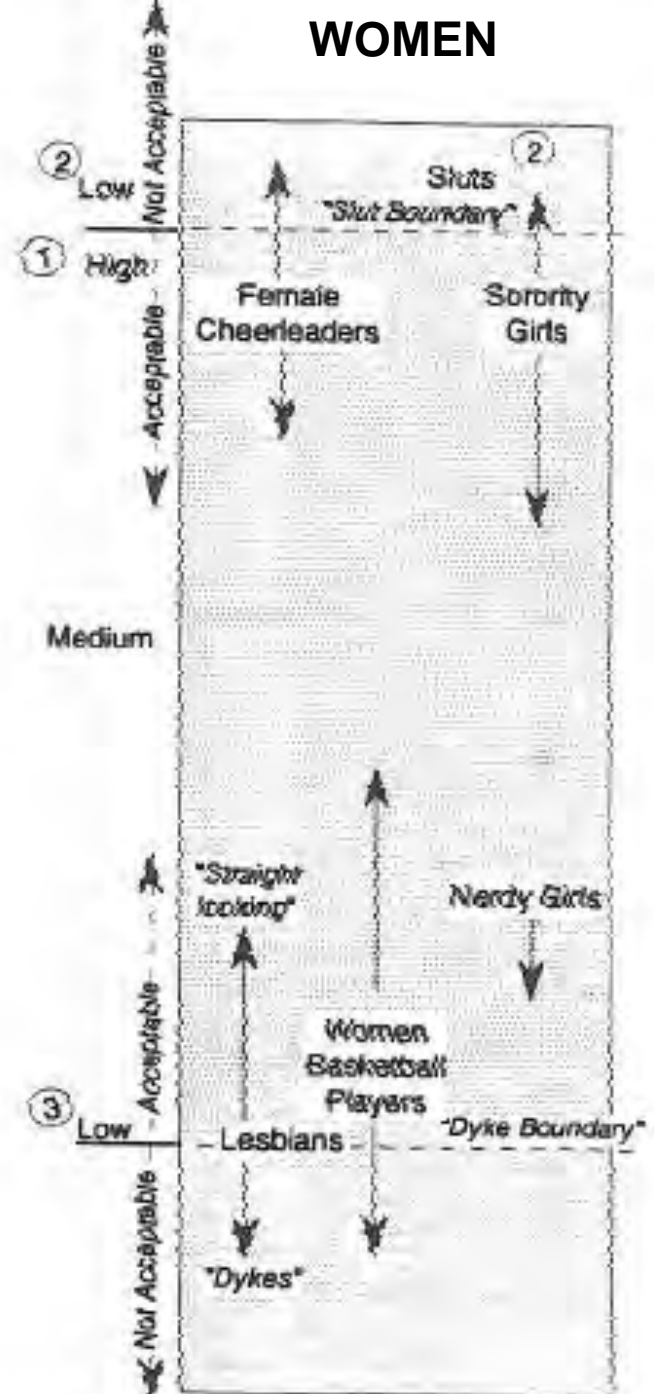
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# MEN



# WOMEN





# Methods

# Methods

- Epistemology – Constructivist Epistemology
- Methodology – Hermeneutic Phenomenology
- Methods
  - Telephone Interviews
  - Snowballing & Nomination
- Data Analysis
  - In Vivo
  - Thematic Interpretations
- Member Checking/Peer Review



# Phenomenology

- “Asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it is – and without which it could not be what is” (Van Manen, 1990)
- “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, 2002, p. 132).

# Participants

- Seven Participants (IPEDS Self-Identify)
  - One White and Hispanic
  - One Latino
  - Five White
- Positions
  - Offensive/Defensive Line
  - Linebackers
- Ages Mid 20s to Mid 30s

# Participants

- Sexual Identity
  - Straight – College (Questioning)
  - Gay – Current
- Schools
  - Six BCS
  - One Non-BCS
- Various regions of country



# Findings



# Orthodox Heteromascularity

# “Just a Regular Guy”

- All used that basic term
  - Average
  - Regular
- Heteromascularity
- Sports
- “Normal”
- Sports
- Passing

# “Just a Regular Guy”

“... Generally, I’m, um, I’m pretty active, I’m, um, I’m involved in, I like to work out. I like to ride my bike. I like to be outside. I’m, alright, I’m probably, just what you would consider kind of average guy. I like to watch sports on TV. I like to eat out. I like to go to a movies. I’m really, I mean very, um, I’m just kind of an average guy”

# “You’re Not Blowing on Anything”

“I remember when I was in grade school, I wanted to play the flute really bad. But my music instructor, my father, weren’t going to go for that, because I wasn’t going to put my lips on anything, as far as they were concerned, so I became a drummer. I hated playing drums. But, I compromised and did it because I wanted to be in the band so bad, but they would not let me blow on anything. I remember my dad telling me to my face in (native language) “You’re not blowing on anything!”





# Extreme Expectations

# “Didn’t Want to Disappoint”

- Male figures critical (mentors)
  - Teachers
  - Coaches
- Didn’t want to disappoint
- “Helped make me a man”
- Privilege to play where they did
- Reason for confidentiality

# “Like a Peanut Butter and Jelly with Cheese”

“I don’t know. It’s really hard. I mean, when you mix football and being gay, it’s weird. It’s like, it definitely doesn’t feel right. And, I, it just didn’t seem right. Even now, it’s hard, it’s like you’re in this masculine brotherhood, and you don’t sleep with each other... I don’t know, I don’t know if it’s because of society, or because of ESPN, or whatever, you just, don’t think of it as part of the game...it just feels wrong, it’s kinda like a peanut butter and jelly with cheese.



**Isolation**

# “I Told NO ONE”

- Tell no one
- Confidentiality/Anonymity for study
- I’m not that way
- Even when campus was open and accepting
- “Imagine worst thing happening”
- Not until long after undergraduate

# “Must Be Very Anonymous”

- Anonymous
- Sexual Release
  - Self
  - Baths
  - Social Media
- Definitely not
  - Bars
  - Campus Orgs

# “Everything Was Fag This and Fag That”

“When we were in the locker room, everything was fag that and fag that. It was like ‘you’re a faggot, dude.’ ‘This guy’s a fag, you know,’ and everything was about how much sex you were getting with women, and ‘I fucked this bitch last night, man, she was really hot for me’ and blah, blah, blah, blah blah, and it was, like, overly policed. It would overly bash gays and the word faggot was heavily used...and I could also tell when certain guys would be very, very quiet, and if they didn’t speak up, they would notice it, like one of the first times

# “Everything Was Fag This and Fag That”

... I realized it was when there was a guy near, and his name was Jim, and Jim confided in me that he felt he might be bisexual, um, which I think he was trying to tell me he was gay. .. But , long story short, we were in the locker room, in a scrimmage, we were cleaning up and stuff and this one dude was talking about these women ... whatever. Well this guy Jim was just quiet, and he looked over at Jim and said, ‘Jim you haven’t said shit, what, are you a faggot or something?’ Jim didn’t respond and from that moment, Jim became the faggot. And then began to give him a really, really hard time. So guys would always pipe up when the conversation began that way.”



# “Everything Was Fag This and Fag That”

- Hegemonic Masculinity
  - Misogynistic
  - Homophobic
- Comments in locker room
- Didn't think much about it
- “It was the worst thing to do, but we did it”
- Silence = Death

# “They Became Like a Pariah; They Had To Be Gotten Rid Of”

“What would it be like for someone who was gay?”

“Absolutely, horrible. And I saw it happen a couple times. I mean, they became like a pariah; they had to be gotten rid of...and I actually saw a guy, we weren't friends, but we would play together, but actually, because he was so, what happened was, a guy that he was messing around with, sent him a letter that basically, just, that he couldn't deal with the whole thing, or that he had issues with it...

# “They Became Like a Pariah; They Had To Be Gotten Rid Of”

...So, other members of the team found out, and what they basically did, they just started beating the crap out of him whenever they could catch him alone. He was so upset about it he ended up, he was actually found somewhere outside of town \_\_\_\_\_, but he actually like, because he didn't want to play football and he didn't want to tell his parents, and, I know it was deliberate, but he actually hurt himself deliberately, like he mangled up his legs so that he couldn't play.”



**Intimacy**

# “I Always Had an Attraction to Men”

- Always knew they were gay
- Crushes on coaches/teachers
- Something wrong with me
- High School – College
- Suppress it or ignore it

# “I Always Had an Attraction to Men”

- “My earliest memories of, um , I, I don’t have any memories until, that didn’t include an attraction to men. Um...I always had, had crushes on male teachers, having crushes on coaches, having crushes on male mentors. Um, always being drawn to men first instead of women... I was always wondering what was wrong with me and, hmm, I’m different from everybody else.”

# “Keep Your Distance”

- Tell no one
- Guilt by association
- Confidentiality/Anonymity for study
- “I’m not that way”
- Even when campus was open and accepting

# “Crossing the Line”

- Make friends with Friends/Teammates to which attracted
- No sexual activity
- Other Athletes
  - Girlfriends





**Image of the Sexual Animal**

# “I Had No Problem Getting Women”

- Sexual Activity
- It was the thing to do
- Enjoyed that someone was that interested in them.

# “It’s Just Being a Guy”

- Same sex OK if...
  - Active Role
    - Machisto
    - Passivo
  - Don’t talk about it
- Best if kept with team
- Domination

# “It’s Just Being a Guy”

- “I grew up in this (traditional ethnic) neighborhood and being (this ethnicity), \_\_\_\_\_s kind of have this thing that guys are into certain things and that’s just how guys are, you know. So long as you keep it quiet and private, and kept it behind the scenes, it’s not a big deal. SO for me it was kind of like, as long as no one speaks about it, and you don’t bring it up and you, you know, you don’t broadcast it, it’s just being a guy...”

# “It’s Just Being a Guy”

...so that was kind of our hidden code, you know, between us, and then part of it was, it was kind of like, well, these are my teammates and, you know, we’ll just do what guys do, but at least we were just doing it with each other, so it was kind of an excuse type thing.”



**Guilt**

# “If I Could Go Back Knowing What I Know Today...”

- Guilt about not confronting
  - Defend players being harassed
  - Talked to people
- “What I know today” v.  
“Where you were then?”

# Developing Services

- Please break up into small groups of 4
- Review the questions and answer them individually and as a group



# Player Recommendations

- Anonymous Website
- Own Place
- Meet people who were athletes and gay
  - Gay – nice guy

# Player Recommendations

“It was more of a focus at winning...at any cost. And while I know winning is important, there are other aspects that, we’re still human beings, we still have feelings, um, I mean I suffer now from, I mean at my age I have like tons of arthritis in my ankles, my legs, I mean, I’m on tons of pain medication and my body’s been beaten pretty bad, um, and no one made me do it, again, because I wanted to do it, but I guess in the end, I would like them just to know, you know, that we are that kid, that 20-year old kid that is breaking his back for you, is going to end up as some very arthritic man, and at least if he’s able to be who he is, and what he is.

# Final Comments

- Anonymity and Confidentiality
- Professional Hegemony
  - SA profession
  - On-Campus SA

# Thank you for participating!

- Questions?
- Contact information
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