

Sexual Diversity: Inclusiveness in Women's Club Level Sport

By

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## **Abstract**

Safe and supportive spaces are important for women as they explore and affirm diverse and non-conventional discourses and practices of gender and sexuality. Sport, however, does not readily provide such spaces. Historically, many women athletes and women's team sports have been stigmatised by a lesbian label and by the discrimination that regularly accompanies this label. Also, there are many sporting teams and club environments where lesbians are invisible and silent. This research examined the lived experiences of women hockey players from three clubs in suburban Melbourne, in relation to their understandings of gender and sexuality, and policy and practice in the club context. This research project utilised a qualitative multiple case study approach and employed interview and content analysis methods. It was found that all three hockey clubs had not implemented a 'member protection' or anti-discrimination policy at the club level. Additionally, the two clubs that had a mixed-gender membership had a culture where males dominated the governance of the club and adhered more readily to traditional ideas about gender and sexuality resulting in a culture of male domination and heterosexism. In such clubs, women often played a subordinate role and sexual diversity in general, and visibility of lesbians in particular, was minimal. In contrast, the club which was established by lesbian feminists, and had an exclusively female membership, had developed by necessity and design, a culture of governance of women by women, a more open attitude to the sexuality of members and a highly visible lesbian presence. This research concluded that the current communication processes in place between the state sporting association and the hockey clubs was inadequate, as evidenced by the invisibility of policy at each of the hockey clubs. In addition, irrespective of politics, gender and sexuality diversity, the lesbian label, in all cases, had a negative impact on the research participants by defining, controlling and constricting their self identity and self image.

### **Declaration**

I, Chelsea Jane Litchfield, declare that the PhD thesis entitled ‘Sexual Diversity: Inclusiveness in Women’s Club Level Sport’ is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature

Date

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## **List of Acronyms**

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFL	Australian Rules Football League
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AIS	Australian Institute of Sport
ARCSHS	Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society
ASC	Australian Sports Commission
AWhA	Australian Women's Hockey Association
CAAWS	Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity
C.A.M.P.	Campaign Against Moral Persecution
EOC	Equal Opportunity Commission
FA	Football Association
GLB	Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual
GLISA	Gay and Lesbian International Sporting Association
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HWFC	Hackney Women's Football Club
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
LPGA	Ladies Professional Golf Association
MCHC	Melbourne Central Hockey Club
MVP	Most Valuable Player
NCHC	Northern Central Hockey Club
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
PBTR	Play by the Rules
QLD	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SEHC	South Eastern Hockey Club
SRV	Sport and Recreation Victoria
SSA	State Sporting Association
VEOHRC	Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
WA	Western Australia
WHO	World Health Organisation
WNBA	Women's National Basketball Association
WTA	Women's Tennis Association

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **Introduction**

Hockey has maintained a prominent position in Australia's sporting landscape. Field hockey<sup>1</sup> has been traditionally participated in by women in Australia. Introduced into Australia as a 'ladies game', hockey did not contest the male dominated mainstream sports during the federation era, such as cricket and football (AFL) (Crawford, 1984). Therefore, women experienced little opposition to participating in hockey. Over time, boys and men began participating in hockey, and the sport became widely viewed in Australia as a sport participated in by white, middle-class women and men. The men's and women's national field hockey teams in Australia have been successful in international competitions. In particular, the women's team, the 'Hockeyroos', have won three Olympic gold medals in seven appearances since 1984.

Cashman observed that 'many Australians have an obsession with sport and that sporting culture is central to Australian life' (1998, p. i). According to McKay, sport in Australia supposedly embodies the myth of giving everyone a 'fair go', and he suggests that 'sport is frequently cited as *the* exemplar of Australia's egalitarian character' (1991, p. 1). In other words, sport in Australia is held up to be a community building activity and as a place where participants are all on a 'level' playing field. However, Kell (2000) argues that rather than being 'the great leveler', sport has been instrumental in 'forming social hierarchies within Australian society which are based on class, race, gender and ethnicity' (p. 11). These hierarchies 'perpetuate' rather than 'alleviate' social inequalities (Kell, 2000, p. 11). While

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<sup>1</sup> When the term 'hockey' is used throughout this thesis, it is used to describe the sport of field hockey. Unless otherwise stated, the term 'hockey' is not related to the sport of Ice Hockey.

Kell does not list sexuality as one of the props of such hierarchies, the dominance of heterosexuality and the existence of homophobia in Australian society suggests that sexuality could be added to the list.

Sexual diversity sits at the crossroads of two, often conflicting, cultural norms:

heterosexuality, which can relegate homosexuality to outlaw status; and egalitarianism, which advances equal rights and freedoms. Heterosexism is best defined as a belief 'in the superiority of heterosexuals or heterosexuality, evidenced in the exclusion, by omission or design, of non-heterosexual persons in policies, procedures, events, or activities' (Sears & Williams, 1997, p. 16). Homophobia can be defined as 'a fear or intolerance of homosexuality, and it includes displaying intolerant attitudes and behaviors towards these groups [lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders]' (Australian Sports Commission, 2000, p. 4). Homophobia is at the core of the discrimination directed at the gay and lesbian community.

Most women in positions of power or in sport, regardless of sexuality, have faced homophobia or some form of homophobic discrimination. That is, female politicians, business leaders and athletes challenge the 'normal' idea of male dominance in society. Lenskyj suggests that '[t]hese women challenge traditional race and class-based definitions of sex appropriate behavior that label independence and achievement orientation as male attributes; hence they cannot be real women, so the argument goes' (1991, p. 62). While women face many forms of sex discrimination in sport, lesbian athletes are subject to additional marginalisation. Lenskyj suggests that in the 'subculture of traditional, male dominated sport, lesbians are by definition members of at least two marginalised groups:

They are not male and they are not heterosexual' (2003, p. 35). Therefore, for lesbians in sport, the experience of discrimination is two-fold.

Homophobia can arise from many different situations in sport; from discrimination by coaches, spectators, competitors or team-mates, to non-compliance with anti-discrimination legislation or a lack of policy and procedures at the club level. In an effort to protect themselves from the consequences of homophobia and the lesbian label in sport, many lesbian athletes have dropped out of sport, created new teams and competitions, or have become more politically active within existing sporting organisations. The establishment of the International Gay Games, for example, was developed in part to counter this situation, and is an example of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) individuals attempting to create positive and affirming sporting environment for themselves.

Many of Australia's social institutions have adopted more inclusive policies regarding gender, and are slowly developing the same with respect to sexuality. Some male dominated social institutions, such as the military and sport, however, have been slower to change policy and procedures with respect to both gender and sexuality equality. This contention will be explored throughout this dissertation through investigating the scope of anti-discrimination policy and legislation available at the state and national level of sporting organisations and individual sporting clubs. In particular, how local sporting clubs interpret the requirements of anti-discrimination legislation, code of conduct policies and member protection policies and apply these interpretations at club level will be explored.

The research participants were all women playing in recreational level field hockey in Melbourne in the regular 2006 hockey season. Three hockey clubs in Melbourne formed the



basis of the case studies included in this research. The experiences of participants were explored through semi-structured interviews and analysed using a critical feminist theoretical framework and Connell's (1987) theory of gender relations and identities. A definition and description of how a critical feminist theoretical framework and Connell's (1987) theory of gender relations and identities are used throughout this dissertation are explained further in the following chapters, Chapter Two and Chapter Three. Additionally, the study examined the overarching politics related to gender and sexuality discrimination in sport in general and in hockey in particular. The extent to which such policy was evident/enacted at the club level was also explored.

### **Aims and Objectives**

This thesis examines the legislative, policy and cultural context within which women experience diversity and inclusion in hockey at the suburban club level in Melbourne.

The specific objectives of this research project are as follows:

1. To examine the scope of anti-discrimination legislation and policy and the expectations that it carries for hockey associations and community-based clubs;
2. To examine the scope of club or team policies with respect to participation based on gender, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity, and how these policies are perceived by the participants and managers (i.e., how they interpret the requirements of anti-discrimination legislation, managers perceptions of inclusiveness in the club, procedures for staff/member education, complaint procedures, etc); and
3. To examine the lived experience of inclusiveness by team members, including their perceptions of team/club policy, procedures, team culture and the experiences of playing within the competitive mainstream hockey league.

In the context of this research project, ‘inclusiveness’ is defined as the inclusion of every person regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, race, culture or religion.

A large gap exists in the area of reported lesbian sporting experience in Australia. Most of the research in this area has been carried out in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, and much of this research has focused on physical education contexts or semi-elite/elite level sports.<sup>2</sup> Very little research has been conducted at the club or social level of sport. While studies such as those of Hillier’s (2005), Hemphill and Symons (2009) and Symons (2002, 2004, 2010) on sport and sexuality in Australia form a base, this thesis expands the body of knowledge by addressing the issue of discrimination and inclusiveness in a local Australian recreational sport context.

Apart from anecdotal information, there is little understanding of the lived experiences of lesbians who play local sport, affected as it may be by club policies and culture. The significance of this research lies in the ability to increase the understanding of how relevant sport is as a source of identity and community involvement, and to what extent anti-discrimination policies and procedure filter down to the local recreational level of community sport. It will also identify the extent to which there are opportunities and barriers to participation and how it could inform future anti-discrimination and inclusiveness policy.

This research increases awareness of social diversity in the community, not only with gender, but also sexuality, and can be used as a resource or reference for many people and sporting organisations. For example, club administrators, coaches, teachers (particularly physical education teachers) and education organisations could use information in this thesis to

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<sup>2</sup> See Griffin (1998); Cox & Thompson (2001); Theberge (2000); Shire et al. (2000); and Caudwell (2002).

improve, in ethical terms, the ‘social health’ of their organisation, and to improve, in management terms, compliance with anti-discrimination legislation.

## **Chapter Summaries**

Chapter Two of this thesis provides a review of academic literature. This discussion will include research on the social construction of gender and sexuality, along with a history of LGBT activism in Australia, feminism, power in sport, sports media, the masculine culture of sport, lesbian identities in sport, and major events such as the International Gay Games and Outgames. The latter half of the chapter will overview the literature dealing with the potential for sport, in particular women’s team sports, to provide a space where gender and sexuality can be constructed by women themselves in a relative ‘safe space’.

Chapter Three examines the research design of this study. Multiple case studies, interviews, document and data analysis and a thematic content analysis of interviews were the qualitative methods employed in this thesis. Examples of other research projects that have employed similar qualitative methods are outlined, along with the ethical risks and safeguards taken in the research project. A critical feminist theoretical perspective is used to inform the research analysis, in so far as the gendered power dimensions are analysed at each hockey club, and then explored further in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four provides a legislative and policy context to the research. A combination of empirical data, contextual information and an additional review of literature in the area of policy, law and legislation is analysed. The connection of policy, research and initiatives to the three hockey club case studies is explored. An examination of ‘safe spaces’ for lesbian athletes as they pertain to the state and federal policies for inclusion and anti-discrimination is

also undertaken. An analysis of policies and publications such as the Australian ‘Play by the Rules’ initiative, the ‘Victorian Government Code of Conduct for Community Sport’ policy, the Australian Sport Commission and Victoria Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission ‘Fair go, sport’ initiative and the groundbreaking research on the LGBT sport experience in Victoria, entitled ‘Come out to Play’ (2010) is carried out within this chapter. These resources inform the recreational level hockey players interviewed in this research project as to their rights and responsibilities in playing, coaching and administering recreational sport in a fair and inclusive manner. An exemplar in ‘community development’ models is also discussed in relation to sexuality and diversity in sport in Victoria.

Chapter Five is the first of the three case studies analysed. *Northern Central Hockey Club (NCHC)* is a women’s only hockey club and the largest of the case studies. *NCHC* was based in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne. A number of themes are discussed in this chapter, including; the culture of ‘safe spaces’ at sporting clubs, the lesbian label, the political foundations of the club and the language used around gender, power and sexuality issues.

The second case study analysed in this thesis forms Chapter Six. *Melbourne Central Hockey Club (MCHC)* differs from other hockey clubs, in that it is affiliated with a university located in central Melbourne. Several concluding points and themes are discussed throughout this chapter, including; male dominated governance of mixed-gendered hockey clubs, the uptake of policy at the hockey club, the ‘pub culture’ surrounding social events at the club, and the effects of the lesbian label for all women involved in sport.

Chapter Seven explores the final case study in this thesis. *South Eastern Hockey Club (SEHC)* is a large hockey club situated in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Policy at

the club level, the governing arrangements of *SEHC* as a mixed-gendered hockey club and the hetero-normative language used by the participants are examples of the themes examined during Chapter Seven.

Chapter Eight compares and contrasts the three case studies. Some of the main findings discussed in this chapter include the differences in club governance, the differing experiences of homophobia encountered by the participants and the general perceptions of the club culture and inclusion at each of the hockey clubs. Similarities between the case studies included the lack of anti-discrimination policies at each of the hockey clubs and the lesbian stigma associated with all women participating in hockey.

The final chapter in the thesis, Chapter Nine, summarises the main findings of the research project, the limitations of the thesis, and concludes with a number of recommendations for policy and practice within sports clubs. These recommendations aim to promote positive, inclusive sports environments for members of all genders and sexual orientations; and include recommendations for future research in the field.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Introduction**

The review of literature is explored over two chapters of the thesis. This chapter provides a theoretical understanding of the literature pertaining to women's (particularly lesbian's) experiences in sport framed by discussions on the social constructions of gender, sexuality, feminism, sport and the media. The International Gay Games and Outgames as examples of safe and affirming spaces for female athletes, along with the potential for sports to provide a space where gender and sexuality can be constructed and performed in a 'safe space', are also explored in Chapter Two. A second relevant body of literature is reviewed after the methodology in Chapter Four.<sup>3</sup> Chapter Four will provide contextual information related to the current laws, policies, initiatives and research surrounding sexuality diversity and equity in Australian sport. The chapter is directly linked to one of the principal research aims, that is, to 'examine the scope of anti-discrimination legislation and policy and the expectations that it carries for hockey associations and community-based clubs'. As a result, Chapter Four will not only contain a review of literature relevant to this research, it also outlines some of the findings of this research project that directly relate to this aim.

#### **The Construction of Gender**

The term 'gender' refers to the cultural difference between women and men, based on the biological (sex) division between female and male (Connell, 2002, p. 8). Chiu, Gervan, Fairbrother, Johnson, Owen-Anderson, Bradley and Zucker, (2006) explain that the construction of gender begins from the time we are born:

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter Three contains an analysis of the methodological process used in this research project.

In hospital nurseries, for example, it is common practice to wrap newborn boys in blue blankets and newborn girls in pink blankets, and greeting cards are often color coded in blue or pink to signify the sex of the newborn (p. 385).

Males and females learn from an early age the behaviours that are appropriate for their sex. According to Hasbrook and Harris (2000), children actively “do” gender ‘by engaging in practices that create differences both between and among them’ (p. 13). In contemporary Western societies, the categories of biological sex, gender identity, gender role and behaviour, and sexual orientation are all assumed to be dichotomous.<sup>4</sup>

Gender as an organising discourse involves hierarchy as well as difference. Hannagan explains that there are widely held assumptions that ‘women’s biology, intelligence, contributions to evolution, historical or cultural change are inferior to men’s’ (2008, p. 465).

Similarly, Paechter observes that:

Masculinity and femininity are not just constructed in relation to each other; their relation is dualistic. A dualistic relation is one in which the subordinate term is negated, rather than the two sides being in equal balance. Femininity is, thus, defined as a lack, an absence of masculinity (2006, p. 256).

Therefore, ‘female’ and ‘femininity’ are viewed as different and subordinate to ‘male’ and ‘masculinity’.

Contrary to the view that gender is biological or psychological and that it is captured by only two separate and dichotomous categories of performance, male and female, Butler argues:

Gender is a discursive effect; it is neither a biological nor a psychological necessity. Gendered behaviour – that is, enactments of prescribed corporeal styles – is “performative”, for it creates the illusion of primary, interior gender identity.

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<sup>4</sup> This dichotomy is examined by Messner (2000) in his research on the gendered behaviour of four and five year old children at a soccer competition in Los Angeles.

This illusion conceals the political under-pinnings of gender identity, namely, male dominance and hetero-sexism (1997, p. 112).

To view gender as performative is to see it as not just socially constructed, but constructed in a way that reflects masculine power.

Lorber (2000) also offers a radical response to dichotomous and hierarchical ideas of gender. Lorber puts forward a ‘de-gendering’ movement, and proposes that ‘while feminists want women and men to be equal, few talk about doing away with gender divisions altogether’ (2000, p. 80). According to Lorber (2000), a de-gendering movement will help women gain full equality in the social world. Lorber (2000) explains that:

Without denying the importance of continuing to fight for gender equality, for an end to sexual exploitation and violence, and for women’s freedom from men’s domination, feminism needs a long term strategy to undermine the overall gendered structure of the societies most of us live in. Feminism has long battled against the content and rationale of women’s devaluation and subordinate status. We now need a feminist de-gendering movement that would rebel against the division of the social world into two basic categories – the very structure of women’s inequality (p. 82).

Lorber advocates a challenge to this inevitable feminist paradox by recognising the physical differences between males and females, whilst also ‘look[ing] for ways to make them socially equivalent’ (2000, p. 82).

According to Connell (2005), there are multiple masculinities and multiple femininities that are played out in society.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Paechter states:

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<sup>5</sup> Connell’s work in the 1980s on the nature and construction of gender and masculine identity was groundbreaking and has been subsequently adopted by a number of prominent social scientists in their research.



We have a multiplicity of masculinities and femininities inhabited and enacted variously by different people and by the same people at different times. These are influenced by the form of the body, but not tied to it; they are related to sexuality (particularly to compulsory heterosexuality) but not correlated with it (2003, p. 69).

Accordingly, the constructions of masculinities and femininities can differ from one culture to another, from one city or town to another and from one point in time to another.

While acknowledging the dichotomy between masculine and feminine, as well as multiple masculinities and femininities, there is also a hierarchy within forms of masculinities.

Connell suggests that most masculinities ‘commonly involve hierarchy and exclusion, in which one (or more) pattern of masculinity is socially dominant and other patterns are dishonoured or marginalised’ (2007).<sup>6</sup> The dominant form of masculinity is labeled as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 830).<sup>7</sup> Connell best describes it as:

The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women’ (2005, p. 77).

Connell (2005) adds that this definition in some cases can have exceptions, as the most ‘visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity are not necessarily the most powerful people’ (p. 77). Easily recognised and visible, examples of these bearers of hegemonic masculinity can

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<sup>6</sup> Connell argues that different masculinities are associated with different positions of power.

<sup>7</sup> According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 830), the concept of hegemonic masculinity was first proposed in ‘reports from a field study of social inequality in Australian high schools (Kessler et al. 1982); in a related conceptual discussion of the making of masculinities and the experience of men’s bodies (Connell 1983); and in a debate over the role of men in Australian labour politics (Connell 1982). The high school project provided empirical evidence of multiple hierarchies—in gender as well as in class terms—interwoven with active projects of gender construction’ (Connell et al. 1982).

include film actors, action heroes, and especially male athletes who demonstrate traits such as strength, courage, and aggression.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain further the idea that hegemonic masculinity is different to other masculinities:

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men (p. 832).

Hegemonic masculinity is nowhere more apparent than in sport.<sup>8</sup> Sport offers a medium for reproducing dominant forms of masculinity by shaping an aggressive, competitive, and on occasion, hostile environment for those who do not adhere to the hegemonic norm (e.g., non-sporting males, athletic women, LGBT individuals).

Along with multiple masculinities, there exists multiple femininities, with some (e.g., ‘hegemonic femininity’) valued more than others. In various areas of social life, suspicion surrounds members of either sex who do not conform to the gendered stereotypes. Crosset (1995) explains:

The questioning of one’s membership in a sex category had often been used to discredit people’s accomplishments in many fields in order to defend the dominant social order from a perceived threat of deviance (p. 126).

On this view, it is assumed that influential women in politics or business cannot be ‘real’ women!

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<sup>8</sup> This position will be explored further in the latter stages of this chapter.

Hegemonic femininity, a term originally coined by Lenskyj (1994) and revisited by Krane (1999), is explained by Choi (2000):

In the world of women's sport, femininity can be seen to be exalted as hegemonic through the greater celebration of the 'feminine' female athlete. For example, female athletes who do not appear 'feminine' and/or who take part in sports perceived as male, or masculine, are likely to be treated more negatively by coaches and sport administrators, by competition judges and officials, by the media, by potential sponsors and by sports fans (p. 8).

Similarly, the so-called 'super moms' are those female athletes who can back up their sporting prowess with heterosexual credentials.

The implications of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity result in a situation where 'masculine' women and 'feminine' men can often be subordinated and oppressed. A similar hierarchy is present in the Western understanding of sexuality. An understanding of the construction of sexuality is crucial to the foundation of this study and this will be more fully examined in the next section.

### **The Construction of Sexuality**

Weeks (1989) suggests that there is a bias towards certain sexualities over others. He writes:

Most works on the history of sex tend to concentrate on the major forms of sexual experience to the exclusion of the minority forms. This is not surprising given the centrality in our society of the great rituals of birth, maturation, pair-bonding and reproduction. But to ignore extra-marital, non-reproductive, non-monogamous, or even non-heterosexual forms is to stifle an important aspect of our social history (Weeks, 1989, p. 96).

To fully appreciate and understand the human situation, we need to acknowledge all forms of sexual experience, not just those that reproduce.

In Western culture, particularly since the emergence of Christianity, sexuality has been an issue producing moral anxiety. Weeks (2003) explains that during the first century BC through to recent times, the purpose of sex was reproduction; therefore any sex that could not result in reproduction was a 'sin' (p. 29). Consequently, homosexual sexual activity (both male and female) was considered a sin and until recent times, the practice of male homosexual sex has been classified as a criminal act.<sup>9</sup>

While homosexual sex and relationships were not uncommon in history, Weeks suggests that the 'idea that there is such a thing as *the* homosexual person is a relatively new phenomenon' (2003, p. 30). According to Weeks, sexuality is a social construct and he defines it as the way 'in which sexualities have been shaped in a complex history, and in tracing how sexual patterns have changed over time' (2003, p. 17). Sexuality, then, can be described as being shaped by social forces.

Certain sexualities are more privileged than others. Against the heterosexual norm, other sexualities (notably gay, lesbian and bisexuality), are considered 'inferior' and subject to ridicule and discrimination. Gays, lesbians, bisexuals (and transgendered individuals) are often grouped together, and from the outside, a joint community is observed. Similarly, Califia (1997) suggests that 'straight culture reads much of the public expression of gay identity as gender transgression. To them, we're all part of the same garbage heap of sex-

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<sup>9</sup> In Victoria, male homosexual relationships were de-criminalised in 1981. For further information on this, see Wotherspoon (2004).

and-gender-trash' (p. 256). Transgender is succinctly defined on the 'Transgender Victoria' website as: 'An umbrella term used to describe all those whose gender identity is at odds with their biological sex. This includes Transsexuals and Crossdressers' (Transgender Victoria, n.d.). Assumptions about individual transgendered sexual orientation is common, whereby transgendered women are often assumed to be gay males dressing in drag and transgendered males are often assumed to be lesbians dressing as men. However, these assumptions are often misconceptions about transgendered individuals.

While the LGBT communities are often linked as one, solidarity between these groups is not a given. Jeffreys, for instance, explains that there is some hostility between bisexuals and lesbian feminists. She suggests:

Though bisexuals occupy an equal space in the most common understanding of the queer LGBT coalition with lesbians, gays, and transgenders, it is by no means obvious that the interests and goals of bisexual women and men are consonant with those of lesbians and gays. Certainly with bisexual anthologies there is considerable hostility expressed towards the lesbian feminist project (2003, p. 36).

Many same-sex attracted young women in Australia identify as 'bisexual', rather than lesbian. In the most recent 'Writing themselves in' report,<sup>10</sup> Hillier et al. (2010) explain that one of the key findings was that same-sex attracted 'young women were more likely to identify as 'bisexual' (42%), than lesbian (39%)' (p. 27). Whereas around 82 % of same-sex attracted young men identified as 'gay' and only around 8% as bisexual (Hillier et al., 2010, p. 27). In contrast to this finding, in Canada, Ravel and Rail (2007) explained that many bisexual individuals resist the 'bisexual' label.

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<sup>10</sup> 'Writing themselves in 3' is a research project investigating the experiences of same-sex attracted youth in Australia.

Heterosexuality is enforced and reinforced as the 'normal' form of sexuality by many social institutions. According to Symons:

There is the widespread assumption entrenched in the major social institutions like the church, the nuclear family, the courts, the workplace, the media and education, upon which the supposed naturalness and superiority of heterosexuality is based (2004, p. 48).

Similarly, Rubin suggested that heterosexual had become the 'good, normal, natural and blessed' sexuality, within a hierarchy of 'sexual value' (1993, p. 13).<sup>11</sup> Rubin's hierarchy was devised in the 1990s and many recent publications in this area continue to use Rubin's work as a point of departure for an understanding of hierarchies of sexuality. While some authors have questioned aspects of Rubin's work, an alternative comprehensive framework for understanding of sexuality is yet to be proposed.<sup>12</sup>

Rubin's hierarchy of sexual value is based on religious, psychiatric and popular culture, and is described as the 'charmed circle' – based on 'good', 'normal', and 'natural', versus the 'outer limits' – based on 'bad', 'abnormal' and 'unnatural' sexuality (1993, p. 13). Rubin's hierarchy demonstrates that all values within the charmed circle are those that mainstream (heterosexual) society holds up as normal and affirming, while those values in the outer limits (homosexual) are regarded as abnormal and problematic. Again, this normalises heterosexual sexuality and subjugates the 'other' forms of sexuality.

Rubin also posed the notion of an alternative sexual hierarchy, one which draws an imaginary line between 'good' and 'bad' sex, where the line represents major areas of sexual division.

As Rubin suggests:

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<sup>11</sup> See also Rubin (1999).

<sup>12</sup> See Brickell (2009); Ho (2006); and Rollins & Hirsch (2003) for those who have discussed Rubin's hierarchy of sexual value.

Most of the discourses on sex, be they religious, psychiatric, popular, or political, delimit a very small portion of human sexuality sanctifiable, safe, healthy, mature, legal, or politically correct. The “line” distinguishes these from all other erotic behaviors, which are understood to be the work of the devil, dangerous, psychopathological, infantile, or politically reprehensible. Arguments are then conducted over “where to draw the line”, and to determine what other activities, if any, may be permitted to cross over into acceptability (1993, p. 14).

This model proposed by Rubin suggests a lack of clear cut dichotomous categories, such as ‘blessed’ and ‘outer limits’. This model of sex hierarchy explains that some aspects of homosexuality, such as long-term, stable relationships between gay men or lesbians, are not ‘bad’ and sit in the major area of ‘contest’ (1993, p. 14). According to Rubin (1993), unmarried heterosexual couples are also in this area of ‘contest’ or division. However, since 1993, there have been institutional and social shifts in this thought. De-facto relationships and same-sex unions and marriage have become more mainstream through many Western countries, and an attitudinal shift in favour of gay marriage has occurred within Australia over the past few years. Nevertheless, Rubin’s model is still pertinent to this research in that it proposes that sexuality can be separated from gender and that not all homosexual activities or relationships are classified as ‘bad’ in terms of society.

### **A Brief History of ‘Homosexuality’**

A historical overview of homosexuality is pertinent to this research project, particularly to frame the experiences, subordination and triumphs of the same-sex attracted communities around the world, and specifically in Australia. Same-sex relationships have existed throughout history, over a variety of different time periods and cultures (Halperin, 2002; Traub, 2002). The public reception to same-sex relationships has always been varied. In Ancient Greece, sexual relationships between two males, one an educator/teacher, and the other a boy or youth (the student), were seen as an essential element of a young man’s

education (Percy, 1996). However, as Weeks points out, there is a long tradition in Christianity that promotes hostility towards the 'practice' of homosexuality, particularly male same-sex behaviour (1989, p. 99). In line with the teachings of the Christian Church, the 1533 Act of English King Henry VIII prohibited sodomy or 'buggery' between males (and in male/female relationships), and according to Weeks, 'the penalty for "the abominable vice of buggery"' was death. The death penalty continued on the statute books, formally at least, until 1861' in the United Kingdom (1989, p. 99). Australia, given the close colonial links, predictably followed suit shortly thereafter, removing the death penalty for sodomy in 1864. In Australia, there is evidence of homosexual activity and relationships between males and also between females as early as the convict era (Anemogiannis, 2004).<sup>13</sup> Wotherspoon claims that while much of this same-sex activity was "situational homosexuality", some meaningful same-sex relationships also occurred (2004).<sup>14</sup>

Same-sex relationships between women have not, until relatively recently, faced the same scrutiny as same-sex male activity. Through her work in the 1990s on the history of lesbian life and culture in the twentieth-century, Faderman proposes that in America, women's intimate relationships with other women 'were universally encouraged in centuries outside of our own' (1991, p. 1). Faderman (1991) also explains that in England, these relationships were often referred to as 'romantic friendships' and dated back as far as the Renaissance period (p. 11). However, some social limitations were placed on these relationships.

Faderman explains:

If an eligible male came along, the women were not to feel that they could send him on his way in favour of their romantic friendship; they were not to hope that they could find gainful

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<sup>13</sup> Many experts in the field of homosexuality history in Australia were interviewed during this documentary written and directed by Anemogiannis (2004). These experts included; Wotherspoon, Moore, Ford, Damousi, Delaney and Woodward.

<sup>14</sup> Wotherspoon explains that 'situational homosexuality' occurred due to the environment that the prisoners were in, rather than due to a preference in sexuality.



employment to support such a same-sex love relationship permanently or that they could usurp any other male privileges in support of that relationship; and they were not to intimate in any way that an erotic element might possibly exist in their love for each other (1991, pp. 1-2).

According to Faderman, outside of these strictures, 'female same-sex love, or "romantic friendships" as it was long called, was a respected social institution in America' (1991, p. 2).

Moore (2004) explains that there is evidence that 'romantic friendships' also existed in Australia between females and between males, some of these relationships were sexual and others were not.

The introduction of the term 'lesbian' in the second half of the nineteenth century meant that relationships between women, such as the 'romantic friendships' took on a completely different meaning. Griffin (1998) explains that just after World War I, the word 'lesbian' had a definite widespread stigma attached to it (p. 31). Love between two women that had been considered natural in earlier years, now demanded explanations and justifications. The relabeling of the love between women by using the term 'lesbian' seemed to carry a more 'deviant' understanding of relationships that existed. The lesbian label denoted intimate relationships between two women into the beginning of World War II. The following section delves further into research on the experiences of lesbians throughout the mid-twentieth century.

### **Mid-Twentieth Century Experiences for Lesbians**

The onset of World War II saw the definition of a woman's 'role' in society change considerably. With many men engaged in military duties overseas, opportunities in the local workforce that were previously exclusively occupied by men, now existed for women. In addition, more places were made available in the military for women than during World War

I. These changes exposed an outlet for access to other women on a grander scale, outside of family and friends. Labeled the 'service experience', Lewis (2001) explains that for women who took on 'male' jobs, this experience had a 'profoundly liberating effect... who then sought jobs after the war that would maintain this independence and liberation'. Subsequently, this independence played a major part in an increase in visibility of women in the workforce and a chance for more women to meet and socialise outside the 'traditional' realm of marital discourse.

Wotherspoon (2004) proposes that the arrival of the American troops in Australia became a defining moment in homosexual Australia. Not only did the influx of troops provide more opportunities for gay males to meet other males, it also provided a stage for cross-dressing males (drag queens) to perform for the troops. Wotherspoon (2004) points out that while Australian males would have been jailed for such an act prior to the war, they were paid substantial amounts of money during the war to perform.

World War II also provided a shift for lesbians in Australia. Damousi (2004) offers the view that there were ample opportunities for lesbian experiences and relationships within the armed forces. According to Faderman (1991), this time period proved a turning point in the history of lesbianism in the twentieth century:

Young women who might have been locked in their husband's homes in the previous decade were now frequently thrown together in all-female worlds. Just as intense love between women often emerged in female institutions such as women's colleges and women's prisons, it was bound to emerge in factories and military units. This time, with the background of sexual sophistication that had been developing in America over the previous decades, love between two women led to the establishment of a much larger, unique subculture of lesbians such as could not have occurred at any previous time in history (pp. 119-120).

After the war and throughout the 1950s, homosexuals became a particular target of persecution in both America and in Australia (Faderman, 1991). The New South Wales Police Commissioner at the time, Colin Delaney,<sup>15</sup> stated that the two greatest menaces facing Australia were ‘communism and homosexuality’ (as cited in Anemogiannis, 2004). While there were no formal laws against lesbianism, at this time many lesbians were also subject to close surveillance and harassment from the authorities (Anemogiannis, 2004).

Ford (2004) explains that despite this surveillance and harassment, the 1950s saw an emergence of different lesbian sub-cultures in Australia. Lesbians were going to bars, having parties, dressing like males and were becoming increasingly visible and provocative in their behaviour (Ford, 2004). However, because of the law prohibiting male homosexuality, many gay males were increasingly frequenting the ‘beats’.<sup>16</sup> Following Delaney’s statement about the ‘menace’ of homosexuality, the police embarked upon a major crackdown on homosexual activity, with police officers luring males to beats, and then arresting them (Anemogiannis, 2004). The following section explores the experiences for lesbians (and gay men) in the second half of the twentieth century.

### **Late Twentieth Century Experiences for Lesbians**

The latter stages of the twentieth century brought about many changes in the way that gay men and lesbians lived. Duberman proposes that “Stonewall” is ‘*the* emblematic event in modern lesbian and gay history’ (1994, p. xvii). The Stonewall riots that occurred in New York in late June and early July of 1969 resulted from a police raid on a gay bar called ‘Stonewall’. According to Symons, the mass protest lasted for three days and it ‘also had

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<sup>15</sup> Delaney held the position as New South Wales Police Commissioner from 1952 through to 1962 (Law and Order, n.d.)

<sup>16</sup> The term ‘beat’ in Australia is often used to refer to an area frequented by gay (and sometimes heterosexual) men seeking out casual sex and a place where sexual acts occur. These locations range from public toilets, parks, car parks and some night clubs.

immediate national [U.S.A.] impact with three hundred Gay Liberation Fronts being created by the end of 1970' (2002, p. 77).<sup>17</sup> According to Duberman (1994), the word 'Stonewall', has 'become synonymous over the years with gay resistance and oppression' (p. xvii). He further adds that even today the word resonates with the 'insurgency and self-realisation' and the emergence of solidarity of gays and lesbians and the political movement that followed (Duberman, 1994, p. xvii).

According to Wotherspoon (2004), the late 1960s and early 1970s in Australia saw a 'modernising liberalising current' or sexual revolution. Marriage ideals also changed, and gays and lesbians felt the need to protest about unfair treatment. The feminist movement gained strength in the 1970s and resulted in the 'sexual revolution', in which women gained more control over their bodies and greater sexual freedom (Griffin, 1998, p. 41).

Several protest groups emerged in Australia during this period, campaigning for equal rights. The early 1970s saw the formation of the first campaign group for gays and lesbians in Australia, aptly named C.A.M.P. - Campaign Against Moral Persecution (Anemogiannis, 2004). Wotherspoon (2004) explains that C.A.M.P. was not welcomed by everyone; even certain sections of the gay and lesbian community did not want to be associated with the group, in fear of being outed. However, for some, C.A.M.P. was not radical enough in the protestation for equal rights. Some campaigners broke away and formed the 'Gay Liberation' group and the 'Australian Lesbian Movement' (Anemogiannis, 2004).

Many in the medical profession during this period considered homosexuality a disease that needed a cure. One of those was Australian psychiatrist, Dr Neil McConaghy. Willet

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<sup>17</sup> Also see Vaid (1995).

explains that ‘the struggle against the medical profession focussed in particular upon aversion therapy, the use of nausea-inducing drugs or electric shock treatment to ‘cure’ homosexuality’, and McConaghy was an active advocate of the technique (2000, p. 104). An even more radical ‘cure’ to homosexuality was proposed by neurosurgeon, Dr Harry Bailey. Bailey believed that through brain surgery, he could remove the small part of the brain that was homosexual. This operation left patients in a vegetative state, without sexual desires for either sex (Willet, 2000, p. 105). However, by the mid 1970s, members of the medical profession were beginning to alter their attitudes that homosexuality could be ‘cured’ (Willet, 2000, p. 107).

Damousi (2004) believes the turning point for Australian gay liberation occurred during the first Sydney Mardi Gras festival in 1978. Members of the gay and lesbian community were marching down Oxford Street in the Mardi Gras parade when police decided to revoke the permit to march and diverted the parade (Damousi, 2004). The police redirected the marchers into a side-street, they then cornered gays and lesbians and ‘bashed’ them (Damousi, 2004). Obviously, this incident caused outrage in the gay and lesbian community and also in wider society in Australia. The police were accused by many of ‘going too far’ (Damousi, 2004). This incident initiated the birth of a widely visible gay community, gay life and gay politics (Anemogiannis, 2004). It also coincided with the period of second wave feminism in Australia. This wave of feminism dealt with law and cultural inequalities, and the role of women in society. The following section explores the literature related to feminism in the latter twentieth century.

## **Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century**

It is pertinent to note from the outset that feminism is often misrepresented as only concerning 'women's issues'. Calas and Smircich (1996) explain that the use of 'feminist' theories as 'conceptual lenses', about women and men, will lead to a more inclusive society. In their research on feminist approaches, Calas and Smircich explore various forms of feminism, and suggest that a similarity between all forms of feminisms is that they critique 'sex' and 'gender' with 'a certain stability as analytical categories' (1996, p. 219). Various forms of feminism will be explored in the following discussion.

Bullbeck dates the beginning of women's liberation in Australia to the summer of 1969/1970 (1997, p. 22). During this summer period the first 'Women's Liberation Group' meeting was held in Sydney, and by 1971, every major town in Australia had a women's liberation group (Bullbeck, 1997, p. 22). The late 1960s and early 1970s were intense revolutionary years where many ordinary women were engaged in the excitement of change (in women's rights) (Lonsdale, 1997, p. 83).

'Liberal feminists' during this period focused on 'individual rights and equal opportunities and argued that legal and social changes would help women achieve these' (Hannan, 2007, p. 144.) Liberal feminism has been criticised by many feminists, as it focuses on the gendered inequalities in society and getting women to the same 'starting line' as men, without critiquing the oppression of women based on the power structures of patriarchy in society. This time period also saw the emergence of more radical thoughts encircling feminist theory. According to Donovan (2000), 'radical feminist theory' was developed during the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thompson (2001, p. 3) explains that radical feminism identified male domination and strongly opposed it. According to Maynard (1998), radical

feminists looked into ‘men’s social control of women through various mechanisms of patriarchy... especially violence, heterosexuality and reproduction, where men as a group are seen as responsible for maintaining women’s oppression’ (p. 253). Radical feminists propose that female oppression is the fundamental form of oppression.

Radical lesbian feminism, a form of radical feminism, also originated during this period. The ‘Radicalesbians’ group, formed in New York in the late 1960s, argued that a lesbian was the ‘natural “unconscious” feminist, who devotes her energies to other women’ (Donovan, 2000, p. 174). Adrienne Rich (1980) situates lesbianism as a form of feminism. While provocative for some, Rich suggests that women who identify as lesbians, are resisting the patriarchal culture of society, and because of this, are the ‘true’ feminists (1980). Jeffreys (2003) further describes the principles of lesbian feminism:

[W]oman-loving; separatist organisation, community and ideas; the idea that lesbianism is about choice and resistance; the idea that the person is political; a rejection of hierarchy in the form of role-playing and sadomasochism; a critique of the sexuality of male supremacy which eroticizes inequality (p. 19).

Positioning itself as an alternative to radical lesbian feminist theory is ‘queer theory’. While ‘queer’ is often used to describe and define the LGBT ‘community’ as a whole, it also represents a theoretical model that has derived out of LGBT studies.

According to Green (2007), queer theory emerged in the late 1980s, ‘at a time in Western scholarship when debates around the ontology of sexual orientation and gender had reached a tired impasse’ (p. 27). Jagose suggests that queer theory:

[F]ocuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. Institutionally, queer has been associated most prominently with lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. Whether as

transvestite performance or academic deconstruction, queer locates and exploits the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilise heterosexuality (1996, p. 3).

Essentially, queer theory represents an approach to study or research that rejects traditional definitions and categories of gender and sexuality. Queer theory includes an array of sexual identities and practices and not all of these identities and practices are non-heterosexual.

Namaste (1996 ) suggests that post-structuralism has played an important part in informing queer theory. According to Namaste (1996):

[Post-structuralism] argues that subjects are not the autonomous creators of themselves or their social worlds. Rather, subjects are embedded in a complex network of social relations. These relations in turn determine which subjects can appear where, and in what capacity. The subject is not something prior to politics or social structures, but is precisely constituted in and through socio-political arrangements (p. 195).

Symons (2004) explains that ‘lesbians and/or feminists have critiqued the politics of queer because it’s very ambiguity and fluidity can result in the valorisation of white gay men’ (p. 265).

Despite the addition of queer theory to the broader discussion of sexuality (post second-wave feminism), it was within the period of second wave (liberal, radical and radical lesbian) feminism, along with the gay and lesbian movement, that helped provide the landscape for sporting women, along with female only sporting clubs, to contest for equality. Hargreaves (1994) explains that sports feminists during this period had several ‘choices’ when participating in sport. These were:

1. Co-option into a male sphere of activity;
2. A separatist all-female strategy; or
3. A co-operative venture with men for qualitatively new models in which differences between the sexes would be unimportant (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 40).



Symons (2010) defines Hargreaves' first option as a 'liberal feminist perspective' (p. 59).

She further explains that many lesbian feminists who had been involved with sport had chosen the second option, where they were participating in women's-only teams and clubs.

According to Symons (2010):

Since the early 1980s there have been lesbian sporting leagues organised on feminist principles including: the provisions of safe, secure and supportive environments for all participants; the active encouragement of all ability levels; concentration on the enjoyable and successful accomplishments of players rather than the failures; avoidance of situations that lead to unequal relations; fostering of cooperation within the team and club; providing women with decisions-making opportunities especially concerning their participation; and promoting a shared and inclusive approach to decision making (p. 59).

The women-only club experience has been rewarding for many sporting females, as these clubs provide the potential space for a gendered 'level playing field' in relation to club governance and participation. The following sections explore the experiences for sportswomen in various stages of the twentieth century and beyond.

### **Sporting Experiences for Late Twentieth Century Lesbians**

Griffin explains that during this period (1960s, 1970s, and 1980s) in the U.S.A, the media warned that the 'mannish lesbian' was a threat to feminine heterosexuality (1998, p. 34).

Griffin (1998) states that the leaders of women's sport became 'increasingly sensitive about the growing association between lesbianism and athletic women', and that medical experts, psychologists and the media accused the athletic woman of being a 'failed heterosexual' (p. 35). Cahn adds:

It was precisely this ambiguity that also created space for women to explore unconventional gender and sexual identities. Athletically inclined lesbians in particular, found that the world of women's sport offered possibilities for self-expression and social life despite the homosexual stigma that beset women's athletics (1994, p. 185).

Sport appeared to have played a crucial role in establishing individual identities and the forming of lesbian communities in the mid to late twentieth century. Cahn concurs and observes during this period, lesbians ‘found that athletic life facilitated the individual process of coming to terms with homosexual desires as well as the collective process of forging community ties among gay women’ (1994, p. 185). Nevertheless, literature on lesbian participation in sport in Australia during this time is limited.

In sport, the passing of Title IX<sup>18</sup> in America in 1972 expanded the opportunities for girls and women in sport. However, although Title IX demanded equality, there were still unequal forces of power at work in women’s sport. Griffin writes:

The emerging cultural attitude toward women athletes was that athletic participation was great for women as long as they could provide evidence that they were not lesbians. Thus, the lesbian stigma could still be used to intimidate and control all women’s sport participation because they felt pressured to “prove” their heterosexuality and distance themselves from association with lesbians (1998, p. 44).

The situation is not so different for lesbians in contemporary society and sport. Most women in sport today are constantly reinforcing a notion of femininity on and off the court/field, and defending their position as heterosexual athletes. This is especially so in relation to the sponsorship deals available to some women athletes (Griffin, 1998).

Lesbian participation in sport during the latter years of the twentieth century in America and Europe had attracted more interest amongst researchers. Helen Lenskyj has provided a small amount of research on the climate for lesbian athletes in Australia and she explains that ‘although advances have been made by feminist and lesbian activist since the 1980s, the situation for women, especially lesbians, in mainstream sport has remained stubbornly

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<sup>18</sup> Title IX is a law passed in 1972 in the United States that requires gender equity for boys and girls and men and women in every educational program that receives federal funding. It has been seen as particularly pertinent to gender equity in female sports. Please see (Title IX, n.d.)

woman-hating and homophobic' (2003, p. 33). However, literature related to Australian lesbian athletes is limited.

In the 1990s, this homophobic rhetoric was evident in the case of Denise Annetts and the Australian Women's Cricket team in 1994. Annetts claimed that she was 'dropped' from the Australian team, purportedly because of her heterosexuality and marital status. According to Kell, Annetts lodged a case with the Anti-Discrimination Board 'on the basis that as a heterosexual, she had been excluded from the side by what she alleged was a lesbian conspiracy' (2000, p. 130). Burroughs, Seeborn and Ashburn (1995) claim that the 'media began to unfold one of the most extraordinary sequence of events in the history of women's sport' in Australia (p. 29). According to Burroughs et al.:

[T]he media's preoccupation with the issue of lesbianism exemplified the extent to which heterosexism and masculine hegemonic processes operate and influence which forms of sport and physical activity are appropriate for women (1995, p. 30).

This case received a considerable amount of media attention not only because it reinforced the pernicious notion that there is a large and 'threatening' lesbian presence in sport, but also because of the symbolic nature of the sport of cricket to Australian people.

Another case where the Australian media reported negatively towards a lesbian athlete was that of Amelie Mauresmo at the 1998 Australian Open Tennis Championships. Although Mauresmo openly declared that she was a lesbian, Kell claims that the media's 'problem' was that she did not conform to the required image of a female athlete (2000, p. 130). Due to Mauresmo's athletic build, the media posed some outrageous questions. 'Did she take performance-enhancing drugs? Was she or wasn't she a "woman"? What advantage did this give her over her opponents?' (Kell, 2000, p. 130). Again, this case demonstrates that the

environment of sports reporting and media coverage for women and especially lesbians in Australia, has been defiantly homophobic and to an extent, misogynistic.

This discourse concerning lesbian athletes in Australia has changed to an extent since the 1990s. Successful women's tennis player, Rennae Stubbs self identified as a lesbian publicly in the Australian press in 2006 to minimal criticism (Pearce, 2006). In addition, Olympic Gold Medal winning Beach Volleyball player, Natalie Cook, married her female partner in late 2008, in a ceremony believed to be sold to women's magazine, *New Idea* with little to no negative exposure ('Gold Medalist Natalie Cook', 2008). In fact, the small amount of media exposure that Cook received about her marriage was decidedly positive. While the lack of attention could represent a 'shift' in homophobic attitudes towards female athletes as reported in the media in Australia, both of these stories received little coverage in the press. This minimal exposure may also account for the lack of interest and possible scrutiny of both of these athletes.

### **Gender, Sexuality and Sport in the Twenty-First Century**

Historically, sport has been contentious in regard to both gender and sexuality. The dichotomy of the genders is perhaps nowhere more evident than in this arena. Female athletes are expected to portray a certain degree of 'femininity', and male athletes, 'masculinity'. However, as mentioned previously, the dichotomy is hierarchical, with masculinity as displayed by heterosexual males privileged above other masculinities and femininities and considered as the 'norm' in sport. Stedman's research, for instance, suggests that the masculinisation of surfing has been made to appear 'natural' through the design of surfboards. Stedman further suggests that the technological advancements in surfboards have benefited male bodies (1997, p. 82). Therefore, according to Stedman, the cultural 'exclusion

of women has been a necessary concomitant of the masculinisation process in surfing' (1997, p. 82). To be an athlete is to be defined as masculine. According to that definition, it is both hard to contemplate, and threatening for, a woman to be described as an athlete.

Messner states that, 'having women as strong and powerful, challenges that dichotomy of the cultural norm we live today' (2002). Athletic and masculine females are not celebrated in the same ways that male athletes are. In fact, according to Hardin and Greer (2009), a recent survey of over 300 college students in the United States has revealed that students associated most sports with masculinity (and not femininity). In her book, *Sporting Females*, Hargreaves (1994) suggested that 'female muscularity is overlaid by techniques of sexualisation, falsifying the notion of fitness, and trivialising female sports' (pp. 161-162). While time has awarded incremental changes in this discourse, a certain amount of anxiety about sporting females still remains. As a result of cultural anxiety about strong women in western societies, in most situations many males generally feel more comfortable seeing women in hyper-feminised roles.

Traditional femininity means looking like a 'real' woman. According to Lippa (2002), stereotypical femininity consists of 'emotional sensitivity, artistic sensibility, a focus on manners, a tendency to timidity and non-aggressiveness, a nurturant, attached orientation to others and sexual attraction to men' (p. 34). Connell adds that one form of femininity is defined around conformity of subordination and 'is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men' (1987, p. 183). This 'emphasised femininity' means that many women athletes project an image of attractive 'emphasised' heterosexual femininity to fit in with this cultural norm. Women athletes are portrayed in the media more off the field than on it, and the portrayals off the field mainly focus on the athlete's physical attractiveness. The images

of athletic and strong women are less regularly included in the media as they challenge the cultural norm of femininity.

The cultural norm of femininity in sport is evident in Lenskyj's (1998) study of the Australian sporting magazine, *Inside Sport*. According to Lenskyj, '[t]he articles on women tended to treat their subjects in a stereotyped or sexualised manner' (1998, p. 29). An example of this was an article on surfer, Lisa Anderson, where six photos accompanied the article of Anderson. Of the six photos of Anderson, 'two showed her in action (surfing), in two she was holding her baby, one was Anderson and the men's (surfing) champion, and the last one showed her lying on the sand' (Lenskyj, 1998, p. 29). This sports reporting demonstrates that sportswomen who fit in with the ideal (or emphasised) level of appropriate femininity and heterosexuality are those who will receive some of the limited media coverage available to women's sports.

Hyper-feminised images of women are one way that the media sexualises women athletes. This sexualisation reinforces the process of hegemonic masculinity in sports, and the sports media. It is important to explain however, that the media is not solely responsible for this exploitation. Women athletes themselves accept this cultural discourse and their feminine roles within it, in order to receive endorsements and media coverage. Duncan argues that '[w]omen in contemporary western culture are socialised to regard themselves through the (masculine) eyes of others', and this consent to femininity also occurs with athletes (1995, p. 268).

The recent ‘coming out’ stories of high profile female international athletes such as Amelie Mauresmo, Rosie Jones and Sheryl Swoopes have been a good ‘yard stick’ for where the culture of women’s sport sits in the twenty first century.<sup>19</sup> Martina Navratilova, arguably one of the greatest ever women’s tennis players, ‘came out’ as a lesbian around 25 years ago. The decision to ‘come out’ lost her millions of dollars in sponsorships, endorsements and royalties over those years. Although, according to Hargreaves, Martina Navratilova has been an inspiration to many other lesbian athletes and in a sense has transformed ‘victimisation into triumph’ (2000, p. 147).

Golfer, Rosie Jones and basketball player, Sheryl Swoopes have been more fortunate. In fact, according to media reporting on the stories at the time, both Jones and Swoopes added sponsors/endorsements after publicly revealing their sexual orientation (Kort, 2004; Rovell, 2005). One might be led to believe that the climate for lesbians in sport has improved considerably in recent times. However, it may be the case that perhaps heterosexism and homophobia now exist in a more covert form than before. Many different considerations affect the attitudes towards lesbian athletes and the environment in which lesbian athletes participate in sport. The next section examines these factors within the framework of Pat Griffin’s (1998) research on and conceptualisation of sporting climates for women in sport.

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<sup>19</sup> Amelie Mauresmo retired in 2009 from a successful tennis career. Over her career, she won two grand slam singles titles along with countless WTA (Women’s Tennis Association) titles. Mauresmo was the first French woman to be ranked No. 1 in the world rankings. Rosie Jones is a recently retired golf professional on the Ladies Professional Golf Association Tour (LPGA). She has had thirteen career victories on the LPGA and is within the top 10 for the money winners in the history of the LPGA and came out publicly as a lesbian in 2004. Sheryl Swoopes is a basketball player who plays in the Women National Basketball Association (WNBA) competition for the Houston Comets. She is the only player to have won the competition’s most valuable player (MVP) on three occasions and Swoopes came out as a lesbian in 2005.

### Griffin's Three Climate Continuum

Griffin has undertaken numerous studies on the lesbian experience in sport in the United States.<sup>20</sup> In her book, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport*, Griffin developed a set of useful categories, which she calls 'climates,' to classify different social environments that lesbian athletes, coaches and managers may operate in and experience in sport (1998).<sup>21</sup> The three climates for lesbians in sport that Griffin describes are a 'Hostile' climate, 'Conditionally Tolerant' climate, and an 'Open and Inclusive' climate (Griffin, 1998, p. 92). These climates refer to the experiences of the participants in sport, as well as the informal social norms surrounding sport. According to Symons and Hemphill, Griffin's climates are not set in concrete, rather 'all the elements of a particular climate may not be present and elements of one climate may exist with some elements of the next climate, within any one sporting organisation' (2005, p. 20). Therefore, it is important to note that these climates do not rigidly define sporting cultures, as these climates can 'overlap'.

Griffin labels a typically hostile environment in sport as one where lesbians are the problem. In a hostile climate, lesbian athletes and coaches have to be extremely careful not to reveal their sexual orientation. Revelation can have adverse effects. These might include; the female athlete being completely alienated from a team, disenfranchised from a sporting club, losing (and not being able to attain) sponsorship deals and under some circumstances, losing

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<sup>20</sup> See Griffin (1992a); Griffin (1992b); Griffin (1994); Griffin (1996); Griffin (1997); and Griffin (1998).

<sup>21</sup> It is important to recognise that Griffin's work has been completed in the United States and while most challenges are contextually relevant to sportswomen everywhere, the college sporting system in the U.S. varies greatly to that in Australia. NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) sport in the U.S. is semi-professional compared to University sport in Australia (which is non-professional). NCAA sport consists of a wide range of sports, where individuals and teams are involved in competition on a weekly basis. The NCAA has media rights deals with CBS and ESPN that are worth billions of dollars for specific sports, and colleges in the U.S. are able to offer athletes full scholarships to lure them on the basis of their sporting prowess. In Australia, a national 'University Games' is held once a year, and an Eastern, Southern and Northern University games are simultaneously held once a year also, but serious sporting competition is often secondary to the social side of University life. This constitutes the cross-university sporting competitions in Australia. Australia does however, have an 'Australian Institute of Sport' (AIS), where scholarships are offered to athletes to train and compete with the AIS, however funding for the institute is through the Australian government, not through media corporations.



her career. According to Griffin (1998), it is even dangerous to be suspected of being a lesbian in this environment (p. 94). When applied to gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB<sup>22</sup>) athletes, Symons and Hemphill (2005) have adapted Griffin's climates to explain that this climate would mean that GLB sports participants (and those assumed to be GLB) 'are avoided, isolated or harassed by team-mates and coaches'; and that 'GLB sports participants or workers would never bring a same-sex date or partner to team/club social events' (p. 20). This definition of a hostile climate confirms that homophobia and heterosexism are two important forms of discrimination that apply to both lesbian and heterosexual women.

In a conditionally tolerant climate, Griffin observes that 'lesbian visibility is the problem' (1998, p. 99). In a sporting team or sporting club environment that is described as conditionally tolerant, lesbians must abide by a certain set of 'rules'. These 'rules' mean that lesbian athletes, coaches, sports administrators, etc. can be involved in sport provided that they conceal their sexual orientation (Griffin, 1998, p. 100).<sup>23</sup> According to Griffin:

Women coaches and athletes construct elaborate charades that enable everyone to act as if there are no lesbians present or to maintain that lesbians in sport are a "non-issue". This collaborative denial maintains a delicate balance that allows heterosexuals not to confront their prejudices and enables lesbians to participate in sport as long as they are willing to keep their identities "secret" (1998, p. 100).

This climate of conditional tolerance allows the protection of lesbians from discrimination, but also a protection of heterosexuals from confronting 'out' lesbians in sport.

There are a number of reasons as to why lesbians involved in sport in a conditionally tolerant environment are cautious about explicitly expressing their sexual orientation. Symons and

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<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that the term GLB is not inclusive of all differences, in particular, ethnicity, class, disability, socio-economic status, etc., are all intersections that must be acknowledged.

<sup>23</sup> Also see Krane (2001). Krane explains that 'many women in sport, and lesbians in particular, feel compelled to perform heterosexual femininity because being identified or labeled as lesbian in women's sports results in prejudice and discrimination' (p.121).

Hemphill (2005) provide an overview of Griffin's climates, adapted for the Australian context. They suggest that it may be the case that GLB coaches, athletes and workers in sport 'who become too visible in the community or in sport are told to be more discreet and to avoid association with other GLB people or GLB related events' (p. 20). Other reasons can include exclusion from a team, loss of scholarship or sponsorship and for a coach or sporting administrator, even loss of employment.

The third climate that Griffin (1998) describes is an open and inclusive environment where homophobia and heterosexism, not GLB athletes, are recognised as the problems in sport (p. 103). According to Griffin, a sporting environment that is described as open and inclusive relies heavily on individual coaches, managers or sports administrators who are morally opposed to discrimination against lesbians (1998, p. 103). Symons and Hemphill (2005) suggest that to achieve such a climate, GLB participants are welcome to take same-sex partners to social events, and 'GLB coaches, workers and sports participants are as publicly 'out' as they choose to be' (Symons & Hemphill, 2005, p. 20). However, an open and inclusive climate can only emerge if there are influential, respected team-mates who are verbally and outwardly opposed to homophobic discrimination.

Griffin details a correlation between 'open and inclusive' environments in regards to sexual orientation and a successful team performance (1998, p. 104). This observation is supported by a lesbian athletic director at an American College interviewed by Griffin as part of her research:

She [Helen Carroll] believes that when team-mates learn to respect and accept each other, these relationships are reflected in how the team works together in competition. Every year at Mills [College], each team chooses a topic and organises a dialogue about that topics for all of the other teams and coaches. These dialogues occur throughout the school year, led by teams

in their off-season. Homophobia is one of the most requested topics, along with racism, media images of women in sport, and eating disorders among women athletes. Her goal is to make the athletic climate more open and accepting (1998, p. 104).

The upshot of creating an open and inclusive climate to address homophobia for Helen Carroll is that it helps teams to perform better (Griffin, 1998, p. 104).

On most occasions in women's sports (particularly elite level women's sport) an open and inclusive environment (although seemingly attainable) is an idealistic notion. Griffin notes that most athletic climates for lesbians in United States sport are either hostile or conditionally tolerant. Not surprisingly, the level of media attention surrounding a team reflects the climate that is present at a sporting club. The more media attention a women's team or sport receives, the less likely the climate is to be open and inclusive as coaches and athletes try to "protect" their image and maintain public approval (Griffin, 1998, p. 106).

Dr Dorothy Riddle, a psychologist from the U.S.A, devised a model of homophobic attitudes (in the 1980s) - four negative homophobic levels and four positive levels of attitudes towards lesbian and gay relationships and people (1985).<sup>24</sup> The purpose of such a model was to expose attitudes, beliefs, and practices that confined many lesbians and gay men during this period. Many aspects of Riddle's model are still relevant for lesbians and gays today. Riddle's four negative and four positive homophobic levels of attitude are demonstrated below (Table 1):

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<sup>24</sup> Riddle's scale is not sport specific, yet is relevant to all social environments and it is similar to Griffin's climates. However, unlike Griffin's climates, Riddle's scale is linear and does not allow for multiple perspectives to be held at once for one environment. Riddle's (1985) 'Homophobia Scale' can be found in Obear & Reynolds (Eds.) *Opening Doors to Understanding and Acceptance*.

**Table 1 - Negative Levels of Attitudes**

1. Repulsion: Homosexuality is seen as a "crime against nature". Gay/lesbians are sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, wicked, etc. Anything is justified to change them: prison, hospitalization, negative behaviour therapy, electroshock therapy, etc.
2. Pity: Heterosexual chauvinism. Heterosexuality is more mature and certainly to be preferred. Any possibility of "becoming straight" should be reinforced, and those who seem to be born "that way" should be pitied, ("the poor dears").
3. Tolerance: Homosexuality is just a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most people "grow out of". Thus, lesbians/gays are less mature than "straights" and should be treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with a child. Lesbians/gays should not be given positions of authority because they are still working through their adolescent behaviour.
4. Acceptance: Still implies there is something to accept. Characterized by such statements as "You are not a lesbian to me, you are a person!" or "What you do in bed is your own business," or "That's fine with me as long as you don't flaunt it!" (Riddle, 1985).

Riddle also noted that most government policies and public attitudes aligned best somewhere in between the third ('Tolerance') and fourth ('Acceptance') 'homophobic level of attitude' – where homophobia was still present.

Riddle's (1985) four positive levels of attitudes are outlined below in Table 2:

**Table 2 - Positive Levels Of Attitudes**

1. Support: The basic ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] position. Work to safeguard the rights of lesbians and gays. People at this level may be uncomfortable themselves, but they are aware of the homophobic climate and the irrational unfairness.
2. Admiration: Acknowledges that being lesbian/gay in our society takes strength. People at this level are willing to truly examine their homophobic attitudes, values, and behaviors.
3. Appreciation: Value the diversity of people and see lesbian/gays as a valid part of that diversity. These people are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and others.
4. Nurturance: Assumes that gay/lesbian people are indispensable in our society. They view lesbians/gays with genuine affection and delight, and are willing to be allies and advocates (Riddle, 1985).

While Riddle's scale does not specifically focus on sport, it is useful for understanding the intricate levels of homophobia within mainstream society. Reflecting on Riddle's scale, a possible fourth climate for lesbians in sport could be added to Griffin's continuum, an 'affirming' climate, as an extension of open and inclusive. In such a climate, the athlete would not only feel like they are free to express their individual sexual identity, they would in fact be actively encouraged to do so. The individual coaches, managers or sports administrators who are morally opposed to discrimination against lesbians in sport would then be supported by institutional practices and policies. An open and inclusive, even affirming, environment is present in LGBT sport, particularly in events such as the Gay

Games and the Outgames, which are events that are created for and by LGBT people.<sup>25</sup> The structural relations of power in mainstream sport may be the most significant barrier to the existence of an affirming climate for lesbians in mainstream sport. This notion is explored below.

### **Structural Relations of Power in Sport**

This research sits between a liberal and critical feminist perspective insofar as the issue of inclusiveness and the problem of heterosexism and homophobia are located in structural relations of power. Connell (1987) describes power as a social structure, and McKay (1997) defines power as a ‘control of most sites of organised coercion and surveillance in society (e.g., the police, military, judiciary)’ (p. 16). As McKay suggests, power is often maintained through institutions such as the courts, military or police and this maintenance is often carried out through violence. Connell explains that those who are affected by violence and subordination in society are usually women and gay men (1987, pp. 12-13). Hegemonic power also involves cultural processes that ‘persuades both men and women that the ascendancy of (heterosexual) men’s values, interests and privileges is both natural and legitimate’ (McKay 1997). In fact, ascendancy achieved purely through violence is not hegemony. This ascendant masculinity is continually expressed and reinforced through religion, the mass media, gendered labor relations and wage structures, government social policy and for the purposes of this thesis, preeminently enacted and celebrated in sport (Connell, 1987, p. 184). Hence, this ideological power reproduces the naturalization of and consent to the dominant gender order, in which women are subordinated and gay men and lesbians are stigmatized. Furthermore, hegemonic power can also undermine the ability or attempts by subordinate groups such as women and homosexuals to marshal power to subvert

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<sup>25</sup> The Gay Games and Outgames are explored further later in this chapter.

or transgress dominant modes of gender and sexuality. In a sporting context, the cultural power of hegemonic masculinity is enacted within the foundation of sport as well as in the media and economics.

Gender is often a central theme when sport and power are discussed. Sport has long been associated with strength and toughness. In the late 1970s, Jane English proposed that our concept of sport contains a 'masculine bias'. English suggested that if women had historically been the dominant sex, sport may have evolved differently over history. Traits such as flexibility, balance and timing may have been traditionally valued over speed, strength and toughness (English, 1978). Speed, strength and toughness are traditionally associated with masculinity, and therefore by definition, these characteristics form the basis of a process whereby sport can exclude women.

Often the messages that women receive in sport are conflicting. For example, Markula (1995) explains that women received messages that they should be 'firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin' (p.1). According to Coakley, Hallinan, Jackson and Mewett (2009), these cultural messages are confusing and conflicting:

Although they [girls and women] see images of powerful female competitors, they cannot escape the images of fashion models whose bodies are shaped by food deprivation and multiple cosmetic surgeries. Girls and women also hear that physical power and competence are important, but they see disproportionate rewards going to women who look young, vulnerable and non-sporting. They are advised to 'get strong but lose weight'. They learn that muscles are good, but too many muscles are unfeminine. They are told that sporting women are attractive, but they see men attracted to professional cheerleaders and celebrity models with breast implants and airbrushed publicity photos (p. 252).

Markula (1995) and Coakley et al. (2009) reveal a culture that is hard to comprehend for many young women embarking on a career in sport. As in other facets of society, gender in

sport is constructed around dominant ideologies, and remains informed and enforced by power structures. Linked to gender, sexuality is another factor that affects the power dimensions in sport. Women who identify as, are accused of being or 'appear' to be lesbian are further subjugated in sport.<sup>26</sup>

Numerous studies have investigated the various forms of overt and covert power that exist in the practice, management and media coverage of sport, particularly hegemonic masculinity (Messner, Duncan & Cook, 2003; Phillips, 1997; Rowe, 2004). Since the discourse of hegemonic masculinity thrives in elite sport, it is easy to assume that similar power relations are also played out at the local club level of sport.

According to Pringle, to view sport through a hegemonic lens is to see that 'some sportsmen enjoy a greater ability to exercise power than others and that sporting practices contribute to inequitable power relations between males and females' (2005, p. 63). Young and White suggest that hegemonic masculinity is an ideological construct, and that many men 'do not conform to the blueprint of hegemonic masculinity' (2000, p. 111). Similarly, Connell (1995) suggested that:

The number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men benefit from its hegemony, because they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women (p. 79).

Therefore, while not all males in sport practice hegemonic masculinity, most males benefit from the very real practice and culture of hegemonic masculinity.

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<sup>26</sup> This position is explored further later in this Chapter.



Young and White (2000) propose that hegemonic masculinity has resulted in gender domination in various social arenas. They explain that:

Patriarchal dividends are visible in men's domination of the workplace, the media, and the state, men's control over the practices of violence, men's enjoyment of privileges of wealth and income, and a gender ideology that normalizes the objectification and marginalization of women in general (Young & White, 2000, p. 112).

Hegemonic masculinity has the effect of denying women opportunities, freedom and privilege that most men readily benefit from.

While hegemonic masculinity affects heterosexual women, this disadvantage is further magnified in the case of lesbians and lesbian athletes. In a sense, lesbians lie outside mainstream categories - they are not heterosexual, therefore not considered 'real' women, and due to obvious anatomical differences, cannot be male. This 'disadvantage' effects the power that women hold in sport. According to Fusco (1998), 'lesbians lack economic power in sports...' (p. 92). As an example of this, she further explains that in 'professional women's athletics, corporate sponsors often threaten to withdraw financial support from sports events and conferences if there is any acknowledgment of lesbians' (Fusco, 1998, p. 92). Therefore, on the most part, lesbian athletes remain silent and silenced.

Additionally, some heterosexual men and women, as well as gay men, also face this disadvantage by not adhering to the characteristics of a traditional form of femininity and masculinity respectively. While much of this hegemonic power is maintained covertly, it still underlies the discourse of big-business sport. This discourse is also evident in local level sport which can be seen as the crucial level to either reinforce the already strong notions of hegemonic masculinity or dissolve such a discourse. Female involvement in 'gender inappropriate' (or 'men's') sports at a recreational level usually 'translates' as lesbian

involvement in sport. Until this generalisation is extinguished, the current discourse will remain. The next section will examine this common misconception concerning women's involvement with sport.

### **The Discourse of Sport - Female Athlete: She must be a lesbian!**

Because the muscularity and power invested in female sporting bodies inverts the myth of gender by rendering women apparently less 'feminine' and more 'masculine', sportswomen have feared being labeled as lesbians (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 135).

For the most part, sporting males do not face the same issues as females do in regard to sexuality. Females in sport are often 'guilty' of lesbianism before proven 'innocent', whereas sporting males are 'innocent' of any link to homosexuality, unless 'proven' otherwise.

Lenskyj suggests that sporting women challenge 'traditional race and class-based definitions of sex appropriate behaviour that label independence and achievement orientation as male attributes: hence they cannot be real women, so the argument goes' (2001, p. 62). Most women in positions of power or in sport, regardless of sexuality, have faced homophobia or some form of homophobic discrimination, as these women challenge the 'normal' idea of male dominance in all forms of society. Connell (1987) identifies this intersection between sexuality and power as 'cathexis'. A further explanation of cathexis is contained in Chapter Three, as it forms part of the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis.

In their study on lesbian physical education teachers, Squires and Sparkes (1996) explained that the association of being a sport and physical education teacher meant that many were subject to the lesbian label. As a consequence of this stigma, many lesbian physical education teachers are constantly 'on guard' with conversations surrounding personal issues

or social situations with work colleagues and have remained 'silent' and 'invisible' in these situations. Squires and Sparkes (1996) explain:

The staff room and other supposed back regions such as staff socials, and informal gatherings in the pub are certainly not places where the participants in our study could relax, repair their sense of identity, and disclose aspects of their self. Indeed, in these 'back' regions for others, the lesbian physical educators perceived themselves as being in another 'front' situation where they had to be 'on guard' and continually deny their sense of self and identity in ways that caused emotional stress... (p. 79).

However distressing it is for some lesbians to be evasive or even lie about their sexuality, the lesbian label is even more distressing for these women.

Hargreaves proposes that a deep-seated fear of homosexuality is a key reason why women are often labeled as lesbians (2000, p. 137). This is the same stigma that is attached to women who play sport; 'she is a lesbian'. According to Hargreaves (2000):

The practice of labeling sportswomen – especially those playing team sports – as mannish, butch, dykes, lesbians, freaks or sickos, is a popular way of conjuring up the idea that lesbians colonise sport, and of deriding and pathologising them. The abuse is insidious. It puts pressure on heterosexual women to disclaim such labels and send out heterosexual signals. Lesbians are therefore trapped in a mythical culture of heterosexuality where the assumption is made that everyone is 'straight' or 'normal' unless explicitly stated otherwise. So, although sexuality for most people is intensely personal, lesbians are forced either to 'make a statement' about sexual preference or to assume a heterosexual identity (p. 135).

Studies by Cox and Thompson (2001) in New Zealand, Caudwell (1999), and Shire et al. (2000) in the United Kingdom found similar results. That is, the assumption that women who play sport are lesbians can lead both lesbian and heterosexual sportswomen to alter their behaviour. Shire et al. suggest that these 'coping strategies' by lesbians included 'adopting overtly feminine features, making fun of lesbian athletes and criticising homosexuals' (2000,

p. 36). In many cases, to fit into team environments in sport means to conceal lesbian identity, and at times impersonate heterosexuals.

In her research on rugby, cricket and netball players, Russell (2006) observes that sportswomen are ‘all too aware of the existence of the lesbian label within their own and other sports’ (p. 108). She further explains that the lesbian stigma in sport is a difficult issue to work through for female athletes. Female athletes in Russell’s study, ‘wanted to play any sport they chose but were aware that by doing so they would attract certain sexual associations’ (2006, p. 108). According to Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier and Mitchell (2010), this lesbian stigma creates negative implications for the sportswoman. Firstly, the sportswoman’s attractiveness, femininity and character are questioned. Secondly, the lesbian label affects the types of sports that women associate with and participate in, in fear of being labeled a lesbian (Symons et al., 2010, p. 41).

Sartore and Cunningham (2009) found similar challenges for women athletes in their research. They propose that the lesbian label exists within sport as a way to challenge women’s ‘status, power, influence, and experiences’ (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009, p. 289). In her research on an Australian Rules Women’s Football team, Hillier (2005) also discussed this stigma. Hillier proposes that ‘the “lesbians in sport” discourse remains a strong deterrent to women playing certain sports, particularly full-contact sports, and playing a sport “too well”’ (2005, p. 53). Therefore the lesbian label, along with women policing their appearance and playing ability, maintains hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic power over women’s sport.

Not surprisingly, the particular sport that a lesbian athlete participates in can play a major role in the formation of identity, and whether a lesbian is publicly 'out'. The notion of 'gender appropriate' and 'gender inappropriate' sports has long been a contentious issue for females in sport. 'Masculine sports' or so called 'men's sports' that emphasise strength and power, such as rugby, boxing, and football, (or those which are 'traditionally' male, such as cricket) are generally considered inappropriate sports for females. Conversely, 'traditionally' feminine sports that emphasise grace and beauty, such as dance sports, gymnastics and even netball have long been considered inappropriate for males. Burroughs et al. point out the assumed consequence for a female athlete participating in a sport that is presumed to be male in Australia - 'women who participate in traditionally male dominated sports, such as cricket and various football codes, are labeled, without question, as lesbian' (1995, p. 28). This type of labeling acts as a deterrent from participating in certain sports for some women, and therefore, the lack of opportunities to form meaningful relationships between team-mates.

The relationships between team members are an important consideration in this research as these relationships help to shape the identity of athletes, and the overall experience of the women athletes (particularly lesbian athletes). Shire et al. (2000) found that there was an enormous difference in the team environment in women's field hockey in the United Kingdom between a predominantly lesbian team compared to that of a predominantly heterosexual team. When the majority of players at the club were heterosexual, the lesbians in the team tended to remain silent about their sexual orientation. However, when the team shifted to having a majority of players identifying as lesbian, the culture of the team changed and lesbians enjoyed a safe environment in which to participate (Shire et al., 2000).

The first major qualitative and quantitative study on the sports experiences of LGBT Australians, 'Come Out to Play' (Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier, and Mitchell, 2010) revealed a similar story for mainstream sporting clubs.<sup>27</sup> Symons et al. (2010) found that nearly half (46%) of the survey participants that were involved in mainstream sport had not come out as LGBT to anyone (p. 10). A further 33% were 'out' as LGBT to some club members and around a fifth (21%) of those involved in a mainstream club were out to all in their club. Symons et al. (2010) explains why such a large number of participants in mainstream sport had not come out:

Many male and female participants involved in mainstream sport were confronted by a hostile sporting environment which forced them to keep their sexuality hidden. They perceived their sporting environment was not safe to come out as LGBT due to possible abuse, threats, exclusion and even violence, especially for males (p. 47).

Around 55% of females in the research had experienced verbal homophobia and 54.6% had experienced sexism (Symons et al., 2010, pp. 50 & 53). The Come Out to Play research also revealed that there were few males out in mainstream sports, and gay males in team sports experienced the most hostile environments (Symons et al., 2010). Only around 16% of participants from the research were predominantly involved with 'queer identified clubs' (Symons et al., 2010, p. 37).

In their research into gay and lesbian sporting clubs in the Netherlands, Elling, De Knop and Knoppers (2003) discovered that 'an increasing number of lesbians and gay men choose to participate in lesbian/gay sporting clubs [instead of predominantly heterosexual teams]' (p. 442). Elling et al. (2003) focused their research on gay and lesbian volleyball players in Amsterdam, some from a mainstream club and others from a gay and lesbian club. The

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<sup>27</sup> 'Queer' or 'LGBT' sporting clubs are those that identify as LGBT participant based, and 'mainstream' sporting clubs are defined as those that have a predominate amount of heterosexually identified players, and are not active within the LGBT community.

researchers found that although homophobic discrimination did occur, ‘decisions [for gay or lesbian athletes] to join a categorical gay sport club are not solely motivated by negative experiences’ (Elling et al., 2003, p. 446). According to Elling et al. (2003), ‘[t]he most important reasons for joining a gay/lesbian sport club were that the respondents felt more at ease there and that it was easier to make contacts with people from their ‘own’ group’ (p. 446). Conversely, both gay/lesbian and heterosexual volleyball players had joined the gay and lesbian volleyball club and ‘[h]aving friends at the gay club and the specific atmosphere’ were the predominant motives for joining the club (Elling et al., 2003, p. 446). The sexuality of the participants at the gay and lesbian volleyball club was still a relevant factor, however, the space was described as open and inclusive of all.

The Netherlands is a pioneer in granting the equal rights for same-sex relationships, which reflects considerable tolerance within their society. While Elling et al. (2003) partly attribute the ‘acceptance of queer spaces and culture’ in the Netherlands to the Amsterdam Gay Games held in 1998,<sup>28</sup> the legal recognition of same-sex marriage and tolerance within their society cannot be underestimated. The findings of Elling et al.’s (2003) research can probably be attributed to the several social processes of the sub-cultures they studied. These social processes include the common issues and problems that are shared by all lesbian participants, the formation of a sense of ‘community’, and to be involved in an environment where one is safe to explore their own individual identity and a place where that identity is affirmed.

### **The Formation of Lesbian Identities in Sport**

Sykes (1996) acknowledges that sexual identity is not fixed, and her research addresses the problems with identity and politics in sport. Sykes calls for ‘a shift in research focus away

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<sup>28</sup> For an explanation and further information on the International Gay Games, please see the discussion on the Gay Games later in this chapter.

from individual lesbian identity toward how institutional discourses constrict and construct lesbian identities' in physical education (1996, p. 459). One such institutional discourse that can have a major influence on a female athlete coming out is the very definition of sport itself. As discussed earlier, many sports are largely, possibly exclusively, masculine and competitive, and serve 'important social functions in supporting conventional social values' (Griffin, 1998, p. 16). According to Coakley et al., on the most part 'sport is male dominated, male identified and male centred' (2009, p. 256). As many sports are often identified as masculine and the territory of males, females are often intruders in this space. Therefore, the largely male hegemonic discourse of contemporary sport shapes the identity formation of a lesbian woman.

Caudwell's research on gender in women's football in the United Kingdom showed that 'playing football, (an activity constructed as male) affects a player's subjectivity, in particular, their gender identity' (1999, p. 400). According to Caudwell, the 'butch lesbian' identity used to describe many of the football players was a worry to the participants (1999, p. 390). As mentioned earlier, many women who play traditionally gender inappropriate sports are automatically considered to be lesbian or some form of sexual 'deviant', thus putting constraints on women's decisions and freedom in sport (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). Hargreaves points out that there is 'huge pressure on lesbian women to conform to heterosexual norms and pass as a heterosexual' (2000, p. 141). The psychological effects of concealing one's identity can be distressing for the individual, a process that Hargreaves explains as 'apologetic behavior', 'resulting in the domination of one sexuality over another' (2000, p. 141). Therefore, many lesbian athletes prefer to conceal their identity in sport.



Many lesbians have to make, often daily, decisions to reveal or conceal their identities, both inside and outside of sport. Griffin proposes a continuum of identity management strategies for both lesbian athletes and coaches, which is illustrated in the following table (Table 3) (1998, p. 135). Griffin labels this continuum ‘Lesbian Coaches Identity-Management Strategies’ (Table 3) and she suggests it can be applied to lesbian athletes as well. While Griffin’s research has been carried out in a United States setting of sport, it is not unreasonable to assume that similar situations and discourses exist in Australian sport.

**Table 3 – Lesbian Coaches’ (and athletes) Identity Management Strategies**

Completely Closeted	Concealing lesbian identity from all in athletic context.
Passing as heterosexual	Intentionally leading selected others in athletic context to see self as heterosexual.
Covering lesbian identity	Concealing lesbian identity from selected others in athletic context.
Implicitly out	Allowing selected others in athletic context to see self as lesbian without naming self.
Explicitly out	Intentionally revealing lesbian identity to selected others in athletic context.
Publicly out	Revealing lesbian identity to everyone in athletic context (Griffin, 1998, p. 135).

Most lesbian athletes do not fit exclusively into one category or one end of the continuum. Many would adopt behaviours that vary according to the situation and stage of life. In particular, younger women in their late teens and early 20s may not be in the same category as older women in their 50s and 60s. However, this continuum is useful, for it provides a framework for understanding different phases of lesbian identity in sport.

While considering elite athletes like Basketballer Cheryl Swoopes, Tennis player Amelie Mauresmo and Golfer Rosie Jones, who would be positioned at the far end of the continuum as publicly ‘out’ to all in an athletic context, it is difficult to imagine lesbian athletes participating in a ‘completely closeted’ environment. Griffin (1998) suggests that most lesbians involved in sport use strategies between the two extremes (‘publicly out’ and ‘completely closeted’) of the continuum, depending on the specific situation (p. 137). While it is easy to assume that many lesbian athletes feel pressure to remain ‘completely closeted’ in certain sporting environments in Australia, it is difficult to make specific conclusions with the limited literature available.

Reimer (1997) proposes a ‘lesbian identity formation’ model based on Costos’ (1990) model of gender identity. While other academics have developed similar models of gay and lesbian identity formation which emphasise a psychologically healthy being, most ignore the differences in gender roles for males and females, and often these models are also based on the chronological age of individuals, which in many situations is irrelevant.<sup>29</sup> This irrelevance can be explained by some lesbians ‘coming out’ early in life, while others later in life.<sup>30</sup> Reimer’s proposed model of lesbian identity formation is illustrated below (Table 4).

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<sup>29</sup> For information on early proposed gay and lesbian identity formation models, see Cass (1979); Minton. & McDonald (1983/4); and Taylor & Dube (1985).

<sup>30</sup> Hillier, Jones, Monagle, Overton, Gahan, Blackman and Mitchell’s (2010) research on same-sex attracted youth in Australia revealed that many teenage girls explore feelings, attractions and relationships with both females and males and that more same-sex attracted young women identify as bisexual (42%), rather than lesbian (39%).

**Table 4 – Lesbian Identity Formation – A Proposed Model** (Reimer, 1997, p. 86).

<u>LEVEL</u>	<u>STAGE</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1	1	<b>Pre-Conformist</b>	Individual understands female as defined by societal norms.
	2		Female may believe she is different from others.
2	1	<b>Conformist</b>	Female lives as a heterosexual. Female understands society's stereotypes about lesbians.
			Female may think she is a lesbian, but does not act on her awareness.
3	1	<b>Post-Conformist</b>	Female realises stereotypes about lesbians may be false.
			Female forms her own set of beliefs about lesbians.
4	1	<b>Lesbian Conformist</b>	Female comes to a personal realisation that she is a lesbian.
			Female comes out to herself.
5	1	<b>Lesbian Post-Conformist</b>	Female comes out to others.
			Female conforms to the lesbian community's definition of lesbianism.
6	1	<b>Lesbian Post-Conformist</b>	Female acknowledges norms and values of the lesbian community.
			Female begins to question norms and her need for approval from the lesbian community.
7	1	<b>Lesbian Post-Conformist</b>	Female acknowledges community and may be active, but no longer feels the need to conform.
			Female has established her identity.

Reimer suggests that for a lesbian to achieve a positive (post conformist) lesbian identity:

She must work through the dominant societal beliefs about lesbians, she must receive positive social support and role models during her years of identity formation. The sporting environment may be one location where lesbians can interact positively with each other. However, not all environments are supportive of lesbians (1997. p. 87).

In Reimer's (1997) study on the identity formation of lesbians in recreational level softball in the United States, she claims that as a result of the support from fellow softball players, many lesbians involved in the study were able to come out to others and enter the lesbian community. Reimer promotes the idea that for some lesbian athletes, sport can provide an affirming environment where lesbians are able to explore the formation of an identity that they might not have had the opportunity to do in an alternative environment. According to Reimer, a connection between positive social support, positive role models and a positive lesbian identity development has been established (1997, p. 94).

Several other scholars concerned with the lesbian experience in sport have noted this connection (Griffin, 1998; Hargreaves, 2000; and Shire et al., 2000). Hargreaves proposes that:

[B]ecause most elite lesbians remain closeted, the exceptional one who does disclose her sexuality becomes a special symbol of resistance and promise. From the first moment she comes out, she is appropriated by the lesbian community (and rather differently by the media) and portrayed as having a shared identity with all other lesbians (2000, p. 146).

Hargreaves (2000) points out that sport has provided a rare space for lesbian women to be together, more so than in other aspects of society (p. 152). While some women may avoid participation in certain sports because of the perceived link to lesbianism, other women may be drawn to these same sports because of this link (Peper, 2004; Russell, 2006; and Sartore & Cunningham, 2009).

In this situation, sport can become a place to share in a positive, affirming environment, where a community can be established and positive identities can be built and celebrated instead of being discriminated against. In 1984, the 'Notso Amazons Softball League' was formed in Toronto, Canada. The women's only Softball League was founded upon feminist principles for lesbian and lesbian positive women (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 96). Similarly, Britain's Hackney Women's Football Club (HWFC) was formed in 1986. HWFC identifies as a predominantly lesbian team, operated solely by women, and it promotes an inclusive environment for all women. According to the HWFC website, the club 'was also the first team to instigate a fair play policy, ensuring that all women are encouraged to train and play competitive football regardless of their skills, age, ethnic origin and sexual orientation' (Hackney Women's Football Club, n.d.).

Theberge (2000) explained a similar positive and affirming environment in her research on a women's ice hockey team in Canada, the 'Blades'. Theberge (2000) stated that the relationships between lesbians and heterosexual women were positive and that along with the playing field, the change room provided a space where these relationships were forged. She explained:

The change room provided the context in which lesbian players were most open about their sexuality and their relationships. There are two aspects of this site that accounted for this. First, the privacy of the change room provided a measure of safety, where lesbians were most free to talk and joke about these matters. Second, within the context of the change room, the differences among the women on the team were to a significant extent overridden by what united them, their passion and commitment to hockey (2000, p. 110).

Theberge elaborates that the sexual orientation of players at the Blades club is of little concern, because the 'Blades' are about "what happens on the ice", therefore the burden of lesbian identity is greatly reduced (2000, p. 98).

Establishing an open environment that is community-making for lesbians and free of homophobic discrimination has long been a dream for lesbian sportswomen. This dream would be similar for transgendered<sup>31</sup> athletes who wish to participate in sport without discrimination and threats. As discussed earlier in this chapter, transgender refers to individuals whose gender identity is different to their biological sex. While transgendered individuals are still affected by and victims of homophobia, transgender identity is about sex/gender rather than sexuality, and discrimination against transgendered individuals is labeled as transphobia. A pioneering transitioned woman in the sports world was Dr Renee Richards. Birrell and Cole explain that in 1977 (after initially being told she was required to undergo a 'sex chromatin test'), Richards went to the New York Supreme Court for the chance to compete in the US Open Tennis Championships as a women (1990, p. 208). Richards was awarded the right to compete and competed on the women's tennis tour for a further four years (Birrell & Cole, 1990, p. 208).

A major issue faced by many male to female transitioned athletes is the myth that they carry an unfair advantage over other female athletes. In research conducted by Love, Lim and DeSensi (2009), transitioned professional golfer Mianne Bagger<sup>32</sup> described her frustration by accusations from the major women's golf tours that she had an 'unfair' advantage over other women she competed against. Bagger felt that the resistance to change demonstrated by many golfing tours to allow her to compete was understandable. She explains that 'in hindsight, I can realise that the sports bodies were basically faced with an issue that they know nothing about and didn't really know where to go and find out' (Love et al., 2009, p.

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<sup>31</sup> Recent publications use the term 'transitioned' for what was once coined 'transgender'. Please see Love, Lim & DeSensi (2009); and Devries (2008). For the purposes of this thesis, both terms are used interchangeably.

<sup>32</sup> Mianne Bagger identifies herself as a 'transitioned' woman. Bagger had Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) from biologically male at birth to female in 1991. She has since played golf as a professional on the European Ladies Golf Tour. At present, Bagger is not able to compete on the prestigious Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour in the United States, because of their unchanged 'female at birth' rule.

73). Love et al. (2009) further explain that after much research (where proof could not be found that Bagger had an unfair advantage over other female golfers), many (not all) of these golf tours changed their 'female at birth' rule to allow for a more inclusive environment (p. 73).

For transitioned and LGB athletes the introduction of same-sex sporting teams and leagues (particularly in the United States, Canada and the Netherlands) and the formation of the International Gay Games has been a welcome change from participating in mainstream competitions. The Gay Games illustrate how transitioned individuals, lesbians, gay men and bisexuals can create positive and affirming sporting environments for themselves.

### **The International Gay Games and Outgames**

The International Gay Games is a multi-sport, mass participation event (held every four years) and is 'recognised as the premier athletic event that is supportive of lesbian, gay male, bisexual, and trans-gendered (LGBT) individuals' (Krane, Barber & McClung, 2002, p. 27). Krane et al. suggest that 'because many of the participants experienced marginalisation in mainstream sport settings, it was especially significant to be in a supportive environment without concern for heterosexist prejudice and discrimination' (2002, p. 28). The Gay Games provides such an environment.

The idea of a Gay Games originated with Mark Brown and Dr Tom Waddell in 1980.

However, the idea was not without its problems:

The Gay Games as conceived in 1980 had an almost comic start. Since there were no international ties to the sports organizations existing in the gay communities and since those organizations were generally functioning on local levels, or were confined to gender exclusivity, there was an initial

skepticism about the viability of the Games. To many it seemed an impossible and foolhardy undertaking (Waddell, 1982).

Despite this, a lot of hard work and determination from a group of volunteers meant that this skepticism quickly disappeared. Within two years, the first Gay Games were held in San Francisco. Since those 1982 Games, seven more Games have been held, in San Francisco, Vancouver, New York, Amsterdam, Sydney, Chicago and Cologne respectively. Gay Games IX is scheduled to be held in 2014 in Cleveland, Ohio.

In her extensive account of the social history of the Gay Games, Symons observed that inclusiveness was an important vision for the first Games, and this 'inclusiveness had to encompass the diverse gay and lesbian population in the policies and practices of the Games' (2004, p. 125). Policy and practices have been created since 1982 and provide the opportunity for the Games to be inclusive of all participants. The Gay Games has been instrumental in the formation of a 'community'. The idea that a sense of community was an intention of the Games is intimated by Waddell:

The Gay Games are not separatist, they are not exclusive, they are not oriented to victory, and they are not for commercial gain. They are, however, intended to bring a global community together in friendship, to experience participation, to elevate consciousness and self-esteem and to achieve a form of cultural and intellectual synergy... Another prime objective was to permit the process of discovery among the many groups within the gay community, in particular the men and women. The previously disparate gay male and female groups within the gay subculture were suddenly in an interactive situation and the terms most descriptive of that interaction were: cooperation, friendship, and mutual support (1982).

Over time, Waddell's vision of a non-separatist, participation based Games came to fruition.

Symons (2002) explored the idea of community in her article, 'The Gay Games and Community'. According to Symons, the 'social elements that sustain communities such as



shared meaning, solidarity, belonging, participation, and even equality, are fostered at the Gay Games' (2002, p. 111). Symons (2002) also points out that community is affirmed during events such as the opening and closing ceremonies of the Games, 'where common cultures are celebrated and common concerns are recognised' (p. 111). While gay men and women come from differing countries, backgrounds and cultures to compete in the Games, the Gay Games has become a place where all can be uninhibited in a sporting and social setting, and an event that contests the 'heterosexual hegemony of sport' (Symons, 2006, p. 149). Waddell suggests that the common goals for gay and lesbians, such as '...our insistence on freedom of expression, our vulnerability, [and] our creativity', not only benefit gays and lesbians, but also society at large (1982). This culture at the Games displays unity and a space where one group does not exhibit power over another.

Central to the philosophy of the Gay Games is community formation and participation of all abilities from novice to elite in sporting events. Participation is open to all abilities and emphasises participation and doing one's best. These Games have also provided a stage for competition for elite athletes and teams. Elite athletes such as Judith Arndt from Germany, (world champion and Olympic silver medal cyclist); Bruce Hayes from the United States, (Olympic gold medal swimmer); and Petra Rössner from Germany, (Olympic gold medal cyclist) have all competed in at least one Gay Games (Federation of Gay Games, n.d.).

In 2006, another multi-sport, mass participation event held for the LGBT worldwide community was held. Under the governance of the newly formed Gay and Lesbian International Sporting Association (GLISA), the world 'Outgames' were held in Montreal. According to GLISA, the 'Outgames bring together lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) athletes from around the world in unprecedented numbers for a celebration of sport, culture and human rights' (GLISA, n.d.). Just like the Gay Games, the Outgames are open to

all, regardless of sexual orientation. The World Outgames have since been held in Copenhagen in 2009, and will be hosted by Antwerp in 2013. GLISA also has two formal continental associations, Asia Pacific and North America, which hold their respective events every two to three years (GLISA, n.d.).

It is important to acknowledge that events like the Gay Games and Outgames are not economically accessible for all people. The Gay Games are largely a white, male, middle class event, where the majority of those who participate, are from developed countries, particularly from the United States (Symons, 2010). Additionally, while the Gay Games are idealistically labeled as a safe space for LGBTQ athletes, Davidson (1996) suggests that there has been opposition to the Games. Davidson (1996) explains that fundamentalist Christian organisations have protested to have the Games banned and vandals have ‘spray painted homophobic graffiti on registration walls’ (p. 77). However, for those who do have access to the Games, the environment has been one of inclusion and community. It is also pertinent to acknowledge that the ‘community’ at the Gay Games, is not one homogeneous population. For Symons (2002), the ‘lesbian and gay community’ of the Gay Games includes ‘lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered, drag queens, leather dykes and daddys, and queers from many different racial, ethnic and national backgrounds’ (2002, p. 101). Symons suggested that:

Considering the diverse communities participating in the Gay Games, and their different interests and political perspectives especially concerning the organisation and engagement with sport and leisure, tensions and conflicts are endemic and ongoing (2006, p. 156).

Conflicts within such diverse communities would not be unusual, as these groups struggle for power in the wider LGBT community.

Symons (2006) further explains that to encompass such diversity at the Gay Games, the Gay Games organisers and participants have implemented 'some of the most progressive and inclusive policies and practices to promote this diverse participation in sport' (p. 156). These policies had to ensure that 'peoples living with HIV and AIDS, as well as transgendered and intersex peoples' were included in such policies and practices (Symons, 2010, p. 244).

Therefore the inclusiveness policies formulated and adopted by the Gay Games needed to encompass all aspects of the LGBT community. For example, according to Symons, lesbians with separatist feminist politics and belief systems can find it difficult to align themselves with such a grouping [LGBT] 'considering their political analysis of patriarchal power' (2002, p. 101). Lesbian feminist scholar, Sheila Jeffreys, elaborates on this:

Lesbian feminism starts from the understanding that the interests of lesbians and gay men are in many respects very different, because lesbians are members of the political class of women. Lesbian liberation thus requires the destruction of men's power over women (2003, p. 19).

The policies enacted at the Gay Games needed to incorporate inclusion of lesbians with separatist lesbian politics at the Games. Many males (including gay males) possess powerful positions over women simply by virtue of being a male. Within a lesbian feminist perspective on sport, power is understood as natural in male-dominated organisations, and this power can be detrimental to the development of a culture that values and celebrates women (Symons, 2002, p. 101).

The Gay Games in Amsterdam (Gay Games V) in 1998 were significant in changing the culture of the Games, in regards to female participation rates and managerial positions. These Games were the first to take a proactive approach to increasing female sporting and managerial participation. According to Symons (2010), the organising committee of the

Amsterdam Gay Games implemented four policy areas to increase female involvement at the Games. These included:

1. Affirmative Action principles were used in the selection processes of all paid staff members;
2. An extensive and targeted promotions campaign... which meant that all promotional material for these Games... contained images of women and men;
3. A number of specific measures designed to increase the registration of women in the sports programme and to take account of women's generally lower income levels and greater family commitments... was implemented, and;
4. A strategy to achieve gender equity within Gay Games V was the creation of a specific women's programme as well as a balance of women's and men's interests and participation opportunities within the sport, cultural, social issues and events and festivities programmes (Symons, 2010, pp. 167-168).

Around 42% of the participants and volunteers at the Amsterdam Games were women (Symons, 2010). According to Symons, this success at the Amsterdam Games in regards to female involvement, 'demonstrated that within the context of a largely gay male-dominated public community there needed to be a committed, concerted and political effort to achieve better female representation' (2010, p. 166). These policies provided a 'systematic and integrated approach to gender equality' at the Gay Games (Symons, 2010, p. 166). The implementation of these policies resulted in the largest ever female involvement at a Gay Games.

Overall, the experience of involvement with same-sex sporting clubs and leagues, and participation in events such as the Gay Games has provided gay and lesbian athletes with open environments that promote a sense of community and affirm gay and lesbian identity. These spaces provide an alternative from the hierarchical gender order shaped by hegemonic masculinity that exists in mainstream sport.

## **Safe and Affirming Spaces for Female Athletes**

Many scholars have discussed the notion of a 'safe space' for lesbian athletes when participating in an open and inclusive women's team sport (Cahn, 1994; Elling et al., 2003; Griffin, 1998; Hargreaves, 2000; and Hillier, 2005). Cahn for instance suggests that:

[Sport] created space for women to explore unconventional gender and sexual identities. Athletically inclined lesbians, in particular, found that the world of women's sport offered possibilities for self-expression and social life despite the homosexual stigma that beset women's athletics (1994, p. 185).

Cahn proposes that 'the existence of this caricatured figure did not prevent gay women from generating an alternative set of affirmative meanings and experiences from within the culture of sport' (1994, p. 185). In fact, many lesbians have been attracted to sport because of affirming spaces to explore gender and sexuality.

Hargreaves (2000) proposes that sport attracts lesbians because of these atypical characteristics. The arena of sport has become a space where many lesbians can be together, and Hargreaves believes that there may be a larger percentage of lesbians in sport than in any other area within society (2000, p. 152). Therefore, according to Griffin, 'it should be of no surprise that lesbian athletes and coaches often find love and community among other women who share a love of sport' (1998, p. 182). This feeling of community and acceptance is especially important among those who have difficulties with the 'coming out' process and acceptance with their families and friends. Their sporting environment/team/community becomes a family of sorts, because of this affirming nature.

In her research on an Australian Rules Women's Football team, Hillier found similar results. Hillier (2005) suggests that for many of the women football players, there was a sense that mainstream society was not an inclusive space for those who explored gender and sexuality

boundaries. Yet, football 'not only gave them the opportunity to be strong and powerful, it also gave them a place in which they belonged and felt comfortable' (Hillier, 2005, p. 58). For some women, playing football was also about many other things, including a place to test the boundaries surrounding sexuality in a safe space.

In their study on gay and lesbian volleyball players in Amsterdam, Elling et al. (mentioned above) also refer to the notion of a 'safe' space or haven for lesbians in sport. According to Elling et al. (2003):

Some male-defined sports in general and some clubs and teams specifically have also turned out to be a relatively 'safe' haven for lesbians where they can be 'out', socialize with other lesbian and straight team mates and transgress traditional gender boundaries (p. 443).

These different research projects above demonstrate the potential for sport, in particular women's team sports, to provide a space where gender and sexuality can be constructed by women themselves in a relatively 'safe space'. The Netherlands provides a model of what an inclusive sporting climate can do for lesbian athletes, along with events such as the Gay Games and Outgames. The research of Elling et al. (2003) is valuable for the analysis of experiences of club level lesbian athletes; however the social climate for gays and lesbians is different to that of Australia. While Australia and the Netherlands are not that different in general legislation for gay and lesbian rights, (there have been recent changes in legislation granting most same-sex rights in Australia), legal recognition of issues such as marriage and adoption in Australia remain outstanding. At present little research has been carried out on the lesbian sport experience at a recreational level in Australia.

## **Concluding Comments**

The bodies of work represented in this review of literature are critical to an in depth understanding of gender and sexuality as they operate in sport. The constructions of gender and sexuality in Western societies inform the history of homosexuality, lesbian and gay rights and the feminist movement. The feminist movement, in turn, is significant in framing gendered power both in society and in sport. Gendered power relations are entrenched in the history and fabric of sport and cognizance of this power underpins an understanding of the formation of identity, the perpetuation of labels and even the capacity of sport to provide ‘safe spaces’ for female (lesbian) athletes.

This body of knowledge adds both background and context to the case studies presented in the thesis. However, this literature review also reveals the dearth of research carried out on sexuality issues in recreational level sport in Australia. In Chapter Three, the focus moves away from the theory surrounding gender, sexuality and sport and into the methodological processes used in this research. Chapter Three explores the qualitative research design of this study, describes the methods of data collection, outlines the ethical risks and explains the safeguards taken in the research project.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Method**

#### **Introduction**

Internationally, academic study in the area of sport and sexuality is increasing. Some of this research focuses on the challenges lesbians encounter with inclusion and discrimination.

While a small selection of research exists in this area in Australia,<sup>33</sup> there is very little that pertains to the lesbian sporting experience. This study expands on the current body of research and seeks to fill the gap in the literature by addressing several aims. These aims are: to examine the scope of anti-discrimination legislation and policy and the expectations that it carries for hockey associations and community-based clubs; to examine the scope of club or team policies with respect to participation based on gender, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity, and how these policies are perceived by the participants and managers (i.e., how they interpret the requirements of anti-discrimination legislation, managers perceptions of inclusiveness in the club, procedures for staff/member education, complaint procedures, etc); and to examine the lived experience of inclusiveness by team members, including their perceptions of team/club policy, procedures, team culture and the experiences of playing within the competitive mainstream hockey league.

A critical feminist theoretical approach is necessary to investigate the club and team policies in regards to gender and power. Critical feminists focus on sport as a site for ‘challenging and transforming oppressive forms of gender relations, including expressions of sexism and homophobia’ (Coakley et al., 2009, p. 43). It is pertinent to acknowledge that a critical feminist perspective is not unproblematic, and that feminist theory has been critiqued for

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<sup>33</sup> Studies such as Hillier (2005), Hemphill and Symons (2009) and Symons (2002, 2004, 2010).



placing gender and sexuality at the forefront of discrimination and not fully examining of interlocking oppressions, such as race, age, etc. Coakley et al., (2009) also acknowledges the ‘weaknesses’ of such a theory (p. 33). Bell Hooks suggests that many feminist theories are often ‘euro-centric, linguistically convoluted and rooted in Western white male sexist and racially biased philosophical frameworks’ (1989, p. 36). Therefore, although such weaknesses exist, the critical feminist framework, along with Connell’s (1987) theory of gender relations and identities was used in this study specifically to explore the roles of women and men in positions of power (governance), along with the culture of diversity and ‘safe spaces’ at the hockey clubs.

Connell’s (1987) theory of gender relations and identities has been interpreted as a critical feminist undertaking and was also used in relation to understanding the implementation and enactment of legislation and policy at the club level. This theoretical framework emphasises gender as a large-scale social structure and not just a matter of personal identity, in particular, it focuses on the ‘institutional arrangements both between men and women’ (McKay, 1997; Connell, 1987). According to McKay, Connell’s theory of gender relations and identities concentrates on how ‘relations at both the macro and micro levels are characterised by obdurate, hierarchal, and exploitative structure that set limits on how gender is “done”’ (1997, p. 19).

Such ‘institutional arrangements’ between men and women are found in various social institutions, including religion, education, the economy, the judiciary and armed services. According to McKay, ‘given that men control the most power in social institutions, and their values are more highly esteemed than women’s, then women must continually “do” gender under disadvantaged conditions’ (1997, p. 14). Connell adopts a structural approach to such

power discrepancies and gender relations, and explains this in terms of ‘labour’, ‘power’ and ‘cathexis’ (1987).

‘Labour’ refers to gendered division of labour, and the ‘allocation of particular types of work to particular categories of people’ (Connell, 1987, p. 99). This labour may include housework, childcare, paid and unpaid work, unequal salaries and pay rates ‘men’s jobs’ and ‘women’s jobs’ (Connell, 1987). In terms of power, Connell (1987) states that ‘transactions involving power are easy enough to observe’ in society at the micro level (p. 107). However, as Connell observes, power (at the macro level) is deeply rooted in structures of authority, control and coercion, and male supremacy. Examples of this include the lack of women in positions of power at major institutions, including the church, business and the judiciary. The structure of cathexis refers to the ‘sexual social relationships’ that ‘are organised around one person’s emotional attachments to another’ (Connell, 1987, pp. 111-112; McKay, 1997, p. 18). In terms of cathexis, ‘sexuality is enacted or conducted, it is not “expressed”’ (Connell, 1987, p. 111), and heterosexuality remains the ‘dominant pattern of desire’ (McKay, 1997, p. 18). According to Maharaj (2005), these three ‘structures complement each other in the analysis’ of social phenomena, ‘providing a context that suggests the structures from the three categories that are likely to be at play’ (p. 57). For this research project, these three structures relate to the legislation and policy at the club level, along with the gendered roles and systemic structures of power at the hockey clubs.

Foucault also provides a pertinent theoretical framework for studies related to gender, sexuality and power (Foucault, 1980; McNay, 1992). However, dominant theoretical perspectives in sport are most often linked to liberal and critical feminist frameworks, the dominant gender order and hegemonic masculinity. Connell’s theory of gender relations and

identities, encompassing structures of 'labour, power and cathexis', can be readily applied to the androcentric culture and hegemonic masculine culture of sport. For the purposes of the present study, Connell's theoretical framework has been used to provide a clear link between gender, power and labour constructs. In particular, this analysis on volunteers, governance, and legislation and policy at the hockey clubs has been possible with the use of Connell and her theories of labour, power and cathexis.

As the research aims to explore relevant legislation and its applicability to clubs, plus relevant club policies, procedures and 'culture', along with the perceptions and lived experience of participants, there needed to be multiple methods of investigation. Moreover, the methods selected needed to capture not only the rich detail of policy, practice and experience at the local level, but also allow the researcher to say something meaningful about sexuality and inclusiveness across a larger metropolitan region. Accordingly, a multiple case study method was utilised to explore the intra-club and inter-club situation of three separate metropolitan hockey clubs.

### **Case Study Method**

The case study method was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, this method identifies the similarities between cases, such as the shared experiences that are common to members of all hockey clubs. Secondly, it recognises the experiences that are unique to members of a club, given factors such as age, sexual orientation, geographic location and gender politics. While the collective or multiple case study methods are not commonly employed in the area of sport sociology, its employment by Yamaguchi (1984); and Enjolras and Waldahl (2007) indicate its relevance in the area. An example of the multiple case study method being utilised in other areas of research includes: Ramus, Rosen, Dakin, Day, Castellote, White and Frith (2003).

The qualitative case study method provides an opportunity ‘to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods’ (Soy, 1997, p. 1). Stake (1998) refers to this kind of specific case study method as a ‘collective case study’ or ‘multiple case studies’. According to Stake, a collective case study is undertaken by studying a number of case studies jointly, ‘in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population or general condition’ (1998, p. 89). Stake (1998) further explains a collective case study as:

[N]ot the study of a collective but instrumental study extended to several cases. Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest the common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each having voice. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases (p. 89).

According to Yin, if given the choice and the resources, the use of multiple case studies is preferred and adds to the strength and validity of a research project.<sup>34</sup>

In particular, if you can even do a two-case study, your chances of producing robust results will be better than using a single-case design. For instance, analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases, as with two experiments, will be more powerful than those coming from a single case (or single experiment) alone (Yin, 2003, p. 135).

Yin suggests that as well as producing more conclusive and reliable results, the multiple case study method avoids the common criticism that single case studies receive (2003, p. 135). A regular criticism of the case study method is that its reliance on the results from a single case deems it ill-equipped in providing generalisations about entire populations. Yin’s (2003) description of the data resulting from multiple case studies implies that this data holds more strength and authority than the single case study method.

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<sup>34</sup> More of the literature refers to this case study method as ‘multiple case studies’ instead of ‘collective case studies’, so the term ‘multiple case studies’ is used for the purpose of this research.

It is important to acknowledge that terms such as ‘validity’, ‘representation’ and ‘authority’ in relation to research methods and interpreting data are mired in positivism. Lather (1991) critiques such terms by suggesting that ‘the job of validation is, not to support an interpretation, but to find out what might be wrong with it... To call for value-free standards of validity is a contradiction in terms...’ (p. 65). The aim of this research was to not look for a ‘representative sample’ that was similar from all clubs, but rather, to interpret the nuances and differences between participants and hockey clubs, and to acknowledge that these interpretations were subjectively created.

The multiple case study method can be chosen for a variety of reasons, but most commonly for the reason of replication; in that similar results can be found in each separate case study. Yin (2003) refers to this process as ‘literal replication’. Another reason for choosing the multiple case study method is for ‘theoretical replication’, where contrasting results are presumed for predictable reasons (Yin, 2003, p. 47).

The multiple case study method used for this research has used both the process of literal and theoretical replication. More simply, in literal replication one might find similar results across several individual case studies. With theoretical replication, although contrasting results may be found across case studies, these differences can be expected due to the nature of the participants in each case.

The multiple case study method has been employed in order to capture the detail (i.e., lived experience, perceptions, policy and procedures) at the club level, plus in attempt to make comparisons across several clubs. Each case study involved a document analysis (e.g., legislation, club policy and procedures) and interviews, which have included an exploration

of personal experiences and club culture dealing with inclusion. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), 'the case study strategy relies on interviewing, observing and document analysis' (p. 25). The document analysis process is explained below.

- **Document Analysis**

Altheide (1996) suggests that qualitative document analysis depends on the 'researcher's interaction and involvement with documents selected for their relevance to a research topic' (p. 24). As a central part of a case study method, document analysis has been used for several purposes. Firstly, an analysis of anti-discrimination legislation and policy at the local, state and national levels of sport was undertaken. Secondly, Victorian and Australian research, policies, procedures and resources was analysed. Finally, the three case studies have been rounded out by an analysis of documents dealing with anti-discrimination and inclusiveness policies in place at the sporting clubs (if such policies exist).

The researcher examined the state legislation in regards to sexuality related inclusion and anti-discrimination and how closely this parallels the sporting association's policy. To help contextualise the verbal responses from the participants, an analysis was also carried out on the 'Hockey Australia' document, the 'Member Protection Policy'. Adherence to this policy is expected of all registered players, coaches, administrators, club volunteers and employees of Hockey Australia. In addition, an analysis of the obligations that sporting clubs have to implement a policy, as outlined in the 'Play by the Rules' resource is undertaken. The dissemination of such a document to sporting clubs was also analysed, along with the sporting club's utilisation of this policy and individual use of such a policy by the research participants. The purpose of the overall document analysis is to discover the range of legislative and policy documentation that pertains to sport and to determine what obligations

these policies put on clubs and officials. Another purpose is to ascertain the club's awareness of legislation and implementation of policies as they pertain to the registered players, coaches, volunteers and administrative staff at the clubs. Another component of the multiple case study method is the interview.

- **Interview Method**

An interview method was adopted in order to acquire rich detail and informative insight about these individual experiences. More so than a research method utilising questionnaires or surveys, the interview method allowed access to the social context within which participants describe their experiences of belonging and identity at their hockey clubs. Minichiello et al. describe the interview process as a 'means by which the researcher can gain access to, and subsequently understand, the private interpretations of social reality that individuals hold' (1997, p. 87). The interview method has been used for similar purposes in recent research by Symons (2010), Elling et al. (2003) and Hillier (2005) and is explored further below.

The interview method employed in this study was designed to gain access to the social reality of inclusiveness, discrimination/exclusion and diversity experienced by the participants at their hockey clubs. In-depth interviews were used to explore the participants' lived experiences of belonging and identity at their respective clubs. Additional topics included sexuality, inclusiveness of sexual diversity and discrimination as they may relate to club policies, practices and culture. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the twenty-five individual participants having been obtained. The interviews lasted between thirty and seventy minutes.

The interview guide was ‘built’ around a series of themes. These themes included: ‘General Background Information’; ‘Involvement with Local Sport’; ‘Local Sporting Club Experiences’; ‘Gay and Lesbian Issues in Sport’; and ‘Anti-Discrimination Policy’.

The formation of these themes was created around the information that the researcher wanted to gain, along with input from academic literature. As mentioned above, this research explored topics such as sexuality, inclusiveness, homophobia and heterosexism as experienced by the female hockey players in their respective hockey clubs. Some of the questions asked in the interviews were designed to elicit information from the participants on these experiences/issues. Lesbian issues may range from health issues, discrimination issues (homophobia and institutional discrimination) and family relationships issues. The United States National Organisation for Women (NOW) explains that there are various issues facing lesbians, such as ‘employment, housing, public accommodations, health services, child custody and military policies’ (n.d.). Some of these ‘issues’ are further perpetuated in the sporting arena. The analysis of the participants’ responses and academic literature is framed around these themes in the case study chapters, Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Seven.

The interview also explored the perceptions of any existing inclusiveness policies and practices in these community based sport clubs. From discussions with participants, it was hoped that any documentation dealing with anti-discrimination and inclusive (or exclusive) policies in place at the hockey clubs could be identified and later analysed.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, attention was particularly paid to the existence of unwritten rules or club ethos dealing with anti-discrimination and inclusiveness at the club level. Interviews were also conducted with

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<sup>35</sup> For an explanation of anti-discrimination and inclusive policies found at each club, please see Chapter Eight.



club officials, administrators, coaches and/or team managers to examine their perceptions of their club's awareness and promotion of anti-discrimination and inclusiveness.

Several of the interview questions were informed by the 'climates' (hostile, tolerant, inclusive) formulated by Griffin (1998) to describe the experience of lesbian athletes, coaches and administrators in sport. As outlined in Chapter Two, Griffin's climates refer to the experiences of the participants in sport, as well as the informal social norms surrounding sport. Griffin (1998) labels a typically 'hostile' climate in sport as one where lesbian athletes and coaches feel they have to be extremely careful not to reveal their sexual orientation. Revelations (or even suspicions) of non-conventional forms of sexuality can result in an athlete, coach or sports administrator being alienated from a team or sporting club by fellow sporting club members (Griffin, 1998, p. 94). In a 'conditionally tolerant' climate, lesbian visibility is regarded as the problem. Griffin suggests that in a sporting team or sporting club environment that is described as 'conditionally tolerant', lesbians must abide by a certain set of 'rules' (1998, pp. 99-100). These unwritten 'rules' suggest that lesbian athletes, coaches, sports administrators can only be involved in sport if they conceal their sexual orientation (Griffin, 1998, p. 100).<sup>36</sup> There are many different reasons why lesbians involved in sport in a 'conditionally tolerant' climate may be reluctant about 'coming out' and revealing their sexuality to others. These reasons can range from being discriminated against in team selections, verbal or physical threats or assault, or even loss of employment.

Griffin describes the third climate as 'open and inclusive', and as one which places discrimination and homophobia as problematic in sport, not lesbianism (1998, p. 103). An 'open and inclusive' sporting climate relies on individual coaches, managers or sports

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<sup>36</sup> See also Nelson, (1991).

administrators who are opposed to discrimination against lesbians (Griffin, 1998, p. 103).

According to Griffin (1998), coaches, managers and sports administrators who support an 'open and inclusive' climate in sport are rarely supported by institutional practices and policies.

The interview guide for the hockey player participants is shown below:

### **Part One – General Background Information**

Can you give a brief description of yourself?

Things to explore - where did you grow up, your family background, age, education, occupation, main interests, etc.

### **Part Two - Involvement with local sport**

Can you describe your current involvement with local sport? (Other sport involvement, main sports played, organisations, roles, interests, motivations, achievements, etc)

Can you tell me how you became involved with this sporting club?

### **Part Three – Local Sporting Club Experiences**

- How would you best describe the experience of playing sport at this club?

Some main areas to explore:

- Club and team environments? ie: friendly, welcoming, etc. (irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, race, etc.)
- Perception of relations, if any, between lesbian and heterosexual athletes in the team

### **Part Four – Gay and Lesbian Issues in Sport**

Do you think there are any unique issues that face lesbian and gay athletes in sport?

Do you think there are any unique issues that face predominately lesbian identified sporting teams playing in mainstream sporting competitions?

Do you think there is a need for separate gay and lesbian sports clubs and events?

Can you recall if homophobia was ever an issue for you and/or your sporting club during your sports involvement – elaborate?

### **Part Five – Anti-Discrimination Policy**

Could you tell me about your awareness of:

- anti-discrimination and harassment policy - how it applies to your sporting club and head sporting organisation.
- Whether this anti-discrimination policy covers sexual orientation.
- Lodging a Complaint – Do you know anything about the complaints procedures at your sports club and association? Elaborate

- Is there any education about the anti-discrimination policy?
- If no education exists – would you be interested in finding out more information or formal training?

Any further comments?<sup>37</sup>

The participants involved in the research were a mix of players and officials (all of whom were active on the pitch) (i.e., managers, leaders, administrators). Accordingly, the same base interview questions were asked of all participants, with the leaders at the club being asked further questions in an additional section of the interview. These additional questions related to the club's awareness of, and promotion of anti-discrimination policies and education activities. The questions asked of the leaders of the club included:

#### **Part One – General Background Information**

Can you give a brief description of yourself?

Things to explore - where did you grow up, your family background, age, education, occupation, main interests, etc.

#### **Part Two - Involvement with local sport**

Can you describe your current involvement with local sport? (Other sport involvement, main sports played, organisations, roles, interests, motivations, achievements, etc)

Can you tell me how you became involved with this sporting club?

#### **Part Three – Local Sporting Club Experiences**

- How would you best describe the experiences of being involved at this club?

Some main areas to explore:

- Club and team environments? ie: friendly, welcoming, etc. (irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, race, etc.)
- Perceptions of relations, if any, between the lesbian and heterosexual athletes in the team, etc.

#### **Part Four – Gay and Lesbian Issues in Sport**

Do you think there are any unique issues that face lesbian and gay athletes in sport?

Do you think there are any unique issues that face predominately lesbian identified sporting teams playing in mainstream sporting competitions?

<sup>37</sup> Please refer to Appendix E – Interview guide for Athlete participants.

Do you think there is a need for separate gay and lesbian sports clubs and events?  
Can you recall if homophobia was ever an issue for you and/or your sporting club during your sports involvement – elaborate?

### **Part Five – Anti-Discrimination Policy**

Could you tell me about your perceptions of:

- Awareness if an anti-discrimination policy exists.
- anti-discrimination and harassment policy - how it applies to your sporting club and head sporting organisation.
- Whether this anti-discrimination policy covers sexual orientation.
- Lodging a Complaint – Is there an effective complaints procedure at your sporting club or sporting organisation?
- Would you feel comfortable enough to lodge a complaint with either/both the sporting club and head sporting organisation?

Education of anti-discrimination policies:

- Are you aware of any programs and resources that address discrimination in sport generally?
- Are you aware if there is any form of formal training offered on discrimination in sport by the sporting club or head sporting organisation for yourself or athletes?
- Are you aware if there is a specific staff member or volunteer responsible for increasing awareness of anti-discrimination?
- If no education exists – would you be interested in finding out more information or formal training?

Any further comments?<sup>38</sup>

All interviews with participants were held at a location suggested by, and convenient to, the participant. The selected location was usually the participant's workplace, residence or at a café. All participants verbally consented to their interview being audio-taped. Along with the audio-tape, the researcher took shorthand notes, which were to serve as a reminder to explore further an issue of interest or relevance.

Prior to the commencement of each interview, the participant was provided with the 'information for participants' and 'consent form' handout (See Appendix C and Appendix G). This form was individually read by the participants and verbally explained to the

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<sup>38</sup> Please refer to Appendix F – Interview guide for Manager, Administrator, Coach or Committee Member participants.

participant. If further explanation was required about the research project, this would be done prior to starting the 'official' audio-taped interview. Once each participant had indicated that she understood the aims, risks and safeguards of the research, she was then asked to sign the consent form.<sup>39</sup> Informed consent forms were completed by the participants prior to the interview beginning, with someone like a workmate, partner, family member and sometimes even a stranger at a café acting as a witness to that participant's consent. During the preliminary activities, the researcher engaged in a general 'warm-up' conversation with participants to help develop a rapport and help participants feel comfortable with the researcher. Some general conversation topics included the researcher inquiring about how the participant's day had been, whether the participant had a training session or game that day/evening or about the performance of the participant's hockey team over the weekend/season. This 'warm-up' method has been utilised by other researchers as a means of 'building rapport' with the interview participants (Symons, 2004).

The interview model adopted involved a combination of structured and semi-structured questions. In a typically structured format, the researcher asked all athlete participants the same questions, in the same order, with a combination of open and closed-ended questions. However, the research topic is such that the structured interview format and the ordering of questions changed depending on the social interaction between the interviewer and participant, and also upon the participant's ability and/or desire to disclose information. Minichiello et al. (1997) suggest that the semi-structured interview 'takes on the appearance of a normal everyday conversation. However, it is always a controlled conversation which is geared to the interviewer's research interests' (p. 65). The interviews conducted with the club managers, officials or administrators also followed a structured format, with a

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<sup>39</sup> See Appendix G and Appendix H for sample consent forms.

combination of open and closed-ended questions. Again, depending on the participant and the information divulged, some interviews became less structured in an effort to explore participant experience in more detail.

As discussed above, the interview process was used to form the basis for three individual, yet collective (or multiple) case studies.<sup>40</sup> Over the course of this research project, some of the other strategies included snowball and purposive sampling, thematic analysis, member checking and peer reviewing. Beginning with snowball and purposive sampling, each of these strategies will be discussed in the section below.

### **Snowball and Purposive Sampling**

Participants for this study were recruited via a combination of both snowball and purposive sampling. Typically, snowball sampling refers to ‘cases of interest from sampling people who know people, who know people, who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview participants’ (Patton, 2002, p. 243). In the case of this research, a base of two personal contacts elicited further appropriate contacts and from there, several more possible participant clubs and individual participants were identified.

The significance of purposive sampling, as opposed to, say, random sampling, lies in selecting information-rich participants/cases or pre-defined groups for in-depth analysis that are related to the central issues being studied (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, pp. 78-80). In particular, the form of purposive sampling used in this research is known as ‘Homogenous Sampling’, labeled as such by Patton (2002, p. 243). According to Patton (2002):

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<sup>40</sup> Research participants from four separate hockey clubs were interviewed, however only the data from three clubs has been used in the research analysis.

[Homogenous sampling is] chosen to give a detailed picture of a particular phenomenon - for example, individuals who belong to the same subculture or have the same characteristics. This allows for detailed investigation of social processes in a specified context (p. 243).<sup>41</sup>

This research project involved the use of both of these sampling methods to research a pre-defined group of community club athletes. To be included in this study, athletes had to form part of the same sub-culture, in this case, female hockey players playing at a recreational level in a given geographical location. Shire et al. (2000); Hillier (2005); and Elling et al. (2003) have used purposive sampling successfully in studies similar to this one.

The focus of the research was on women who played recreational level hockey in Melbourne in the winter season of 2006. Approximately forty letters of invitation were sent out initially to those identified by snowball and purposive sampling methods at various hockey clubs in Melbourne. In order to ascertain their interest in the study, letters were sent to those clubs who satisfied the sampling criteria. Some of these clubs were contacted via electronic mail, while others were contactable only through the postal system.

### **Recruitment Process**

The recruitment process was undertaken in two stages. As mentioned above, the first stage consisted of a letter of invitation being sent to the club management to request permission to recruit members and officials of the club. These letters of invitation/consent to the club included an introduction of the researcher, a description of the research project (including aims, methods, risks and safeguards), a description of the interview process, an explanation of the basic content of the proposed interview, an offer of an executive summary of the research

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<sup>41</sup>Also see Ritchie & Lewis (2003, p. 79).

thesis once completed, and the researcher's contact details in the event that the club required further information.<sup>42</sup>

This letter to the club was designed to elicit consent for the researcher to recruit athletes and officials. Hockey clubs were invited to respond to this letter via return electronic mail or by telephone to express their level of interest. Eleven hockey clubs responded to the letter of invitation, indicating various level of interest. Of these, five hockey clubs responded to the invitation by declining the offer to be involved in the research. One club requested further information to take along to the club's next committee meeting. However, once further information was forwarded onto that particular club, permission was ultimately not obtained from the committee to recruit participants.

Five clubs accepted the invitation to be included in the research project. One of these clubs, however, was unable to allow access to players within the time frame of the study and therefore had to be excluded from the study. The four remaining hockey clubs that initially agreed to allow the researcher to recruit participants at their clubs were ultimately included in this study. Of these four hockey clubs, three clubs were chosen as case studies in this research. A decision over which hockey clubs to include as a case study was based on the number of participants sought after for each club. The hockey club that was not included as a case had only three participants, while the other three case studies consisted of six or more participants.

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<sup>42</sup> See Appendix A - Information Letter for Sporting Clubs



In the second stage of recruitment, the sporting clubs that gave permission for the researcher to recruit participants were asked if they would allow the researcher to conduct an informal information session about the research. These information sessions were conducted after training sessions in the case of athlete recruitment and after a club committee meeting in order to recruit officials. A session of around ten minutes was devised which involved distributing a recruitment letter,<sup>43</sup> briefly discussing the aims, method, risks and safeguards of the study, and answering any questions. The recruitment letter contained the researcher's institutional contact details so that prospective participants could contact the researcher and confirm their interest in the study. All participating hockey clubs were able to accommodate these sessions. The researcher ensured that all prospective participants understood that their participation was voluntary and that their involvement was neither required nor expected of them by virtue of being a member or official of the club.

After the information sessions, a number of potential participants made contact with the researcher via email. While many of the potential participants that responded were interested in arranging a time for an interview on the first contact, others had additional questions to ask. Further information was given to all participants at this point via email or post.<sup>44</sup> In total, twenty five participants were interviewed. *Northern Central Hockey Club*<sup>45</sup> was the first club that allowed recruitment of its members, with nine participants agreeing to participate in interviews. Seven individuals were interviewed from *Melbourne Central Hockey Club*; six participants were interviewed from *South Eastern Hockey Club* and three participants from *Western Central Hockey Club*<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> See Appendix B - Recruitment letter to club members, and Appendix C - Recruitment letter to club officials.

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix D – Information to Participants.

<sup>45</sup> All club names used in this study are pseudonyms.

<sup>46</sup> As discussed on the previous page, only the interview material from the first three hockey clubs were used in this PhD project.

All research participants were active hockey participants in the winter season of 2006, and nine of these women were also involved in a management, administrative, committee based or coaching capacity at the hockey club. There were additional women who initially agreed to an interview. However, these women were not interviewed because they either did not respond to confirmations of time and place, or in some cases, simply did not present for the interview at the arranged time.

Several challenges and difficulties were encountered when recruiting for this research project. The research topic was sensitive for many of the women who attended the information sessions conducted by the researcher. The researcher noted that some of the women were visibly uncomfortable at hearing about the proposed research project. Several participants chose not to ask any questions in front of their team-mates, but rather only via email. Another challenge was to assure participants that the research would not just focus on the experiences of lesbians, but all women. This question was asked by several participants. The appearance of the researcher (i.e., not adhering to an image of traditional femininity) also appeared to stimulate such questions and assumptions about the research prior to any information being dispersed.

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, a number of ethical risks and safeguards were employed by the researcher when conducting the interviews for the research. The following section will explain these ethical risks and safeguards.

### **Ethical Risks and Safeguards**

While the interviews dealt with potentially sensitive issues for the participants, care was taken to maintain privacy, confidentiality and the participant's well-being. Considering that

some of the participants involved in this research may have experienced direct or in-direct forms of homophobic or heterosexist discrimination in their everyday lives, questions about these challenges may have left the participant feeling uncomfortable. The ethical risks and safeguards included club and participant informed consent,<sup>47</sup> confidentiality, and follow-up counseling support, if necessary. A suitably qualified psychologist from Victoria University agreed to provide counseling to the participants of this study, if that was required.

Participants were also given the opportunity to view and audit their interviews once transcribed.

Informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy were major considerations in this study, and the following steps were taken to minimise any potential risks:

- Participants were briefed on the sensitive nature, as well as the other risks and safeguards, of the study before making a decision to participate.
- Participants were informed before the interview commenced that they were free to withdraw their consent at any time (even after the commencement of an interview) if they are uncomfortable with issues raised during the interview.
- Participants were informed before the interview commenced that, at any time, they can choose not to answer particular questions.
- Participants were informed before the interview commenced that any information received through the interviews for analysis or for academic publications will be de-identified. That is, pseudonyms will be used to protect their identity, and data will not be available for use for anyone other than the student and the principal and associate investigators.
- Participants were informed before the interview commenced that they will be free to view their interview transcripts and audit any details as they see fit.
- Participants were informed before the interview commenced that counseling support was arranged and was available at no charge if it should be required. Dr Harriet Speed from Victoria University agreed to provide counseling for participants if necessary.

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<sup>47</sup> See Appendices G & H – Consent forms for athlete and Coach/Team Manager/Administrator Participants.

- Interview participants were asked before the interview commenced not to mention names or other identifying information about themselves or others during the interview.
- Participants were informed before the interview commenced that any sensitive or suspect information that is inadvertently disclosed during the interview process will not appear in transcripts or in any other written materials (e.g. thesis or research publications).
- Participants were informed that the information gained through the interviews will be kept inside a locked filing cabinet in the office of the Principal Investigator, Dr Dennis Hemphill, at Victoria University.

If by chance any sensitive information (e.g., actual names of individual or teams, slanderous comments) were disclosed during the interview process, the interviewer would not record the names mentioned to protect the identity of participant. Also, during the interview process, if participants felt uncomfortable about any of the questions or the issues raised, a three step process was utilised. This process meant that the participant was offered the opportunity to 1) not answer that particular question and continue with the interview, 2) not answer the question, and take a break to discuss what may be of concern to them, and then continue with the interview, 3) to cease the interview and withdraw from the research. The option of a counseling support would be discussed in the event of scenario 2) or 3). While all participants answered all questions asked of them, the researcher did offer one participant the option of not answering a question in response to a prolonged pause by the participant. No other participants requested that any of the strategies outlined above be implemented. As is common practice for studies involving human participants, this research underwent review and received approval by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee.<sup>48</sup> The following section explores the process of data analysis, specifically ‘thematic analysis’, which was utilised to analyse the interview material.

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<sup>48</sup> The Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee approved this research proposal in January 2006 - Approval number - HRETH.05/80.

## Thematic Analysis

The interview material was assessed using thematic analysis to identify meaningful and significant themes. Studies similar to this research project have used thematic analysis successfully (Hillier, 2005; Dionigi, 2008). Hillier utilised discourse analysis (a form of thematic analysis) in her research on women's Australian Rules football, while Dionigi (2008) used thematic analysis in her research on older people, sport and ageing.<sup>49</sup> The process of thematic analysis employed in this study is outlined below.

In thematic analysis, 'the analyst looks for themes which are present in the whole set of interviews and creates a framework of these for making comparisons and contrasts between the different respondents [transcripts]' (Gomm, 2004, p. 189). According to Braun and Clarke, a theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set' (2006, p. 82). Gomm (2004) suggests while analyzing the data, that the emergence and identification of a theme can simply mean writing a 'code word' in the margin of a hard copy transcript (p. 190).<sup>50</sup> In the present research project, themes and important quotations were highlighted on the hard copy transcripts during the analysis.

Themes were guided by both a set of theoretical ideas supported by research (conducted by Griffin) prior to the interview being undertaken and by ideas emerging from (or identified in) the transcripts. These themes encompassed the 'hostile, conditionally tolerant and open and inclusive' climates for lesbian athletes in sport (Griffin, 1998, p. 92).<sup>51</sup> Coakley et al. (2009)

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<sup>49</sup> Please see Dionigi (2008, pp. 214-219) for a discussion of these methodologies as they relate to her research.

<sup>50</sup> In his description of thematic analysis, Gomm (2004) also suggests that the term 'theme' is used interchangeably with the term 'code'.

<sup>51</sup> For a detailed explanation of these climates, please see Chapter Two.

suggest that critical feminist theory is 'well suited for asking questions about issues of power and the dynamics of gender relations in sports and social life in general' (p. 42).

The element of 'coding' in thematic analysis is essential for themes to emerge. According to Liamputtong (2011), researchers using thematic analysis 'need to perform initial and axial coding in order to deconstruct data, code it up and find links between the data' (p. 173).

Initial coding involves an examination of the data to identify specific concepts and categories within the data. This type of coding was completed by using the interview questions as categories and concepts. In this research, data coding was conducted via a grid. All responses to the questions from the interviews were organised into a grid for each individual case study. The qualitative nature of the research meant that the entire response could not be added, but a shortened or abridged version was documented. If the full response was significant to the themes and concepts of the research, a marker was included on the grid to refer the researcher back to that particular transcript.

Minichiello et al. (2008) explained that axial coding is used to organise 'the data together by making connections between a major category and its sub-category' (p. 280). Axial coding is primarily concerned with how categories interrelate and how themes emerge. Interview material was coded into five distinct categories for the purposes of conducting the interview and analysing the data. These categories included: 1. 'General Background Information'; 2. 'Involvement with local sport'; 3. 'Local Sporting Club Experiences'; 4. 'Gay and Lesbian Issues in Sport'; and 5. 'Anti-Discrimination Policies'. The researcher used the interrelated categories that were formed in the open coding process to suggest the similarities or differences between the participant's responses during the interview process.

During the coding and analysis period, the researcher returned to the interview transcripts time and time again, until all thematic categories were exhausted; that is, until no new themes emerged. The next process in the research project to be embarked upon was ‘member checking’ and ‘peer reviewing’, which is detailed below.

### **Member Checking and Peer Reviewing**

A process of ‘member checking’ was also undertaken. Member checking (also called ‘informant feedback’) is a ‘specific way that researchers test their own meaning making by going back to, and asking for feedback from, those studied’ (Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 104). After the process of transcribing interviews took place, the participants were invited to view their particular transcript of their interview. Participants were given the opportunity to read and edit any of their responses.

The process of ‘peer review’ was also used to verify, validate and improve the research data, in particular the interview transcripts. Creswell (1998) describes the process of peer reviewing as a tool to provide an external check of the research process (p. 202).<sup>52</sup> Lincoln and Guba define the role of the peer reviewer or ‘de-briefer’ as:

A “devil’s advocate”... an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings (1985, p. 208).

Specifically a process was undertaken whereby the interview transcripts were reviewed by a peer, Dr Caroline Symons from Victoria University, to investigate the integrity of the researcher’s analysis.

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<sup>52</sup> Other authors of research methods have identified this process as ‘Integrity in Analysis’ and ‘Content Validity’. See Patton (1990); and Neuman (2000).

In addition to the research methods outlined above, this research project aims to provide information on the general characteristics of women's hockey in Melbourne. By comparing the basic demographical information provided by the participants and/or through the hockey clubs themselves, a picture of Melbourne hockey clubs will be formed. This information may include the following; the size of the hockey club in terms of membership; number of teams fielded into competition; the gendered distribution of teams and members; the number and gender of executive committee members; and the mean age of the participants from each club.

### **Limitations**

Most qualitative and quantitative research projects are affected by limitations. Several limitations may affect this research project, and these include; the interview format, the absence of anti-discrimination policy or documents, and the perceived sensitive nature of the research. The utilisation of a pre-determined set of interview questions can mean that not all information or 'angles' are pursued by the researcher. Recognising the importance and relevance of each response is difficult to ascertain at the beginning of a research project. Another limitation will be the absence of any anti-discrimination documents or policies at the club level. While the absence of such documents will be significant in itself, it will be difficult to gauge how closely policy is followed at the club level, if no policy exists.

Another challenge and possible limitation occurred in the recruitment of participants for this research project. For many women involved in local club level sport, the word 'lesbian' is sensitive. While recruiting, the researcher assured participants that the research would focus on the experiences of all women, not just lesbians. As previously mentioned, very few questions were asked of the researcher at the information sessions, however, many questions



came via email in the prospective participants own space and time. This perception about the research project and the ‘type’ of study made recruitment of participants difficult.

## **Reflexivity**

The author also acknowledged that a period of reflexivity was necessary. Reflexivity is the idea that an individuals’ beliefs are naturally biased, and that these biases and beliefs will be represented in the individuals work/research. According to Nightingale and Cromby (1999), there are two types of reflexivity, ‘personal and epistemological’. ‘Personal reflexivity’ ‘involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research’, while ‘Epistemological reflexivity’ ‘encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research’ (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 228).

As a lesbian identified woman, the researcher carried her own biases and expectations as to how the research would unfold. Therefore, the researcher must remain cognizant of these biases whilst interpreting the participant’s responses and the use of thematic analysis. To neutralize these biases described in both ‘personal reflexivity’ and ‘epistemological reflexivity’ in the interpretation of the data, the ‘peer reviewing’ process (outlined above) was utilised. This process outlined several examples of personal biases and assumptions made by the researcher in the initial analysis and were thus, reframed or omitted from the research discussion.

## **Conclusion**

The qualitative research methods of in-depth interviewing and policy analysis are common practices in social research. These two particular methodological approaches are components of the multiple case study process. Thematic analysis has been used to examine and code the interview data into the specific themes that form the research findings. Methods proposed in this research thesis are similar to those used in studies conducted by Elling et al. (2003), Dionigi (2008) and Symons (2010).

The following chapter provides the legislative and policy context of the recreation hockey clubs within the research. Chapter Four begins with a review of literature surrounding the area of policy, laws, initiatives and resources related to local sporting clubs. As a result of the document analysis, the culture of sporting clubs and in particular, hockey clubs in Australia are explored in relation to the enactment of, and engagement with, such policies, laws and resources. The 'Member Protection' policy from Hockey Australia, along with the process used to distribute this policy is also analysed. Finally, recommendations for alternative models of policy dissemination are offered in Chapter Four.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Legislative and Policy Context**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents information arising from the examination of current laws, policies, initiatives and research surrounding sexuality diversity and equity in Australian (and particularly Victorian) sport, as well as the culture of field hockey in Australia, in relation to the current research project. Additionally, a contextual overview of literature surrounding policy and practice is reviewed. Little has been written around recreational sporting clubs in relation to policy. Therefore, before presenting each case study, it is important to situate this study within the existing state and national policies related to diversity and equity in sport, particularly as these pertain to sporting clubs adherence to their obligations under such codes and laws. Examining these laws and policies aligns with one of the principal aims of this research project – to explore the range of anti-discrimination legislation and policy and the expectations that this policy carries for hockey associations and community-based sporting clubs.

In order to contextualise this policy information, this chapter both reviews the current documents, initiatives and research in sport, as well as situates Hockey Australia, Hockey Victoria, and hockey culture in relation to such policies. Any policies and research that have been published recently that relate to creating non-discriminative and ‘safe spaces’ for women and, in particular, lesbian athletes in sport will be explored. Some of these policies, initiatives and research include the ‘Play by the Rules’ initiative, the ‘Come out to Play’ research and the ‘Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport’ policy, all of which are pertinent to sport policy and culture, for various reasons, within the state of Victoria.

An analysis of sporting club culture in Australia in general will also be undertaken, along with an examination of hockey club culture in Australia in particular. The purpose of including such a discussion in this chapter is to highlight some of the historical and current cultural nuances which impact upon the ability of sport to embrace and enact policy and initiatives in diversity and equity. Beginning with an examination of the legal status of LGBT issues in Australia, several other themes are identified and explored throughout this chapter. Some of these include: sexual diversity and state anti-discrimination law, the law and sexuality discrimination in sport, national and state sporting organisations, education of homophobia-free sport, and the culture of hockey clubs and hockey in Australia.

### **Legal Status of LGBT in Australia**

In terms of matters such as superannuation and health care, Australia is seen at the forefront of human rights and social progression in relation to equalising LGBT rights. Over the past few decades, the social attitudes of the general public towards LGBT people in Australia have changed considerably in these areas. Until recently the rights of same-sex identified people and couples in Australia have been limited in terms of family healthcare, superannuation, tax laws, and marriage and parental rights. A change in some federal laws has brought about increasing numbers of same-sex couples creating families<sup>53</sup> (Rainbow Families Council, n.d.). In 2007, a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report titled, *Same Sex: Same Entitlements*, outlined 58 federal laws that breached the rights of same-sex couples (Same Sex, 2007). Since 2008, under the Rudd Government, 84 laws thought to discriminate against same-sex attracted individuals and couples were changed to cover areas like superannuation, tax, health, employment entitlements and aged care (Same Sex Reforms, 2008).

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<sup>53</sup> It could also be argued that the law changes enabled recognition of lesbian parented families that already existed also.

Despite progress made towards full equality for the LGBT community, there is still a way to go in Australia.<sup>54</sup> Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2007-2010) and current Prime Minister Julia Gillard,<sup>55</sup> have led the traditional ‘working class’ Labor party, whereby fairness and equality, social justice and compassion are core concerns. However, it still transpires that women cannot serve on the ‘front line’ in the Australian Defence Force and lesbians and gays do not have the right to legally marry. According to the Commonwealth Marriage Act, the current definition of marriage ‘means the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life’ (Marriage Act, 2006). By definition, this excludes marriage for those in same-sex relationships. In 2010, the ‘Greens’ political party presented a bill in the Senate for an amendment to the marriage act to include same-sex marriage.<sup>56</sup> However, it did not pass Senate.

Equality for every member of society can be considered a human rights issue. In his book titled, *Virtually Normal – An Argument About Homosexuality*, Sullivan suggests that legal and political access to marriage should not vary from citizen to citizen (1996, p. 209).

According to Sullivan (1996):

The ability to treat others as equal politically, while respecting their sometimes enormous cultural dissimilarity, is not just a contemporary necessity; it’s perhaps as close as we can get to a truly contemporary civic virtue (p. 210).

The right for same-sex couples to be legally married is often considered a bench-mark for gaining equality in same-sex rights. Yet, Australia stands apart from other Western jurisdictions (e.g., New Zealand, Canada, Britain, Denmark, France, The Netherlands,

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<sup>54</sup> Most recent changes in legislation have been made under Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Up until 2007, laws affecting the daily lives of LGBT individuals had remained for many years prior, mainly due to the long standing conservative Howard government. A Liberal government headed by Prime Minister John Howard, was in office from 1996 through to 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Julia Gillard’s government was elected in 2010, and at the time of writing this chapter, Gillard was Prime Minister.

<sup>56</sup> Further information about this Bill can be found on the ‘Greens’ website. Retrieved from <http://greensmps.org.au/taxonomy/term/97/all>

Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Spain, some parts of Switzerland and several states in the United States) in terms of legislation that permits gay and lesbian marriage or civil union (Human Rights Commission, 2009).

### **Sexual Diversity and State Anti-Discrimination Law**

Federal laws often inform and influence state laws within Australia. However, state laws are not necessarily amended to reflect all of the changes in Federal law. According to the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (1995) discrimination on the basis of 'sexual orientation' is prohibited. The Act describes sexual orientation as 'homosexuality (including lesbianism), bisexuality or heterosexuality' (p. 14).

While the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act is a step forward, there are also certain difficulties with it. Chapman's (1997) study examines the messages of subordination that are contained in various state anti-discrimination statutes 'to uncover heterosexism and, in some instances, homophobia, within the language of the provisions' (p. 60). According to Chapman, the term 'homosexual' appears to be more of an imposed label of non-heterosexuals, rather than an identity that has been chosen by the gay and lesbian community (1997, pp. 60-61). The term homosexual is rarely used by same-sex orientated individuals, and Chapman suggests that the 'label of homosexuality appears, by contrast, to be the preferred terminology of anti-gay/lesbian groups and is associated, by those groups, with sin, sickness and abusive sexual behaviour' (1997, pp. 61-62). Each of the state or territory anti-discrimination legislations in Australia use the label or term of homosexuality.

Only two states or territories include trans-sexuality in their definitions. The Northern Territory of Australia (NT) and the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act define sexuality or

sexual orientation as the sexual characteristics or imputed sexual characteristics of heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality or trans-sexuality (Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act, 2010, p. 7; and Anti-Discrimination Act Tasmania, 1998, Act 46). The key difference between these two states/territories and other state definitions is that gender identity, rather than sexual orientation, appears to be a significant factor.

All but one of the state and territory Anti-Discrimination legislations refers to bisexuality as a protected attribute. The only state legislation that does not do this is the New South Wales (NSW) Anti-Discrimination Act (1977).<sup>57</sup> The NSW Anti-Discrimination Act refers to only the term 'homosexuals' which is defined as both male and female homosexuals (Section 4C). No mention is made of bisexual, trans-sexual or lesbian in the act.

The Queensland (QLD) Anti Discrimination Act (1991)<sup>58</sup> makes no mention of either lesbian or trans-sexual and defines sexuality as heterosexuality, homosexuality or bisexuality. The only states or territories that mention the term 'lesbian' or 'lesbianism' are the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Discrimination Act (1991)<sup>59</sup>, the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (1995), and the Western Australian (WA) Equal Opportunity Act (1984).<sup>60</sup> The ACT Discrimination Act (1991) defines sexuality as 'heterosexuality, homosexuality (including lesbianism) or bisexuality' (p. 75); as mentioned above, the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act states that 'sexual orientation defines homosexuality (including lesbianism), bisexuality or heterosexuality' (p. 13); and the WA Equal Opportunity Act (1984) defines 'sexual orientation as heterosexuality, homosexuality, lesbianism or bisexuality' (p. 7). Chapman

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<sup>57</sup> This act was last amended on the 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2009. Bisexuality has still not been added as a protected attribute.

<sup>58</sup> This act was last amended on the 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2010. No changes were made to include lesbian or transsexual.

<sup>59</sup> This act was last amended on the 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2010. Lesbianism still remains a protected attribute.

<sup>60</sup> This act was last amended on the 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2010. Lesbianism still remains a protected attribute.

points out that ‘the issue of explicitly naming lesbianism is important in terms of access by women to grounds worded as homosexuality’ (1997, p. 66). There are few other ways that oppression can be as effective as non-acknowledgement, which is the case when the term ‘lesbian’ is not included in anti-discrimination legislation.

In the definition of sexual orientation in the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (1995), heterosexuality is included as a protected attribute.<sup>61</sup> Scholars such as Morgan (1996) and Chapman (1997) suggest that heterosexuality in the list of protected attributes is completely unnecessary, and that by listing heterosexuality, the protection granted to the gay and lesbian community through the Act is minimised. Chapman states that:

Including heterosexuality gives credence to the notion that gay men and lesbians have the power and the will to discriminate against heterosexual people because of their heterosexuality. This sends not only an inaccurate message but it is one that obscures the systemic nature and characteristics of discrimination against people with same-sex desires (1997, p. 67).

Chapman raises an important consideration, although it could be said that in certain situations/settings heterosexuals could be a ‘minority’ and possibly discriminated against.<sup>62</sup>

Morgan’s point about the inclusion of heterosexuality as a protected attribute does not depict or represent the reality of the dynamics of accepted and marginalised sexualities. Lenskyj demonstrates this point by suggesting that heterosexuality (unlike homosexuality) is ‘entrenched through social institutions such as the nuclear family, through cultural forms such as television and the print media’ (2003, p. 4). It could be further suggested that through most mainstream religions, educational institutions and most cultural discourses that

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<sup>61</sup> Although ‘heterosexuality’ is listed as a protective attribute in other states as well, Victoria is a focus due to the nature of the research. The hockey clubs investigated in the research are all Victorian hockey clubs.

<sup>62</sup> For an example of this in the sporting world, see Shire, Brackenridge and Fuller (2000).



‘heterosexual hegemony’ is the norm.<sup>63</sup> Lenskyj suggests that the term ‘heterosexual hegemony’ has its limitations as it suggests ‘ideological control by *consensus*, as distinct from *coercion*’ where in fact in some cases the dominant discourse of heterosexuality has been and is maintained by violence and force (2003, p. 4).<sup>64</sup>

## **LGBT Rights and Protections**

In 2008, research conducted by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS) at La Trobe University investigated the ‘underreporting’ of heterosexual violence (Leonard, Mitchell, Pitts & Patel, 2008). Around 85% of the participants in this study had been subjected to heterosexual abuse, and just over 20% had been physically attacked or assaulted (without a weapon) due to their presumed sexual orientation (Leonard et al., 2008, pp. 23-24). Another similar recent study conducted by ARCSHS found similar results. *Writing Themselves In 3* is the third national report on the sexual health and well-being of same sex attracted young people (14 - 22 years old) in Australia (Hillier, Jones, Monagle, Overton, Gahan, Blackman & Mitchell, 2010). This research found that ‘61% of young people reported verbal abuse because of homophobia, 18% physical abuse and 26% ‘other’ forms of homophobia (Hillier et al., 2010, p. 11). This physical abuse ranged from the destruction of property, to severe physical bashings, sexual abuse and hospitalisation (Hillier et al., 2010).

The suggestion that heterosexuals require the same level of protection as LGBT individuals needs more consideration. While circumstances of discrimination against heterosexuals is less widespread than that of the LGBT community, at present, heterosexuality does not

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<sup>63</sup> Lenskyj uses the term ‘heterosexual hegemony’ when describing the ‘ideological control on sexuality issues...’ in Lenskyj (2003, p. 4).

<sup>64</sup> Lenskyj discusses the work of both Kinsman, (1987); and Rich (1980) in relation to this area.

require an equal level of protection as LGBT. This is because of the pervasiveness of heterosexism and homophobia within various social institutions and relationships.

### **The Law and Sexuality Discrimination in Sport**

As part of wider society, the institution of sport is covered by the various state based anti-discrimination acts within Australia. Despite this, sport continues to be an arena where homophobic discrimination has taken place. Much of the research that has been carried out in the area of sexuality and sport suggests that homophobic discrimination puts constraints on the ways that both heterosexual and homosexual people express themselves.<sup>65</sup> An example of this occurring was the accusations that Olympic swimmer Ian Thorpe has faced in regards to his purported sexual orientation.<sup>66</sup> While Thorpe identifies himself as heterosexual, he experiences many of the issues of discrimination that plague gay men.

Clarke suggests that the ‘current political climate for lesbians continues to be a chilly one’ (2002, p. 209). In her study of lesbian physical education teachers in the United Kingdom, Clarke (2002) proposes that this climate is most pronounced in the highly gendered arena of sport (p. 209). As a result, sexuality based discrimination in sport continues to be a significant issue, particularly for lesbian athletes who engage in sporting activities in a realm that disenfranchises women from the point of view of both gender and sexuality.

According to another study conducted on lesbian sporting experience in the U.S.A. by Griffin, ‘[o]ne of the most effective means of controlling women in sport is to challenge the femininity and heterosexuality of women athletes’ (1998, p. 18). This homophobic

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<sup>65</sup> See Cox and Thompson (2001); Griffin (1998); Shire et al. (2000); Elling et al. (2003); and Caudwell (2002).

<sup>66</sup> Ian Thorpe has faced a barrage of insinuation regarding his sexual orientation. Such allegations have prompted him again in 2009 to refute these allegations. One such article appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* (29 January, 2009).

discrimination forces many lesbian athletes and coaches to go to considerable lengths to hide their sexualities from team-mates, employers, sponsors and administrators, due to the negative impact that disclosure is thought to have on team selection, sponsorship deals, job offers and job terminations. This is particularly prevalent in numerous states of the U.S.A., where anti-discrimination laws do not protect lesbians.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) provides a national sports system that deals with all aspects of sport policy and education in Australia. Together with all State/Territory sport and recreation and anti-discrimination agencies, the ASC has produced information and online learning materials about 'how to prevent and deal with discrimination, harassment and child abuse for the sport and recreation industry' called 'Play by the Rules' (PBTR) (Play by the Rules, n.d.). This is one of the main education resources in the sport and recreation industry dealing with these issues and it is a resource that is accessible to everyone. The PBTR website includes information about discrimination and the law as they apply to sport in Australia.

The PBTR site states that the laws that govern sport can be grouped into two distinct types of rules, internal and external (Play by the Rules, n.d.). The internal rules apply to those set out by individual sporting organisations and clubs, while the external rules 'exist in the form of statutes and common law' (Play by the Rules, n.d.). The external rules that apply to sport are a community standard of conduct and the laws that apply in every other arena of society.

The 'internal' rules in sport are usually in the form of a code of conduct. A code of conduct is prepared by a head sporting organisation to govern each individual and each sporting club aligned with it. For example; the governing body of hockey in Australia, Hockey Australia,

has prepared a 'Member Protection Policy'. This policy is available to state and territory hockey organisations, along with all hockey clubs and hockey participants in Australia. The grounds for discrimination in sport in accordance with the law in wider society (external rules) include such factors as sex, race, age, marital status, pregnancy, impairment and sexual orientation.

Several other state sporting organisations in Victoria specifically, have provided a good framework for 'code of conduct' and 'member protection' policies. Basketball Victoria has produced a plethora of resources related to member protection, particularly in the area of wheelchair basketball. Basketball Victoria also produce a regular newsletter on their website, labeled 'inclusion' (Basketball Victoria, n.d.). Women's Golf Victoria is also active in regards to inclusion. Through regularly promoting educational sessions and policy surrounding equal opportunity, they have also recognised the need for a policy for participants who have undergone sex-reassignment surgery (Women's Golf Victoria, n.d.). The publications, educational resources and proactive policies developed by organisations such as Basketball Victoria and Women's Golf Victoria, provide an exemplar of inclusion for other sporting organisations to follow.

### **National and State Sporting Organisations**

Along with providing an effective national sports system, the ASC also provides funding to many national sporting organisations to be 'compliant' with the law and implement member protection policies. Funding to national sporting organisations can filter down to state sporting organisations and local sporting clubs. Other sources of funding to state sporting organisations can come from corporate sponsors, and other government organisations such as

Sport and Recreation Victoria and Vic Health.

Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) is a state government organisation under the umbrella of the Department of Planning and Community Development. Through sport and recreational activities, Sport and Recreation Victoria aim to get more people involved in the community. SRV also assists the sport and recreation sector to develop and improve community sport and recreation facilities throughout Victoria, and funds sport in the form of grants to a wide range of recipients from local community clubs through to elite level sport.

Vic Health is the Victoria Health Promotion Foundation. According to the Vic Health website: 'Promoting health by fostering change in social, economic, cultural and physical environments underpins our mission' (Vic Health, n.d.). Vic Health also provides funding to health promotion initiatives and community clubs. It distributes more than \$23 million annually, mostly through funding schemes and research.<sup>67</sup>

The funding that Vic Health provides sporting organisations in Victoria is supplied based on certain provisions. According to Eime, Payne and Harvey, these provisions include providing 'welcoming and inclusive environments, sports injury prevention, 'smoke-free' environments, responsible serving of alcohol, sun protection and healthy eating' (2008, p. 146). These requirements are purportedly met by sporting organisations and their subsequent sporting clubs in order to receive such funding. However, Eime et al. (2008) surveyed over 50 representatives from state sporting associations, and in general many of the participants

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<sup>67</sup> For more information on Sport and Recreation Victoria or Vic Health, see their websites - Sport and Recreation Victoria - <http://www.sport.vic.gov.au/>. Vic Health - <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en.aspx>.

felt that the focus area of ‘welcoming and inclusive environments’ was lacking structure. One participant felt that there was not enough guidance or support offered by Vic Health to implement such a policy (Eime et al., 2008, p. 150).

Sporting clubs carry a responsibility to provide a code of conduct or to implement a code of conduct or anti-discrimination policy prepared by the sporting association. It is a difficult task to establish how effective this ‘filtering down’ process is, and to determine if all local sporting clubs have implemented a policy on inclusive environments. It is also difficult to ascertain if all local sporting clubs implement and abide by their state organisation’s policies. The ‘Club Development Manager’ from Hockey Victoria claimed that that Hockey Victoria did not assess the hockey club’s uptake of policy and educational resources (personal communication, July 6, 2010). As a result, there has been no evaluation of the local club by the state sporting association on this information. As most recreational level sporting clubs are managed by and rely on the services of volunteers for the daily duties at the club, implementation of such a code is not always evident or possible.

Sporting clubs are responsible for developing and implementing such policies that deal with many issues, including diversity and discrimination. The PBTR site provides a section on understanding the roles of sports governing bodies and sporting clubs (Play by the Rules, n.d.). The responsibilities of sporting clubs in regards to adopting a code of conduct and anti-discrimination policies are outlined in the following section.

### **Understanding the Roles of Governing Bodies and Clubs**

It is important that governing bodies understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to member clubs and groups. These roles are summarised in the table below:

**Table 5 – Role of Governing Bodies, Clubs and Groups**

<b>Role of governing bodies (including peak bodies and associations)</b>	<b>Role of clubs and groups</b>
Develop, review and if necessary change your constitution and by-laws, to include provisions for dealing with discrimination, harassment and child protection.  Policies should cover paid and unpaid staff as well as players and participants, parents and spectators.	Adopt and implement the policy.
Develop or update codes of conduct.	Adopt and implement the codes of conduct.
Develop practical guidelines for those working with children or other participants, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure there is no discrimination in team selection and access to equipment and facilities</li> <li>• minimise the risk for those working with children.</li> </ul>	Adopt practical guidelines.
Forward information on discrimination, harassment and child protection to clubs and groups.	Read and make a commitment to the material forwarded by the governing body.
Coordinate training on discrimination, harassment and child protection. Your State/Territory Department of Sport and Recreation can help with this task.	Undertake training on discrimination, harassment and child protection (particularly the nominated Member Protection Information Officer).
Provide guidelines and information on all aspects of recruiting staff and volunteers, including employment, promotion, screening and Working With Children Checks.	Get the right people by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adopting non-discriminatory selection, recruitment and promotion procedures</li> <li>• implementing screening and police checks.</li> </ul> <p>Note: In NSW, Queensland and the Northern Territory screening and Working With Children Checks are a legal requirement.</p>
Appoint a Member Protection Information Officer and provide a point of contact and source of advice for clubs.	Appoint a Member Protection Information Officer in your club. Make sure all members of the club know who the contact officer is, their role and the procedures for making a complaint. Make contact with the peak body or association to clarify any concerns or issues.
Respond to and/or investigate complaints of discrimination, harassment and allegations of child abuse.	Respond to any complaint of discrimination, harassment or child abuse. Seek advice and make contact with the governing body if there is any incident of child abuse. Follow your club's complaint policy and procedure (Play by the Rules, n.d.).

A sporting club's responsibilities are quite extensive and it would be fair to say that not all sporting clubs adhere to these responsibilities. As mentioned above, Eime et al. examined the factors affecting 'healthy and welcoming' environments in sporting clubs in Victoria.

According to Eime et al., 'sporting organisations have limited capacity and power to mandate changes in [sporting] clubs' (2007, p. 153). Many volunteers have family and employment commitments outside of the sporting club that take precedence in their daily lives. At present the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (Vic Health) provides funding to state sporting organisations to develop healthy and welcoming environments in their affiliated local sporting clubs, however, not all sporting clubs have adopted this development.

Eime et al. states that:

The limited capacity of clubs to implement HWE [Healthy and Welcoming Environments] policies and practices and the general lack of support given by the SSAs [State Sporting Associations] to their respective clubs were two of the most common barriers reported to the implementation of HWE club practices and policies (2007, p. 150).

Additionally, policy and code of conduct messages at state level sporting organisations may not necessarily be filtering down to club or local level sport for various reasons. The main reason for this is that most sporting clubs in Australia are volunteer based, with no paid staff, unlike college sports in the United States which are staffed by paid staff. As discussed earlier, some of the other reasons for this may include poor communication between the state sporting organisation and clubs, the capacity of volunteers at the sporting club to carry these messages and a possible lack of education of anti-discrimination policies and complaints procedures, along with entrenched traditions and cultures.<sup>68</sup> The PBTR site helps to inform sporting clubs on their responsibilities to provide a fair and safe environment for all participants. This information will be explored in the following section.

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<sup>68</sup> For an analysis on Hockey Victoria, please see this discussion later in the chapter.



## Local Sporting Clubs Anti-Discrimination Obligations

Even though policy guidelines concerning discrimination in Australian sport are clearly outlined, and a responsibility for sporting clubs and organisations to develop anti-discrimination policies exists, discrimination still occurs. Publications such as the *Harassment-Free Sport*<sup>69</sup> collection produced by the Australian Sports Commission are designed to aid in the education of sporting participants, coaches, administrators and managers. While this resource was available prior to the development of the Play by the Rules website, it has provided a good starting point to education on discriminatory practices in sport.

It is not clear whether all sporting clubs in Australia implement a code of conduct or anti-discrimination policy. There are various reasons that would account for this. Club officials, for instance, may not be aware that they need to; some club officials may feel that an anti-discrimination policy is not necessary for their club; and other (mostly volunteered based) clubs may not have the time, capacity or inclination to implement such a policy.

Not all volunteers who take on administrative roles within sporting clubs have the capacity to carry out all required tasks. The organisation of weekly matches (teams, umpires, venues, etc.) and other management concerns take priority on a weekly basis. Sharpe (2006) suggests that very few volunteers are ‘professionally competent’ in managing a sporting club. She explains:

Generally, grassroots [sporting] associations are characterized for their low capacity in “professional” competencies related to managing the organization. For example, members rarely come to grassroots associations with any prior training in non-profit

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<sup>69</sup> The Australian Sports Commission has prepared a number of publications educating on ‘Harassment Free Sport’ for various groups, including coaches, athletes, sports administrators and guidelines to ‘Address Homophobia and Sexuality Discrimination in Sport’ (2000).

management, volunteer administration, or leadership (Sharpe, 2006, p. 389).

Additionally, as mentioned above, volunteers often have everyday challenges with family and work commitments. Therefore, the ability to circulate information from the head sporting organisation that is not immediately relevant to the club or team, such as policy, can be discarded.

‘Affirmative Action’ policies are also employed as a way of combating gender discrimination. Affirmative action is used to benefit an underrepresented group, usually as a means to contradict a history of discrimination and oppression. While more proactive than anti-discrimination policy, affirmative action policies are in place for women in some sporting organisations. McKay (1997) acknowledges that affirmative action policies are generally adopted by organisations to counter the effects of a history of discrimination, which in this case, involve women’s employment opportunities at sporting organisations. However, McKay’s research found that only a few [of these sporting] organisations (operated by state and federal governments in Australia, New Zealand and Canada), had written affirmative action policies (1997, p. 114). According to McKay (1998) sporting organisations can respond to affirmative action policies in a variety of ways, which include; ‘pro-action, reaction, and benign neglect’ (p. 113). He suggests that:

Proactive organisations practice affirmative action even in the absence of legislation. Reactive organisations merely respond to affirmative action in order to avoid litigation or because there are funding incentives. Organisations characterised by benign neglect institute affirmative action only if they are legally compelled to (McKay, 1997, p. 113).

If more sporting organisations were proactive in implementing affirmative action policies for employing women, there would be more women in leadership roles in sporting organisations in Australia.

In McKay's (1997) research, most organisations respond to affirmative action policies in a reactive or neglectful manner. McKay explains that through his research, he discovered that very few organisations had affirmative action policies written down, and most male managers believed that all employees were treated equally (1997, p. 114). According to McKay, '[i]nsofar as affirmative action was pursued, it was always in terms of getting individual women to the same starting line as men, rather than responding strategically to gendered, structural inequalities at work and home' (1997, p. 114). Therefore, many sports organisations' policies were based on liberal feminism, and very few were based on critical feminism, which acknowledges systemic inequalities. The immediate problem is countered without looking deeper in to the roots of such inequalities, such as the hegemonic power dimensions endemic at so many sporting organisations.

McKay labels this structure of power 'androcentric culture' (1997, p. xiv). He suggests several contributing factors to this culture, including: 'occupation segregation'; 'links between segregation, profitability and labor control'; the 'exclusion of women from accumulating wealth or attaining a secure career position'; the 'maintenance of sexual demarcations through work practices that reinforce male solidarity', and; 'women's disproportionate responsibility for child care' (McKay, 1997, p. 20). Issues such as childcare, domestic duties, travel and prolonged working hours had 'relatively little impact on married men's careers' (McKay, 1997, p. 61). This contention is also explored in research conducted by Craig and Sawriker (2009); Knoppers and Anthonissen's (2008); and Knoppers and Anthonissen's (2008). McKay (1997) further suggests that 'most married men could separate their work and family duties and give priority to the former, most married women had to combine them' (p. 61).

In a recent study, Sundstrom, Marchart and Symons (2011) found that gender imbalances still exist in Australian sport. At the 2010 Commonwealth Games, only 14% of Australian coaches were female, and many of these women played a secondary role to the (male) 'Head Coach' in their respective sports (Sundstrom et al., 2011, p. 107).

Essentially all of these factors combine to produce a culture within sporting organisations where women are systematically disenfranchised from power structures. A critical awareness of this process will interrogate the power inequalities and privileges in play at sporting organisations and sporting clubs. Systematic policy and strategies to address such inequalities (such as the affirmative action policies) is required. While anti-discrimination policy is a legal requirement in sport, an active adoption (such as a community development model) of affirmative action in regards to sexuality discrimination and diversity is needed at organisation and club level.

Research on diversity in sport has been carried out in the United States by Fink and Pastore (1999). They examined the lack of diversity in sport using business literature, in light of diversity receiving 'a great deal of attention in the corporate world' (Fink & Pastore, 1999, p. 310). Fink and Pastore (1999) suggest that 'there are very few documented examples of proactive diversity management in sport, physical education and kinesiology' (p. 324). They further explain:

To proactively manage diversity takes constant attention, a firm commitment, and often, an overhaul of the current organizational culture. As a result, few organisations fully practice proactive diversity management (Fink & Pastore, 1999, p. 324).

According to Fink and Pastore, many sports organisations have been 'highly criticized for their lack of attention to diversity issues' (1999, p. 325).

Information surrounding diversity issues in sport needs to be dispersed more readily to sporting organisations, clubs and individuals. The current education processes surrounding diversity and homophobia in sport, both internationally and nationally, are explored in the following section.

### **Education of Homophobia-free Sport**

- **North America, UK and Europe**

In the United States, a nation-wide program called ‘It Takes a Team’ is run by the Women’s Sport Federation. ‘It Takes a Team’ is an educational program and resource designed for sporting organisations to implement and to inform on homophobia in sport. According to the Women’s Sport Federation website:

It takes a team’ is an education project focused on eliminating homophobia as a barrier to all women and men participating in sport. [Their] primary goals are to develop and disseminate practical educational information and resources to athletic administrators, coaches, parents and athletes at the high school and college levels to make sport safe and welcoming for all (Women’s Sport Federation, n.d.).<sup>70</sup>

Similarly and according to their website, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) have run ‘Addressing Homophobia in Sport’ workshops nationally. These workshops have been an extension of their position paper on the nature and impact of homophobia in Canadian sport titled ‘Seeing the Invisible, Speaking about the Unspoken’ (Seeing the Invisible, 2006).

A traditionally masculine sporting association, the Football Association (FA) in England is also ‘tackling homophobia’ in the UK. The FA held a LGBT summit meeting to gain advice on how they could be fighting homophobia on and off the pitch. As a consequence of this

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<sup>70</sup> Further information can be found at the following website - <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Issues-And-Research/Homophobia/About-It-Takes-A-Team.aspx>.

summit, different forms of education and training for athletes, coaches, managers, administrators and referees have been proposed to question homophobia and promote diversity (Tackling Homophobia, 2006). However, after such a positive start, little has happened and there has been resistance to this education. A recent report on English Football by Stonewall,<sup>71</sup> showed that seven out of ten fans have heard homophobic abuse directed at players during a game (2009). The report, *Leagues Behind – Footballs’ Failure to Handle Anti-Gay Abuse*, has branded the sport ‘institutionally homophobic’ (2009). The survey of over 2,000 football fans, found that the majority of participants felt that the head sporting organisations (such as the FA) do not do enough to tackle homophobia in football (Leagues Behind, 2009).

Elsewhere in the British Isles, research recently commissioned by SportsScotland, Sport Northern Ireland, Sport England and UK Sport, reviewed sexual orientation in sport as it pertains to policy implications (Brackenridge, Alldred, Maddocks & Rivers, 2008).

Brackenridge et al. (2008) examined the policy context, and recommended that sports organisations implement ‘effective policies to ensure LGBT people are not subject to discrimination and harassment in a sports context’ (p. 7). It is pertinent to acknowledge that transforming inclusive homophobia free policy to inclusive homophobia free practice takes time and that this cultural change is only beginning.

- **Victoria and Australia**

Very little literature and education exists in Australian sport that addresses homophobia and sexuality discrimination directly. While publications such as the Australian Sports Commission’s (ASC) *Harassment-Free Sport: Guidelines to Address Homophobia and*

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<sup>71</sup> Stonewall is the peak LGBT rights organisation in the United Kingdom.

*Sexuality Discrimination in Sport* (2000) have been useful in educating individuals and sporting clubs, there is a need for a more proactive and applied model. The PBTR website provides the information needed for recreational level sporting clubs, but there is no mandate for sporting clubs to use this website and its affiliated resources to assist their shaping of a homophobia free culture. While the website is available, it is only useful to those athletes, coaches and administrators who visit the site.

Recently, a groundbreaking report on the ‘sports experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people in Victoria’ (Symons et al., 2010) was launched with much publicity and support from high profile Australian athletes and coaches.<sup>72</sup> As a result of these high profile supporters of the report, several radio and television interviews were aired on the report. The participants involved in the ‘Come Out to Play’ research were asked about their knowledge of policies that promote ‘safety and inclusion’ at their clubs (Symons et al., 2010). Symons et al. explains that ‘86.6% of participants from queer-identified clubs reported that their club does have these policies, while only 12.1% of participants from mainstream clubs’ suggested that such a policy existed (2010, p. 72).

Symons et al. (2010) made a number of recommendations for Australian sport, including the expansion of research in the area of LGBT sporting experiences Australia wide (p. 83).

These recommendations are outlined in the table below (Table 6):

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<sup>72</sup> For a summary of the main findings of this report, please see Chapter Two.

**Table 6 – Recommendations from the ‘Come Out to Play’ research**

1. The findings of this research provide support for the initiative of the Australian Sports Commission Sports Integrity Program which is promoting inclusive practice and challenging homophobia and sexism through a few national sporting codes. This work should be supported and expanded.
2. It is clear that homophobia and sexism pervade many sporting environments which are either hostile or conditionally tolerant to LGBT people. This limiting of options for participation of a significant number of Victorians is unacceptable, and requires more proactive measures to be undertaken at the club level to create more inclusive environments that are sustainable in both rural and urban communities.
3. The importance of early experiences of physical education and school sport in shaping participants’ future enjoyment of sport is strongly suggested in this study. In addition, coaches and other volunteer and professional sporting mentors have the opportunity to foster a love of sport at any time. The need for proactive inclusive practices wherever sport is played should be an essential element of both the pre-service and in-service training of physical education and sports teachers and other human movement professionals. This training should also be included in courses for coaches and other volunteers in sporting clubs.
4. This research focused on participants over 18 years of age whose early experiences of physical education and sport at school were not current and commonly occurred at some time in the past. It is important we know more about same- sex attracted and gender questioning young people in terms of their current experiences both of school sport and sports participation in their communities. Additional research should be carried out to explore this often vulnerable group and their access to community connectedness through sport.
5. There is little collected in official data sets to provide accurate statistics about LGBT participation in sport and physical activity in Australia. It is recommended that wherever data is collected on participation in sport and physical activity (for example, the Sweeney report or in ABS data sets) that data on sexual orientation and gender identity (beyond male/female) be part of that data collection.
6. This research was carried out in Victoria with relatively few resources. The study lends itself to informing a larger Australia-wide research project which extends the survey data with interviews of participants and stakeholders including members and leaders of sporting associations. Such a project should be funded by the main research funding bodies of health, sport, physical activity and social inclusion within Victoria and Australia, as a matter of priority (Symons et al., 2010, p. 83).

These recommendations provide a platform for required research areas in the field of sport and LGBT involvement in Australia. However, the initiatives and research addressing homophobia in sport in Victoria have been limited thus far. Over the last several years, the ‘Come Out to Play’ research, the ‘Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport’ policy



and the 'Respect and Responsibility Policy' for the Australian Rules Football have been launched in Victoria. Rather than being widespread and systematic, the efforts of a few 'champions' (discussed below) have provided incremental steps towards homophobia free sport.

Dr Caroline Symons from Victoria University started the first educational workshops to address homophobia in sport, titled 'Come Out to Play', in her university classes. This educational initiative was developed further with the direct support of Victoria University, Sport and Recreation Victoria, along with the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria. This initiative was held as a panel style discussion/interactive workshop for sporting groups/clubs within Victoria to attend.<sup>73</sup> The purpose of the workshop was to discuss homophobia, stereotypes and to explore strategies for combating homophobia in local level sport.

Hemphill and Symons have provided insight into the nature and impact of homophobia on young people, along with examples of 'curriculum materials and intervention strategies to promote sexuality inclusive teaching and learning in university level physical education and sports studies programs' (2009, p. 397). Along with this research, Symons, Hemphill, and Walsh (from Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria) produced an information booklet for university students and staff involved in sports studies programs (2006). This booklet aims to make learning and teaching at university more inclusive for gay, lesbian and bisexual students and staff. Hemphill and Symons (2009) explain that this resource can be used to help prepare 'all students in physical education, sport counselling, exercise science, coaching and sport management to work more effectively in settings of social and cultural diversity, in

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<sup>73</sup> These educational workshops were held between 2004 and 2006.

Australia and elsewhere' (pp. 397-398). Such as resource provides understandings of homophobia, and will act as a useful resource for many.

Also in Victoria, in 2010,<sup>74</sup> the 'Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport' was launched. The code, released by the State government of Victoria, aims to ensure that:

Every person in Victoria has the right to participate in community sport which is safe, welcoming and inclusive. Equally everyone plays a part in ensuring their actions and behaviours are supportive of these values (Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport, 2010, p. 1).

The code further outlines that from 2010, all State Sporting Associations (SSAs) (including Hockey Victoria) were required to pledge their support for the code, by confirming the following actions:

1. Ensure all components of the Code are included in an existing SSA code or through the creation of a new code for the SSA;
2. Develop appropriate reporting and assessment processes for issuing penalties for breaches of the Code;
3. Identify what penalties they will put in place for any breaches of the Code; and
4. Inform all affiliated clubs of their obligations under the Code, their expectations for reporting, assessing and acting upon breaches (Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport, 2010. p. 3).

Sporting associations and clubs who do not adhere to the code or cannot prove their adherence will not be eligible for any SRV funding. The code outlined that any sporting association or sporting club 'applying for funding through Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) from 2010/11 will need to demonstrate their adherence and enforcement of the Code in order to be eligible for funding' (2010, p. 3).

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<sup>74</sup> The 'Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport' was not in place when the 'Come Out to Play' research was launched.

Observing such adherence in State Sporting Associations will be difficult to carry out at a practical level. Another problem with this type of approach – the ‘top down’ approach<sup>75</sup> for a code of conduct is that club members are forced to comply with such a code without education and therefore, such a method will only promote compliance, rather than knowledge and cultural change.

Dyson (2010) offers an alternative approach to implementing policy and programs into sporting clubs, with her groundbreaking policy for the Australian Rules Football League (AFL) - ‘Respect and Responsibility Program’. The Respect and Responsibility program has been in existence for two years and has been implemented by the AFL to address violence against women at all levels of the game. While the program does not specifically address homophobia, the methods in which information is dispersed and cultural change is promoted are vital to adopt in anti-discrimination programs in sport. Dyson (2010) explains that the Respect and Responsibility program utilises a ‘community development model’:

The key components of community development are to improve economic, social and cultural conditions in communities; the participation by the people themselves in efforts to improve amenities in their community; and the provision of technical and other services in ways that encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make these more effective. Community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities (Dyson, 2010, p. 11).

In particular, the Respect and Responsibility program implemented ‘Program Drivers’, who were ‘members from within participating clubs to act as facilitators of change’ to help with the implementation of the program (p. iv). For this program, Dyson suggests that it is ‘important for change to occur from both the top down (AFL Victoria and league levels) and from the bottom up (club and member levels)’ (2010, p. v). According to Dyson (2010), the

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<sup>75</sup> The ‘top down’ approach describes policy being implemented by State Sporting Associations, where change is enforced upon sporting clubs.

‘Program Drivers have been the lynchpin of the program’, and some of these program drivers have provided the beginnings of cultural change in their clubs (p. iv).

Dyson (2010) explains that the promotion of inclusive policies by community sporting clubs is important to a successful club:

A number of common factors have been identified for a ‘successful’ sporting club. These include a commitment to including others, a strong family and social focus, valuing and rewarding members...and regularly promoting policies that ensure the club is safe and inclusive for all members (p. 17).

Therefore, the importance of policy in regards to safety and inclusion cannot be understated.

However, the uptake of policy has long been the problem at local sporting clubs.

One particular method that Dyson outlines to increase the uptake of policy at club level, and to change the culture of local sporting clubs is outlined below. Dyson utilised research carried out by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2007) to guide the process in her program. The WHO principles for ‘primary prevention programs in the community’ include:

- The use of participatory methods for effectively engaging participants;
- Fostering an enabling social environment to increase the likelihood that positive behaviour change will be sustained;
- Employing and training facilitators with high quality skills;
- Providing long term follow-up to support and sustain changes brought about by the program; and
- Combining education with wider advocacy and community mobilisation activities (Cited in Dyson, 2010, p. 25).

Dyson recommends that the principles above are pertinent in ‘both the development and ongoing evaluation of any culture change intervention’ (2010, p. 25). These principles also provide the opportunity to ‘follow up’ over time on the progress of programs, and to evaluate

the success of such change. Additionally, these principles could be easily applied to a sporting club in regards to inclusion and sexuality based discrimination.

Essentially, the area of addressing homophobia in sporting policy has only just commenced.

In 2006, when the participant interviews were conducted, very little was active in this area in Australia. In particular, the head sporting organisation for hockey in Victoria, Hockey Victoria, had provided little in the way of an anti-discrimination policy on their website. The hockey clubs and club members needed to consult the Hockey Australia site to view the policy, as this policy was not distributed effectively to the hockey clubs. After contacting and speaking with Hockey Victoria, the 'Club Development Manager', explained that Hockey Victoria do indeed disseminate information to hockey club representatives in relation to 'Homophobia in Sport', 'Health', 'Working with Children' and 'Ugly Parents' via email and post (personal communication, July 6, 2010). The Club Development Manager further explained that this was an area that Hockey Victoria aimed to further develop. This further development has only been a recent item on Hockey Victoria's agenda (since 2006). The Club Development representative made it clear that Hockey Victoria do not enquire as to whether information, once sent to clubs, had arrived and been distributed to members (personal communication, July 6, 2010).

Since 2006, the Hockey Australia (which encompasses all state organisations) 'Member Protection' policy has also been made available on the Hockey Victoria website, along with a 'Play by the Rules' web link and many other resources aimed at 'club development'. These changes have been a positive inclusion on the state organisation's website. The Club Development Manager from Hockey Victoria claimed that all clubs should have a member responsible (Member Protection Officer) for helping members with policy, complaints and codes of conduct (personal communication, July 6, 2010). While 'Member Protection

Officers' are responsible for this information at the hockey clubs, there are still issues with dissemination of this information to hockey clubs and the capacity of club volunteers to distribute this information to club members.

However, listing policy and codes of conduct on a website only provides one way traffic (top down) for such information. Much can be learnt from the Respect and Responsibility program. Dyson's (2010) approach of implementing policy and cultural change through a community development model would be beneficial for organisations such as Hockey Victoria to develop. Using some of the WHO principles and Dyson's program, a possible model for the SSA and hockey clubs could include the following steps:

- Policy is disseminated and implemented using a combination of a 'top-down' and 'bottom up' approach;
- Expert training of Club Development Managers at Hockey Victoria (and Hockey Australia) to provide advice, guidance and training in these areas to volunteers at the club;
- The training of willing 'program drivers' at the local club level to act as catalysts of cultural change. These 'program drivers' would need to be well regarded members within these existing clubs; and
- A commitment by the SSA and the hockey club to implement long term changes - SSA (Hockey Victoria) would need to commit to following up with interactive training and workshops at regular intervals with highly qualified staff. (Cultural change does not occur quickly and the 'program drivers' will need space and time to carry out their roles).

While such a model represents a liberal feminist approach, this model and subsequent changes need to be necessarily incremental. These are just some of the preliminary suggestions required for the SSA and the club level to implement if cultural change involving issues of gender, sexuality and diversity are to occur. If such a model was successful at the club level, further models (i.e., addressing affirmative action) could be developed and

implemented.

Incidentally, as a result of the ‘Come Out to Play’ research and consultations with the ASC, Hockey Victoria announced in 2010 that they will be involved in a joint project with the ASC called ‘Fair go, Sport!’ This project is designed to ‘promote safe and inclusive sporting environments for everyone’ (Hartung, n.d.). Hartung (Chief Executive Officer of Hockey Victoria) explained that a community development model will be developed to engage clubs on the issues above. Additionally, ‘as part of the project, an online survey has been developed to identify attitudes and perceptions of harassment and discrimination related to sexuality and gender identity’ (Hartung, n.d.). Although the project has not begun, it promises to be a positive step towards sexual and gender diversity and acceptance in hockey across Victoria.

Ideally, a national sporting organisation, such as the Australian Olympic Committee or a major football code in Australia, would adopt a community development model to address education and training specifically targeting homophobia and discrimination. Such a program would be invaluable as a model to other sports, SSA, local sporting clubs and individuals. Panel members from the Crawford Report share a similar view on this. The Crawford Report (2009) is a national report titled ‘The future of sport in Australia’.<sup>76</sup> The report was based on an independent review of sport in Australia commissioned by the Federal Government and focused on the structure and administration of the Australian sporting system from community to the elite level. In reference to homophobia and sexuality discrimination, the Crawford Report panel suggested the following:

The Panel believes that this [homophobia and sexuality discrimination] is an area which has been largely neglected in

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<sup>76</sup> The principal author of this report was David Crawford.

sports policy and where the ASC [Australian Sports Commission] can play an important role in working with researchers and the sports community to better understand the issue and work to build appropriate strategies for more inclusive outcomes (Crawford Report, 2009, p. 45).

Once more community development models emerge to address homophobia and sexuality discrimination in Australian sport, the culture of sport and sporting clubs in Australia may change and a more diverse range of role models may appear in sport.

### **Cultures of Sporting Clubs**

Cashman (2010) explains that the practice of sport and Australian culture are intertwined:

For better or worse, sport has become central to Australian life and business of being Australian. Sporting culture is accessible and provides continuing satisfactions for many Australians. It is immensely popular (p. 192).

With Cashman's description of the importance of sport to Australian society in mind, it is no surprise that literally thousands of sporting clubs exist in Australia. In Victoria, emphasis is placed on large, popular, commercial team sports, such as the Australian Football League (AFL) competition. While the main AFL season is held over the autumn and winter months of the year, at other times of the year, the media focus is on 'pre-season training', pre and post season club vacations and the celebrity culture of individual players. Cricket is also a sport that is popular in Victoria, however it receives less media coverage than the AFL. Horse Racing is also a popular sport, in particular, the 'Spring Racing Carnival' during the months of October and November in Melbourne.<sup>77</sup> During January, Melbourne plays host to the first tennis grand slam of the year, the 'Australian Open'. This event proves to be a favourite with the media, however, after the winners are decided, the sporting focus in Victoria tends to move back to the AFL pre-season competition beginning in February.

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<sup>77</sup> Melbourne is the capital city of the state of Victoria.



As a consequence of the popularity of AFL, there are countless football clubs in Victoria, and most of these clubs have only male participants. Netball, along with hockey are popular sports for women in Victoria. In 2000 around 72% of Australian women participated in some form of sport or physical activity (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000). However, in 2006, this figure dropped to 66% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). The statistics show that women's involvement in club level or organised sport in Australia is considerably less than men's involvement. In 2000, only around 27% of women in Australia participated in organised 'sporting' activities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000). Showing a small decline during 2006, around 26% of women participated in organised sporting activities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). While these figures are useful, the statistics only go so far in informing one about the culture of sport and sporting clubs in Australia. Information from quantitative studies involving culture are necessarily incomplete, with these figures giving little understanding of the actual experience of participating within the sporting club environment.

Stell (1991) clearly exemplifies the inconsistency between the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the culture of sporting clubs:

For two centuries Australian women have struggled against forthright opposition to their participation in sport. They have been trivialised, banned, excluded, ignored, oppressed, degraded, unsung, discouraged – yet still they have played on. After decades of medical argument, exclusive clubs and lower levels of funding, what is surprising is the enormous number of women who actually play sport (p. viii).

As evidenced above, many sporting club cultures in Australia have traditionally been male dominated. It is this male domination that has led to the marginalisation of women within these sporting subcultures.

According to Duncan, sporting culture tolerates a 'greater threshold of acceptance of poor behaviour' (2007). Duncan, the National Project Officer of the PBTR's initiative, suggests that sporting culture is very different to that of the culture in the workplace, school and other public areas. Behaviour not accepted in society, such as verbal abuse, sexism, excessive alcohol consumption, spectator violence, fighting, homophobia, discrimination and abuse of officials, is often an accepted practice in sporting culture (Duncan, 2007).

The capacity of volunteers at sporting clubs is also a point worthy of discussion. Most formal positions on the committee at sporting clubs are filled by volunteers, usually playing members of the club. According to research conducted by Nichols and Shepherd on volunteering in sport, 'the 35-54 age cohort is over-represented in volunteers' at sporting clubs (2006, p. 205). Therefore many of the volunteers at sporting clubs have partners and families. The capacity of these volunteers, who are often juggling family life, playing and work commitments with an official role, is limited. Duncan further explains this point:

Sport survives because of its large volunteer base with no employment contracts/agreements. It is difficult to make them aware of and to 'enforce' various requirements (legal and other). Also, if sports make too many requirements volunteers walk away (different to the workplace) (2007).

According to Duncan, most volunteers and small sporting clubs, are 'ill equipped to deal with the complexities of complaint handling' (2007). Handling complaints made in regards to sexual orientation discrimination would be an additionally difficult task for sporting club volunteers.

What is particularly pertinent is that the 2009/2010 annual report from the 'Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission' (VEOHRC) showed that 22 complaints were lodged in sport during this period. The bulk of these complaints were based on sex

discrimination, disability/impairment discrimination, age discrimination and victimisation. A significant statistic is that not one of these complaints made in relation to sport were based on sexual orientation (Victorian Equal Opportunity, 2010). These statistics could indicate that complaints made directly to sporting organisations are being resolved effectively (without the need for the Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission). However, this may be a false assumption. A representative from VEOHRC explained that the current process in place for lodging a complaint was problematic, as complaints cannot be lodged anonymously (personal communication, January 31 2011). This is particularly problematic for LGBT people who may be in the closet for personal and safety reasons, i.e., to avoid discrimination.

Duncan (2007) suggests that many sporting clubs and volunteers need significant support to carry out their roles within the club environment. Guidance from agencies such as 'Equal Opportunity Commissions (EOC's), Legal Aid, the Police and even child protection agencies' would benefit sporting clubs (Duncan, 2007). Support from such agencies may help volunteers and clubs with their knowledge in regards to anti-discrimination legislation and member protection policies.

In 2006, an analysis of the Hockey Victoria website found little in the way of a code of conduct or a member protection policy. The Hockey Australia website displayed a 'Member Protection Policy' that applied to all state bodies in hockey, including Hockey Victoria. 'Sexual orientation' and 'gender identity' were both listed as protected attributes under the heading of 'discrimination' in the policy (Member Protection Policy, 2005, p. 10). An analysis of this policy has been made in relation to the case studies of this thesis and will continue to be explored later in this thesis.

Hockey club culture in Australia is, for the most part, male dominated. Although most hockey clubs around Australia consist of more than one-team and gender at the club (i.e. Women's, Men's and Junior teams), most positions of authority (the club committee) are held by male members.<sup>78</sup> This position will be explored further in the following section.

### **Culture of Hockey and Hockey Clubs in Australia**

At the beginning of this century [1900's] sportswomen carried their hockey sticks in public when dressed in their ankle-length hockey skirts so that their 'daring' costumes would be excused (Stell, 1991, p. viii).

Field Hockey was introduced into Australia as a women's sport. Margaret Irving (co-founder of Lauriston Girls High School) was the first to introduce hockey into her school in 1901 as a game for 'young ladies' to play (Crawford, 1984, p. 71). Women's participation in hockey came with little opposition during this period in Australian sport, as it was brought into Australia as a sporting pursuit for young 'ladies' (Crawford, 1984). Crawford explains that it was not long before the first inter-school contests began for young women, in 1903 (1984, p. 71).

Inter-university field hockey events were also held for women in the early 1900s. Senyard's (2004) sporting and social history of Melbourne University and the formation of sporting clubs affiliated with the university, shows that a women's hockey club was formed at the university in 1907. The sporting communities formed in the university setting provide a social and sporting outlet for many university students. However, while sporting clubs are formally affiliated with the university, universities are not necessarily governing these clubs.

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<sup>78</sup> The researcher searched the Hockey Australia and Hockey Victoria website and found web-links to various hockey clubs in Australia. A vast majority of these clubs were governed by the male members of the hockey clubs. Links to various hockey clubs can be accessed via Hockey Australia website, <http://www.hockey.org.au/> and Hockey Victoria website, <http://www.hockeyvictoria.org.au/>

This plays a part in the culture of such clubs. Similar to Senyard's study, Lilienthal's (1997) *Newtown Tarts: A History of Sydney University Women's Sport Association* documents the beginnings of Sydney University's women's sporting clubs, including the hockey club. According to Lilienthal, the Sydney University Women's Hockey Club was formed in 1908 'by a group of enthusiastic first year students' (1997, p. 17). While hockey was played at Sydney University prior to this date, the club was not officially formed until 1908 when they could register with the newly established NSW Women's Hockey Association (Lilienthal, 1997, p. 17).

State Associations were formed for hockey during this time period in Australia.<sup>79</sup> According to Cashman, some team sports such as hockey have been [historically] more accepted sports for women in Australia. He suggests that there are several likely reasons for this acceptance, one being that 'possibly because hockey was less developed as a male sport than were cricket and football, its territory could partly be claimed by women' (Cashman, 1998, pp. 88-89). Stell suggests that the traditional culture of field hockey in Australia was informed by that of England. She suggests that by 1910, 'the game was already strong in schools and universities due to the enthusiasm of English trained sports mistresses' (Stell, 1991, p. 51).<sup>80</sup> Even though women participated in both cricket and football at this time, the long established tradition of male participation in those sports left little room for women's involvement, particularly in the development of the social culture within clubs.

When the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) was formed in 1984, hockey was one of the first sports included. Although not based in Canberra, with the majority of other AIS sports, the

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<sup>79</sup> The first State hockey Association was formed in South Australia in 1903, Victoria and New South Wales followed shortly after that in 1906, Western Australia in 1908 and Queensland, not until the late 1920's. The Northern Territory and Tasmania associations were not formed until the latter half of the twentieth century.

<sup>80</sup> Also see Solling (1997, p. 208).

men's and women's program began in Perth (Australian Institute of Sport, n.d.). The Australian men's hockey team first appeared at the Olympic Games in 1956 in Melbourne, where they finished fifth. The Australian men have had moderate success at the Games, finishing second several times, and securing a gold medal in Athens in 2004.

The Australian Women's Hockey Association (AWHA) was formed in 1910 and shortly thereafter, affiliated with the All England Women's Hockey Association. Four years later, the first international competition was held in Australia against England, and in 1930, the Australian women's hockey team travelled to England for the inaugural overseas tour (Hockey Australia, n.d.). Whilst the men's hockey team competed at the Olympic Games in 1956, the Australian women's hockey team<sup>81</sup> first appeared nearly 30 years later in 1984 in Los Angeles, where they competed in a match for the bronze medal, eventually finishing fourth (Hockey Australia, n.d.). Since that day, the Australian women's team has had great success at the Olympic Games. The Australian women have won three Olympic gold medals, in 1988, 1996 and 2000, along with numerous world championships and Champions Trophies.

A response to this sort of success has been increased media coverage of the women's hockey team and individual women players. While 'appropriately feminine', many of these players over the last two decades have been seen as role models for young sportswomen and girls. Participation in hockey in Australia is growing each year. According to the 2006 hockey census, around 138,000 people in Australia were registered with a club to play hockey, and almost 24,000 were registered with a club in Victoria (p. 7). This 24,000 (incorporating both club and modified players), consisted of nearly 12,000 male hockey players, over 7,000

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<sup>81</sup> The Australia women's hockey team are nicknamed the 'Hockeyroos'.

female hockey players, and around 5,000 school hockey players (Hockey Census, 2006, p. 7). In percentage terms, of all registered (non-school) hockey players in Victoria, women only represent around 37% of the participants. In the states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, more women hockey players are registered than male hockey players. The culture of many hockey clubs in Victoria is male dominated, as also evidenced in the participation numbers.

In general, hockey has been a sport historically participated in by white, middle class women and men in Australia. Field Hockey is also not a sport that is accessible for all adults. Hockey fees and equipment required to participate can total in excess of \$1000 a year in Australia. In 2007, the average membership costs for a senior player to join a club were around AU\$260 (with the most expensive memberships being AU\$640) (Hockey Census, 2007, p. 14). While these fees are not exorbitant, this, coupled with the purchase costs of hockey equipment, places hockey club membership out of reach for some sections of the Australian public.

Since the early 1900's the culture of women's field hockey in Australia has changed dramatically. One of the principal research aims of this study is to explore the opportunity for women's 'safe spaces' within hockey clubs. As mentioned in Chapter Two, similar research has been conducted by Hillier on a women's (Australian Rules) football club. Hillier revealed that the association of lesbianism with women's team sports does have what could be termed an 'upside', especially where there is the provision of safe spaces for women to explore and affirm diverse and non-conventional discourses of gender and sexuality (2005). However, no research has been conducted in Australia on safe spaces for women in hockey.

Comparably, a longitudinal study conducted by Shire et al. reveals a similar environment within a hockey club they researched in Britain. Shire et al. (2000) suggests that the predominately lesbian, women-only environment of the hockey club allowed the hockey players to be open about their sexualities and the space provided the women a more relaxed and safe environment in which to explore and affirm a variety of sexual identities (p. 53).

### **Concluding Comments**

Over the last century in Australia, hockey has provided a space for girls and women to participate in sport with little opposition. The success of the national women's team in Australia has produced role models for women at the club level. Male membership at the local club level has steadily increased and predominant male governance at mixed-gendered hockey clubs is common. At the time of the interviews the predominantly male dominated hockey club culture in Victoria was rarely challenged by a member protection, equal opportunity or anti-discrimination policy in place at clubs. This was evident in the comments of the Club Development Manager at Hockey Victoria – whereby Hockey Victoria did not monitor the progress made at club level in the implementation of such policy.

The uptake of policy at the club level is examined in the three case studies of the research. The following chapter, Chapter Five, comprises the first of the three hockey club case studies - *Northern Central Hockey Club (NCHC)*. A women's only hockey club, *NCHC* is the largest of the three case studies. Policy at the club level, along with the participant's lived experiences of inclusion and the attitudes towards sexuality diversity are explored in this case study.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Case Study 1 - Northern Central Hockey Club (NCHC)**

#### **Introduction**

The pseudonym of *Northern Central Hockey Club (NCHC)* was given to the first hockey club investigated in this research. *NCHC* is a small, one-team women's hockey club in suburban Melbourne operating under a different structure to larger and mixed gendered hockey clubs. The club has operated solely as a one-team women's club for more than twenty years and, at the time of the interviews, had 15 women members. *NCHC* was created with the intention to allow women the opportunity to play hockey at a club governed solely by women. The team from *NCHC* competed in a competition (or league) run by Hockey Victoria, the state governing organisation for hockey in Victoria.<sup>82</sup> In total, nine members of *NCHC* agreed to participate in an interview for the research.<sup>83</sup> However, only eight of these interviews are used for examination in this case study.<sup>84</sup> In terms of sexual identity, the participant base from *NCHC* consisted of one heterosexually identified member, and seven lesbian members. The members' experiences of playing with such a club will be explored in terms of feminism, power, identity and community.

Thematic analysis has been employed to analyse the interview material from *NCHC* participants. Some of the keys themes that emerged from this case study were safe spaces at *NCHC*, the participants' clear understanding of lesbian issues in sport generally, and the collective knowledge of power surrounding gender and sexuality in sport.

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<sup>82</sup> The league in which *NCHC* competes in will not be disclosed for participant identification reasons.

<sup>83</sup> The interview questions asked of participants can be found at Appendix E and F.

<sup>84</sup> The ninth participant withdrew her consent from the research project after reading through her transcript.

## Demographic Information

In this section the demographic data and the background information of the *NCHC* participants are outlined. The participants from *NCHC* were aged between 32 years and 52 years, with an average age of 42.1 years. Five of the eight participants were born in Australia, while the other three were born overseas. Of those born abroad, one participant came to Australia as a child refugee with her family from Sri Lanka, another arrived in Australia at around seven years of age with her family, and the other settled in Australia as an adult. Three out of the five participants born in Australia grew up in regional Australia, while the others were raised in a major Australian city.

Two of the participants identified culturally as ‘Anglo-Australian’, three participants identified as ‘Anglo-Saxon’, one participant identified as ‘Sri-Lankan Australian’, one participant identified as ‘Dutch’, and one participation identified as ‘Australian’. All but one of the participants had reached a tertiary level of education, with three having completed post graduate qualifications. All participants were in some form of professional employment at the time of their interview.

All of the participants became involved with *NCHC* through a personal contact, the majority through a friend. One participant, *Grace*, was introduced to the club by her partner who was playing hockey with *NCHC* at the time. *Dawn*, who formed the club with a group of friends, was the only original founding member left at the club.

All participants from *NCHC* had an involvement with sport throughout most of their lives. Every participant started playing some form of organised sport at primary school age. The sports that were played in childhood did not vary greatly between participants, with netball,

hockey, athletics and softball being common. These particular sports reflect the activities available to primary school aged girls in Australia between 25-45 years ago. However, only three of the eight participants began playing hockey in primary school.

As mentioned above, seven of the eight participants interviewed identify their sexuality as either 'lesbian' or 'gay', while the eighth participant identified her sexuality as 'heterosexual'. All of the lesbian participants at *NCHC* were publicly out as lesbians. Griffin (1998) identifies 'publicly out' as identifying as a lesbian to all in an athletic context (p. 135). The participant who identified as heterosexual was in a de-facto relationship. Two of the seven women who identified as lesbian were not in romantic relationships, two were engaged to each other (with the intention to marry in The Netherlands), and the remaining three were in lesbian relationships (with women outside the hockey club).

### **The Origins of *NCHC***

In this section, material related to the origins of the *NCHC* will be discussed. Themes that will be addressed include; the feminist principles in which the club was founded, the 'ethos' of the club, and 'identity' of members at the club.

*Dawn*, a founding member of *NCHC*, explained how the hockey club was created in 1985:

There was a woman who [wanted] to start up her own team based on feminist principles, sort of equality and no judgment. You didn't have to be a lesbian at all, however it was certainly expected that you, you know, promoted and practiced feminist principles and, and the participation of sport to participate and not necessarily to want to compete which I thought was quite funny because we were the toughest, most competitive lot of women you'd care to meet, but that was supposedly the philosophy... so we went to the first meeting and that was over

in Spotswood<sup>85</sup> in a little lounge room in front of a fire and it's you know early March or something and it was a really cold night and we're all sitting around and, and we thought alright, well why don't we try this one... see if we can get a team together, and we got sixteen women all of whom had played sport at some stage and...there was also a real commitment that the team should honour mature aged women and...invite participation of women who loved the sport and wanted to play... It was a really great way to begin and it was a very powerful you know, it was a really powerful feeling that was sort of based on that concept, and it was called... the concept... and concept was about participation, equality and you know, sharing, sharing times, sort of thing and it was... and those first three years were really formative (*Dawn*, 49 years).

A number of important principles are outlined in *Dawn's* quote. *Dawn* explained that the club was founded upon participation (rather than competition), equality and sharing experiences. *Dawn's* words highlighted a combination of liberal (equality) and more radical and sporting feminist (women only team) influences on the origins of the club.

The creation of *NCHC* evolved out of the period of 'second wave feminism', where women focused on putting an end to all forms of gender discrimination (Freedman, 2003). The period of generational (liberal and radical) feminism, along with the gay and lesbian movement, helped provide the landscape for sporting clubs, such as *NCHC*, to emerge. The founding club members lived through this early formative period of the women's liberation movement. Hargreaves purported that during this period, some women chose to participate in sport in a 'separatist all-female strategy' (1994, p. 40). Along with several other women's sports clubs and league, the *NCHC's* club configuration was a deliberate choice made by the founding members.<sup>86</sup> For *NCHC*, their 'women-only' club has provided the members with opportunities, such as 'safe and secure sporting environments for all participants; the active encouragement of all ability levels; [and] concentration on the enjoyable and successful

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<sup>85</sup> Spotswood is an inner western suburb of Melbourne.

<sup>86</sup> See the description of the 'Notso Amazons' Softball League, Hackney Women's Football Club and the 'Blades' Women's Ice Hockey team discussed in later parts of this chapter. This discussion shows other women only clubs founded on similar principles.

accomplishments of players rather than the failures' (Symons, 2010, p. 59). These opportunities may not have been available to women involved in a mixed-gendered club.

An overarching theme at the club from its inception is the recruitment and acceptance of older women. Women in the age bracket of early 30s to early 50s made up the membership of the club. All *NCHC* participants had been working in paid employment for many years, enabling a steady income and independence. This economic position ensured the women were able to socialise together outside of the club and attend events such as the Gay Games, further strengthening their bond as team-mates and friends.<sup>87</sup>

*NCHC* had developed a rather unique ethos in regards to inclusion and participation. *Karen* referred to the club's 'ethos' in her interview. She claimed that the club has an ethos to be inclusive regardless of how members identify in terms of sexual orientation (*Karen*, 42 years). There are also other elements to this ethos. For instance, *Dawn* and *Claire* both explained that the club had no need for a formal anti-discrimination policy. *Dawn* explained that 'we don't have anything written down... I would like to think that we practice [non-discrimination without the need for a policy] (*Dawn*, 49 years). *Claire* also supported this notion and she made it obvious that part of the ethos at the club was that discrimination within the club was non-existent. She said: 'It [discrimination] doesn't happen and it just would not happen. They're the sorts of people we have in the club' (*Claire*, 40 years). *Claire* was confident that this was the case at *NCHC*.

A pertinent observation about the hockey club was the lack of facilities for the club. *NCHC* had no official 'clubhouse' or home ground. Therefore training session and 'home' matches

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<sup>87</sup> Symons (2002) explains that the Gay Games is still an event that is largely for the 'affluent, developed nations of the world' (p. 112)

would take place at shared facilities with other clubs. This meant that many of the social functions for the club were held at ‘the pub’ or at one of the club member’s homes. While this section has outlined the foundations of the club itself, the following addresses the current administration and governance at the hockey club. Information such as the configuration of members in official roles within the club will be discussed.

### **Governance at *NCHC***

The structure of *NCHC* as a one-team club is unusual for hockey clubs within Australia. The players from *NCHC*, however, had an explanation for this configuration. *Alison* provided details on the club’s structure:

We have only got enough for a nucleus of one-team, and being such a small club, you get to know everybody and it is very friendly, supportive environment. Bigger clubs, you don’t know everybody, you don’t know the other teams, therefore I suppose it’s a club that fosters that club feeling. But with this club, everyone knows each other, everybody goes to the club AGM...everybody, even when they have the committee meetings, everybody has a say in what happens (*Alison*, 46 years).

*Dawn* raised the point that once you have more than one-team, a hierarchy develops on which team is the first team and which is the second.

...I suppose I’ve been really protective of [this configuration] and because I’m the only and the original member left it’s something I feel really strongly about *NCHC* remaining as a one-team club and there have been some points in our history where it’s been, [should] we have two, two teams and I’ve really argued very strongly you know, because as soon as you have two, two teams you start talking about, well who’s better than who? Which one’s your A team which one’s your B team and all of a sudden you’ve got a... hierarchy there and you start being divisive (*Dawn*, 49 years).

*Dawn* explained that the inclusion of more than one-team at the club would result in a space that might promote competition between members, rather than encouraging participation and

enjoyment (*Dawn*, 49 years). Fostering a competitive culture at the hockey club would contradict one of the founding principles of the club, participation.

As a small, exclusively women's hockey club, the administrative and governance roles of *NCHC* were performed by the women. One of the consequences of belonging to a small hockey club was that a number of the participants interviewed held administrative roles within the club. Two of the participants held positions on the committee of *NCHC*, *Cassandra*, the president of the club, and *Karen*, the treasurer of the club. Two other participants in the research, *Summer* and *Connie*, shared the role of a 'playing coach'. *Dawn* and *Claire* were past committee members.

Each participant had a different motivation for taking on administrative roles within the club. Many suggested that it was simply an opportunity to give back to the club and hockey in general. *Claire* explained:

Ah, I guess it's just sort of an attitude I have to life generally, that you can take, take, take the whole time but you should put back as well. So, after being involved at the club for a while, it just became clear that it's sort of your turn and that it's an obligation if you are going to be getting that benefit of being involved in the team at the club, that you help run it at some point (*Claire*, 40 years).

One of the coaches on the team, *Summer*, described her position on taking on a leadership role:

I played top level for 15 years, and I thought well I could give something back to these women who... haven't had any training really, so I wanted to give something back after having so much given to me (*Summer*, 36 years).

It is clear that official involvement in the club was seen as an integral part of being a club member. Most of the women from *NCHC* felt a sense of responsibility and service with respect to the club's operations and continued existence.

An example of this sense of responsibility was explained by the president of the club.

*Cassandra* mentioned that she felt that there was a 'crisis' within the club when she stepped in as a committee member and that she stepped in to 'fill a breach' (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

The only remaining original member of the club and past committee member, *Dawn*, explained that she had previously volunteered for administrative roles when the club was on the verge of folding.<sup>88</sup> Involvement in a small sporting club appeared to make the members more active on an administrative level, which enabled members to claim ownership in the 'running' of the club. In effect, participating in the club's administration had become part of the 'culture' of the club; in the subsequent section, this club culture is explored in regard to the lived experiences of inclusion.

### **Lived Experiences of Inclusion at the Club**

All participants described their experiences of playing hockey at *NCHC* and the team environment in predominately positive terms. All participants felt that the club was welcoming of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and sexualities. At the time of the interviews, the participants claimed that there were no major problems between women of different sexualities within the club.

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<sup>88</sup> Dawn further explained that after three seasons (in 1988) the club was on the verge of collapsing as several founding members of the club had left. She claimed that the only reason that the club did not fold was because a group of six to seven players banded together and 'took on' administrative roles.



As previously stated, the majority of the participants at *NCHC* identified their sexuality as either lesbian or gay. *Claire* however described the membership of the club as feminist; not exclusively lesbian:

It was set up as a feminist club, but most of the people were lesbians who were in it. Ah, but we have never been exclusively lesbian and we always like to say that we have got a couple of token straights on the team too... like reversing the whole thing instead of a couple of lesbians on the team... (*Claire*, 40 years).

The relevance of sexuality at *NCHC* is described by *Alison*, a self identified heterosexual, in this statement:

...I mean when I was first asked a couple of years ago to join the club, my sexuality was never mentioned, the woman who was talking to me, she knew a bit about me, but it never was an issue, and so when the offer was made, 'look we have got vacancies, come and join us'. Yeah, it was never an issue. *John*, my partner has been welcomed... (*Alison*, 46 years).

For *Alison*, sexual orientation played little role in joining *NCHC*. *Alison* appeared to be accepted by the other members of the club without question. The founding ethos of the club that encouraged membership from women with diverse backgrounds regardless of sexual identity was enacted by other members.

Participants described their experiences of playing with *NCHC* as 'liberating', 'supportive' (*Karen*, 42 years); 'safe', 'fantastic' (*Claire*, 40 years); and 'pivotal' (*Dawn*, 49 years). The president of the club, *Cassandra* shared her experiences:

Ah, it's really... it's quite lovely in one sense because they are all very encouraging, very encouraging of... at the club we have always maintained that we encourage women of all abilities, of all ages, of all classes, of all educational abilities. Our premise is that we encourage diversity at the club. So if you are the worst player, it doesn't mean that you're not going to get a gig on the field. Now, for me the experience of that has transpired with that experience because we have given people that have never played before the chance to play, we have women who are poor a chance to play, because our fees aren't that high, or

as high as other clubs... Ah, the way that we embrace diversity, I think has been fantastic and that's been one of my experiences at the club (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

*Cassandra's* comments identified the many nurturing aspects of the club. The players believed that the club's environment was welcoming of all new players. There also seemed to be an appreciation for diversity and an acknowledgement of the challenges some other women face. Regardless of ability, age or sexual identity, the team provided an opportunity for all ability levels to 'have a game', and for those players who could not afford the fees to play, the club would help financially with the payment of such fees.

*Dawn's* experiences were somewhat similar to those of *Cassandra*:

We really, we really care about each other and like each other immensely but we can also really piss each other off like you would not believe but once we're on the field we're incredibly supportive of each other and once we're off the field we're also very, very supportive for each other and but luckily we, you know we, we say what's on our mind and it, it you know it's spoken about out there in meetings or you know or get together and have a few beers and get things off our chest and all that sort of thing but it's a it's a terrific team and it's a, it's an incredibly rich and rewarding place to be (*Dawn*, 49 years).

At *NCHC*, the club practice and ethos meant that inclusion had become part of the lived experience at the club.

While the close-knit nature of the team can be problematic ('piss[ing] each other off'), most of the participants seemed to agree that the positives of being involved with *NCHC*, outweighed the negative aspects. *Claire* explained some of the sources of conflict within *NCHC*:

If you get a group of feisty lesbians together, then, you know, everybody is strong willed, everybody is... you know and we are all older women now, we are not sort of in our twenties. We are sort of, I think the youngest is 33, so we are all very, I don't know, it's hard to explain. But having said that, it's not a

negative thing, it's just so... yeah, I was going to say, I thought of leaving a number of times... but I don't. You know, I just stay there because even though people can give me the shits from time to time, it's still a really safe place you know (*Claire*, 40 years).

*Karen* also shared her thoughts on the differences between the personalities within the club:

The team, well it's very supportive of people's differences, and individuality, it's also very... I am not going to find the right word here, but unusual, it can be extreme because there are so many personalities... It's probably unique and yeah, it's probably an unusual group that play hockey together and then, it can be quite heated... (*Karen*, 42years).

Reconciling independent personalities was central to the inclusive club ethos. *Claire* described the women at the club as 'feisty lesbians' and 'strong willed' (*Claire*, 40 years), while *Karen* explained that there were disagreements between club members (*Karen*, 42 years). However, the participants that explained the personality clashes within the team environment further explained that these clashes and disagreements were not significant to the overall fabric, culture and experiences at the club.

While all participants claimed that there were no major challenges between the women of differing sexualities within the club at the time of the interviews, several elaborated on issues which had occurred in the past. *Dawn* recalled a past altercation between a lesbian identified player and heterosexually identified player:

Well, where one of the women had a function and she wanted it to be a women's only function and felt very strongly about that and one of the straight women on the team wanted her male partner to attend and felt real angry about that but it was that woman's choice to have a women's only function and she felt that the player should've respected that request and I mean not that you know, not that it was a huge falling out but it was a discussion that they had and, and I don't think there was any resolution. There was no resolution to it you know, she didn't come which was a real shame... (*Dawn*, 49 years).

*Dawn* felt that this club function did not reflect the hockey clubs' ethos of an inclusive culture. However, while some challenges within the club environment did not end amicably, most problems within the club were not significant in nature.

With few exceptions, the relationships between women of differing sexualities at the club have been described in positive terms. *Cassandra* described an experience where a heterosexual member of the team attempted to drive decisions for the team/club that were not part of the general ethos of *NCHC*. She related the following:

We had one heterosexual woman and it was interesting because, how can I say this sensitively as I really like this person, but she obviously observed us lesbians as...an outsider, and she would make comments, and in a sense, she tried to drive some decisions for the team that I thought weren't based on our politics, it was based on her own heterosexual world and...thought that was interesting. I actually remember thinking how can her opinion have so much power and she is only one person, and it fascinated me because...I didn't quite know what was happening. It could have been my misperception... But I just felt that she could be critical of us, but was it because she came from a heterosexual paradigm and the power that comes from that or what was it? I wasn't quite sure and I thought she carried a lot of power, which I thought wasn't meant to [go] with where she sat (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

*Cassandra's* comment differed from *Claire's* earlier perspectives regarding the political leaning of the club. *Cassandra* gave the impression that the club was driven by a combination of liberal feminism and lesbian feminism. She referred to 'our politics' (presumably lesbian politics) as different to heterosexual and hetero-normative perspectives. While *NCHC* is a team for all women, the women within the team had to abide by the club ethos. One aspect of this ethos is that decisions within the club were not based on a 'heterosexual world' viewpoint, and according to *Cassandra*, the power that comes from that paradigm.

There were also instances in which heterosexual women enjoyed the culture and experiences of playing at *NCHC*. *Claire* recalled a conversation that she had with a heterosexually identified team-mate and explained why her team-mate felt comfortable in that environment:

‘I love *NCHC*, I love playing with you guys, you don’t bitch about your boyfriends, you don’t bitch about your husbands, you just talk about cool stuff like footy and whatever, movies and whatever, and you don’t, you’re not like straight women, I love it’. She loved it to death for that completely different culture to other clubs. Yeah, but she was straight (*Claire*, 40 years).

While there have been incidents of conflict, there is also evidence, such as *Claire*’s recollection, of the club being seen as a positive place for heterosexual women.

*Cassandra* reflected on the shared experiences of marginalisation and discrimination experienced by lesbian members of *NCHC*, and considers that this may have contributed to the emphasis placed on ‘accepting diversity’ within the club. She claimed:

I don’t believe that there is any clash currently at the club, I think that it is fine at the moment, ah, and I think that we can be fairly accepting of diversity, I mean yeah we are, the het [erosexual] women we have had in the team, we have bent over backwards I reckon to be accommodating, to not push our politics on them, to not, you know, leave them out of things, include them in things, I think we have done very well personally. Really, you could just say ‘piss off’ and go and play with another team, but I think, I think that we have bent over backwards for our het [erosexual] players I would have to say. Well, that’s my feeling, that’s my feeling. Maybe because we are aware of discrimination ourselves, we don’t want to be seen as discriminating against other people. Well, you know when you have experienced it yourself, you don’t want to be a perpetrator of it yourself and often people are though... (*Cassandra*, 52 years)

*Cassandra* positioned herself as a lesbian and the club culture as lesbian territory, not a women’s club and women’s territory. She made a clear distinction between herself as a lesbian, the club identifying as lesbian and ‘other’ (i.e., heterosexual) women. While *Cassandra*’s comments demonstrated intention to include heterosexual women at the hockey

club, including ‘bending over backwards’ for heterosexually identified team-mates, earlier comments from participants would suggest that this has not always been the case. Excluding a team mate’s male partner at a club function and suggestions that heterosexual politics did not fit in with club politics are two such examples.<sup>89</sup>

Sexual orientation was often a focus for club members at *NCHC* when new players joined the club. The sexual orientation was just as (sometimes, even more so) important than the playing capabilities for new hockey players at the club. According to Theberge (2000), this focus on sexuality over performance is unusual for a sporting team. In fact, Theberge (2000) explains that because the ‘Blades’ (women’s ice hockey team in Canada),<sup>90</sup> are about “what happens on the ice”, the burden of disclosing sexual identity is greatly reduced. Theberge (2000) further explains that the relationships between lesbians and heterosexual women were positive and that the playing field and change room provided spaces where these relationships were forged. The make-up of players at *NCHC* was decidedly different. The field hockey players at *NCHC* were significantly older and played at a recreational level. While the younger, more competitive players of the ‘Blades’ were more concerned with on-ice performance, the *NCHC* players placed much of their focus around the social constructions within the club, including sexual orientation. As a result of this, socialising with team-mates with similar experiences was an important aspect of club culture and cohesion, so it is of little surprise that the sexual orientation of new players was a focus.

While homophobia was not a problem amongst the members of *NCHC*, many had experienced homophobic discrimination and taunts from opposition players and spectators

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<sup>89</sup> None of the participants interviewed made reference to experiences of playing alongside bisexually identified women at the hockey club.

<sup>90</sup> The ‘Blades’ is a pseudonym.

while playing hockey with *NCHC*.<sup>91</sup> Only one of the participants from *NCHC* had experienced homophobia at a previous sporting club or sporting team.<sup>92</sup> *NCHC* was seemingly known as a club that had a large lesbian player base, which may lead opposition players and spectators to the conclusion that if a woman plays for *NCHC*, she must be a lesbian.

Although not experienced while playing hockey, *Cassandra*, had experienced homophobia from an opposition player whilst playing tennis:

My own tennis club are fantastic with me, but we were playing a team one day and my team-mate funnily said to this team how I had won a silver medal at the Gay Games playing hockey and this woman from the other club... you could see her lips curl actually... and I said, 'yeah, there were 14,000 athletes there', and she said 'were they all gay?' And you could see her lips curl as she said this, and I said, 'yes, they are all gay'. You just knew that she was cringing inside and they couldn't wait to get out of the club rooms. They had lunch and just fled the club rooms because they couldn't deal with the fact that I was a lesbian and apparently she said to someone on the tennis court when I wasn't playing with them, when I wasn't on the court, 'is she really a lesbian?' [laughing]... She could not deal with it, could not deal with this idea that I was a lesbian. That's funny, and the idea that there were 14,000 gay athletes playing in the Gay Games... ah, she just couldn't deal with it, god forbid, god forbid, shocking people... (*Cassandra*, 52 years)

*Cassandra's* experience was not an overt display of homophobic discrimination. The opposition player's reaction indicated feelings of discomfort and possible disgust rooted in homophobia, as well as ignorance about the event of the Gay Games.

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<sup>91</sup> This is explored further along in this chapter.

<sup>92</sup> Two of the participants felt that they hadn't experienced homophobic discrimination at a previous club, because they were not 'out' as lesbian at their previous sporting club.

The interview participants were asked if they could describe an ‘open and inclusive sporting environment’. Most of them responded by explaining that *NCHC* fitted that description.

*Cassandra* demonstrated that *NCHC* is diverse in many ways:

I think that *NCHC* is doing it [an open and inclusive environment] personally. I mean we are open, we are open about our sexuality, we are inclusive of diversity and I think that we try to practice it, what more can you do? And I think that... yes, I think the thing about inclusiveness is an important thing, about including all abilities and all levels and the whole thing. Ah, I suppose too much sport is driven by winning and performance and other paradigms that aren't about inclusiveness and I think that for me an open and inclusive environment is what we do and try to practice and can't imagine, I don't know if many heterosexual clubs do what we do or are as accepting as we are accepting. I don't know (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

*Claire* agreed with these sentiments, yet felt that *NCHC* would be more of an open and inclusive environment if there was a men's (possibly gay identified) team as well, proposing that a genuinely inclusive club would include membership open to all. The reaction to male membership at the club is potentially controversial. While this would be a common theme amongst most club members, at least two participants explained that they would be opposed to male membership at the club (personal communication, June 13, 2006). In particular, these participants felt that males in positions of power at the club would not align with the founding principles of the club. The feminist principles that *NCHC* were founded upon could affect their ability to open the hockey club up to male members. In fact, the opposition of male members at the club from at least two participants reinforced the club culture as a separatist feminist one.

As well as being open about matters such as sexuality, *Dawn* felt as though a ‘real’ open and inclusive environment of a sporting club is about sharing her sporting experiences with others who are the same as her.



I'm a lesbian and I identify very strongly as a lesbian and I really enjoy playing with lesbians, not just women who are inclusive, who are broad minded, who appreciate diversity, but I actually enjoy playing with lesbians because of a... shared love of sport. Usually a commonality of friends, you know a, a shared experiences of growing up, we can talk about you know, we can talk girl talk and lesbian talk. We talk relationships you know, who's broken up with who. You know who's slept with who, you know all that sort of stuff as well as the more serious stuff. ...so it's a really, it's a strange one because this is my ideal environment and it's the environment I choose to be in. It would be great you know, an ideal environment, this is it, as far as I'm concerned. If, if in a totally inclusive, in a totally inclusive and non discriminatory environment where there were lesbians and straight women and bisexual women all playing sport and loving sport and not worried about you know, people's sexuality and orientation they would also be good, but I'd probably migrate to the dykes in the you know, in the club anyway to, to share, to share experience you know... (*Dawn*, 49 years)

*Dawn* enjoyed begin involved with *NCHC* as she was able to play sport with, socialise, share experiences with and build solidarity between lesbians. However, the very solidarity which can develop amongst individuals of a similar sexuality can also produce specific challenges for those groups, specifically 'in' groups and 'out' groups. Being accepting of lesbians is one aspect of inclusion, however, another aspect is to accept and embrace all identities and sub-cultures within the wider lesbian community. The *NCHC* participants' understanding of sexuality issues is addressed in the following section.

### **Attitudes towards Sexuality Diversity in Sport**

During the interviews, the participants from *NCHC* were asked if they thought that there were any unique issues that women faced in sport. Specifically, they were asked if lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women faced unique issues while participating in sport. The concepts of discrimination, stereotypes, the 'lesbian label', 'coming out' and playing the 'heterosexual game' were all key points in the participant's responses.

- **Lesbian Women**

Seven of the eight participants believed that lesbians did face some unique issues in sport.

*Cassandra* elaborated on her perspective on the challenges that lesbian face:

Ah, yes. A – that we live in a heterosexual world to start with [laughing]... it's simple. Ah, in the sporting world, there is always that issue that if you are a, well, it's an issue for all women, that if you play sport, you know if you are a very sporty person and accused of being a dykey sporty person, it's always a big put down. So when you are a lesbian in the sporting world, it just confirms to a whole lot of people in the het [erosexual] world, that here you are, you're a sporty person, you must be a dyke. And of course, the baggage that goes with that is that you are a lesser person because you are a dyke. But, I think the other things that we have experienced is that in playing against other teams that are heterosexual, there has been some sledging on the field, not that I have been myself a victim of it...(*Cassandra*, 52 years)

*Cassandra* highlighted the dominant hetero-normative culture of mainstream society where heterosexuality is considered the norm and is privileged over other sexual orientations.

*Dawn* similarly reflected on some other challenges faced by lesbians in sport:

Yeah I do... I think it's really hard for some lesbians in sport to actually openly identify as lesbians and express their lesbian ness (sic) in sport. I think there's still a lot of prejudice out there particularly if you look like a lesbian... look a little bit like the stereotype which is a shame, but I still think it's out there. I really do, I still think that it's out there. It's certainly out there in terms of the really big time sports and professional sports like golf and all the rest of it, yeah and you know women really do have to go underground and even though within certain circles you know everyone knows who the lesbian golfers are, they cannot dissipate out in crowd at all, you know the same with the tennis circuit and all the, all the rest of it and so, and I think that there is a difficulty for some women in certain teams which is why some women have chosen to come and play at *NCHC* (*Dawn*, 49 years).

Both participants explained that to be a lesbian in sport usually means that you are treated as a lesser person and that sexual orientation can define the treatment one receives through sport. *Heargreaves* (2000) explains that the practice of labeling all sportswomen (especially

those playing team sports) ‘as mannish, butch, dykes, lesbians, freaks or sickos, is a popular way of conjuring up the idea that lesbians colonise sport, and of deriding and pathologising them’ (p. 135). The ‘coming out’ process becomes difficult when these labels are already positioned around the lesbian athletes sport involvement.

*Claire* explained that some lesbian athletes are actually disadvantaged by ‘coming out’ publicly about their sexuality:

Yeah... that they can’t come out, or they don’t feel like they can come out. And then, when they do, they are often vilified for it. Amelie Mauresmo, when she first came out copped a whole lot of press... she came out in Melbourne, so it was all in the press, she was called a man, and this and that... and ‘I don’t want to play a man’. And these sort of negative comments and I really admire her because she has come out at the height of her career or before the height of her career. She hadn’t won a grand slam at that point so she is someone to be admired, but often then will sort of come out towards the end of her career. I think women in sport generally can make less money anyway than men and ah, why would you jeopardise that, it’s a sad thing to say, but if you come out, you jeopardise whatever earning capacity you have got... (*Claire*, 40 years)

Several of the participants seemed to be quite well aware of the notion of lesbians ‘playing’ the heterosexual game in sports. *Karen* added that ‘if they’re [lesbians] not ‘out’ ... [they] play the game... the [heterosexual] “game” so to speak’ (*Karen*, 42 years). Hemphill and Symons (2009) have addressed the pressures experienced by elite athletes of ‘staying in the closet’ for financial gain. They explain that ‘...the day-to-day challenges and stresses on these sportspersons can hurt their performances, enjoyment, career prospects, and monetary rewards, forcing most to remain deeply closeted’ (Hemphill & Symons, 2009, p. 401). Playing the (heterosexual) game that *Karen* described ensures the safety of some athletes, particularly those that are participating in what are considered to be masculine team sports.

*Summer* also touched on a stereotype surrounding women and sexuality in sports. She explained ‘well I think there’s the stereotype that is perceived for lesbians to be like, you know, aggressive or masculine in some way’ (*Summer*, 36 years). *Summer*’s suggestion confirms a widely held belief that most sporting lesbians are masculine, aggressive and generally participate in sports that match these characteristics, such as contact sports.

*Cassandra* identified what she believed to be some of the advantages of being a lesbian involved in sport:

Ah, I think that another unique thing about it is lesbians have time to do it [play sport]... most lesbians don’t have children and so they are not encumbered by family and husbands and they have the ability, or the time and the space to play sport. I think that that is definitely a lesbian issue, a nice issue that means that they can do it... a unique thing about being a dyke is that you can play sport and be yourself and you can play your sport to your fullest ability and not be encumbered by a whole lot of baggage that heterosexual women have by playing sport (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

*Cassandra* pointed out that most lesbians do not have the family pressures that their heterosexual counterparts may encounter. While lesbians do have other challenges that may affect participation, such as discrimination, stereotypes and ‘coming out’, an ‘upside’ of being a lesbian involved in sport is the lack (for many) of family and childcare constraints that many heterosexual women have.

In contrast, there have been increased numbers of lesbian parented families in Australia in recent times. According to research carried out by the Rainbow Families Council in Australia, ‘around 20 percent of lesbian women have children, and a further 20 percent are planning to do so’ (Rainbow Families Council, n.d.). The Rainbow Families Council also suggest that ‘until recently, most children living in same-sex parented families originated

from heterosexual relationships. However increasing numbers of same-sex couples are now creating families' (Rainbow Families Council, n.d.).<sup>93</sup>

- **Bisexual Women**

The majority of the participants felt that the issues facing bisexual female athletes in sport would be similar to those faced by lesbians in sport. However, several unique issues were also put forward and several of the participants considered there to be more challenges faced by bisexual female athletes than those experienced by lesbians and heterosexual women athletes. In particular, *Grace* and *Cassandra* felt that bisexual women athletes would face discrimination from not only heterosexuals, but also the gay and lesbian community. *Grace* summarised this double discrimination; 'in some ways I think it's harder for people who are bisexual because ... I guess yeah, cause there's discrimination from both sides' (*Grace*, 40 years). *Cassandra* similarly explained, 'bisexuals are discriminated against by lesbian people and gay boys...' (*Cassandra*, 52 years). Both *Grace* and *Cassandra* felt that bisexuals would encounter discrimination from a variety of individuals.

Two of the participants proposed that the issues surrounding bisexual female athletes would depend on the partner that they had at the time. *Claire* explained:

If you are a bisexual woman and you are with a man, then the straight [mainstream] press will see you as straight, and they will just treat you as straight. And so if you are bisexual and you are with a man, that is going to benefit you, I guess. And if you are bisexual and you are with a woman, then you will have to keep it quiet. It depends on who you have at the time I guess (*Claire*, 40 years).

Clearly, *Claire* felt that if a bisexual female athlete had a male partner (heterosexual

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<sup>93</sup> For further information, please see Rainbow Families Council, n.d., at <http://www.rainbowfamilies.org.au/pages/information/research/hot-topics.php>

relationship) her life would be considerably easier than if her partner was female (lesbian relationship).

*Claire*'s comments allude to the privileging of heterosexuality which normalises male/female relationships. Very few of the participants at *NCHC* believed that bisexuality challenged this privilege which is ideologically linked to the binaries of sexuality (heterosexuality and homosexuality) and gender (male and female). While lesbians and gays encounter difficulties in sport, there is little acknowledgement of the challenges that are faced by bisexual individuals.

- **Heterosexual Women**

Seven of the eight participants felt that heterosexual women faced unique challenges in sport. While all of the issues raised relate to heterosexual women in sport, many would also relate to all women in sport, irrespective of sexuality. Several different themes were present in the responses given by the participants. The themes that emerged were femininity, compulsory heterosexuality and equality issues in regards to exposure, sponsorship and club politics.

Self identified heterosexual, *Alison*, claimed that she felt that heterosexual female athletes do not face as many issues as women athletes of other sexualities in regards to sport participation and involvement (*Alison*, 46 years). *Alison* further explained that there is a link between lesbian participation and team sports that are traditionally considered 'male'. She felt that because a greater proportion of heterosexually identified women played sports that were considered to be traditionally 'female', that they then did not face as many challenges (*Alison*, 46 years).

*Alison*, along with *Summer*, felt that a unique issue faced by heterosexual women athletes was that their participation was seen as social and not competitive. *Summer* used the example of female netballers playing a secondary role to the male footballers on the weekends; ‘they socialise at the club and that’s not a problem because they’re sort of seen more as a social [athlete] than anything’ (*Summer*, 36 years). In a similar vein, *Alison* explained:

It’s not until they get a women’s committee going to have women’s sport or the women’s side of it take on. If you leave it to the men to organise, it will happen, but they won’t really put their heart and soul into it because we are here for the guys and male sport, you know all that male testosterone, woof woof stuff... Ah, but for the women, ‘you’ll be right love, just play your social stuff, you’re not supposed to take it too seriously’ (laughs). So, I think a lot of it is the male attitude as well (*Alison*, 46 years).

*Alison* considered that some women’s sport will be regarded as social until women are involved in official roles. These might include taking on leadership roles and/or becoming members of the committee.

According to the participants, stereotypes are also a factor for heterosexual female athletes. Along the same lines of the findings in research carried out by Sartore and Cunningham (2009), several participants felt that any female participating in sport can be labeled a lesbian. *Cassandra* proposed that heterosexual female athletes can face this negative stereotype by being:

Branded a dyke... I am sure there is some heterosexual women who are playing sport and being branded a dyke is an issue, you know, they don’t want to be called that. Ah, that they are not seen as being feminine and all that sort of stuff, you know, and that’s issues for them (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

*Grace* also commented on the ‘female athlete = lesbian’ stereotype that exists in women’s sports:

I reckon that some women’s sports are a bit paranoid about that stereotype about being lesbians, so they discriminate against

women who... are lesbians or who they're trying to dispel the myth about, you know, that all cricket players are lesbians or that all hockey players are lesbians and so you know, you find things like Cricket Vic[toria] or the Victorian Women's Cricket Association used to have a policy that whenever the state team were together in any formal presentations or anything, they had to wear skirts and so that's about trying to present a more feminine image of women's cricket, because its more marketable and palatable particularly in a very, you know, traditional male dominant environment and so I think that, I think that our challenge for women's sport is how to, you know it's that whole sex sells thing and it's about how to do that without undermining the athleticism of the women, you know (*Grace*, 40 years).

*Grace* raised a pertinent point when she suggested that many state and national female representative teams adopt a uniform that is usually more 'palatable' for male spectators, with little regard to the comfort of the female athlete.<sup>94</sup> This is evidenced by the Beach Volleyball uniform that women are required to wear compared to the men's uniform.<sup>95</sup>

Symons et al. (2010) commented on the resonance and impact of the lesbian label in their research into the LGBT sport experience in Victoria. Symons et al. (2010) explain:

Because the subject 'lesbian' is coded in many negative ways, being positioned as a lesbian brings with it a question mark over that subject's attractiveness, her femininity and her good character, and as a result many women fear this label (p. 41).

Consequently, many women will adhere to uniform policies and 'appropriately 'feminine' dress to avoid such a label. Similarly, Hargreaves (2000) explains that many women in sport 'practice' heterosexuality, and that this practice enables sporting organisations to ignore homophobia issues in women's sports. According to Hargreaves (2000):

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<sup>94</sup> Coakley et al. also discuss this point made by Grace. See Coakley et al., 2009.

<sup>95</sup> Competitors at the Olympic Games in Beach Volleyball must abide by a strict set of uniform guidelines. International male competitors are required to wear a 'tank top and shorts', however women are required to wear a 'top and briefs' or a 'one piece suit'. This difference in uniform guidelines has caused controversy. For further information on these guidelines, see the International Federation of Beach Volleyball website (<http://www.fivb.org/en/beachvolleyball/>) and the website for the Olympic Games ([www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org)).



Because lesbian and gay men are invisible, unlike Black or disabled athletes, and most elite homosexual athletes stay closeted, it is easy for sports leaders and organisation to do nothing. In the top level of the sport establishments of Western countries, there are few progressive voices about the politics of sexuality and so changing the climate of homophobia and discrimination against lesbian women rest with women themselves (p. 143).

The marketing, promotion and attempts to increase the media coverage of women in sport by focusing on the sexual attributes of female athletes are common.

This issue of ‘appropriate’ images for media coverage for instance leads to the more general issue of the marginalisation of women in the media as a whole. *Claire* commented on the marginalisation and inequality that can be applied to all women in sport. She explained that:

Women’s sport generally is marginalised... it’s just not as worthy. You know often... I don’t read the paper much but if I flick through the sports section, you could be forgiven for thinking that women don’t play sport. It’s the same if you look at any of the sports shows... it’s the same. You might see women in a swim suit or something on the sports shows but you know, women are out there and they are getting on with it and with the hockey, in Hockey Victoria, thousands of women play hockey every weekend and you wouldn’t know, you know, and it’s the same with netball (*Claire*, 40 years).

*Claire* also pointed out that this marginalisation is simply a ‘continuation of how women are treated in society generally... just second class citizens. There is a lot of talk about equality and the rest of it but its only lip service really’ (*Claire*, 40 years). *Claire* also felt that sportswomen received little in the way of media coverage, and if women did appear in the media, the appropriate feminine image was maintained.

*Cassandra* mentioned that femininity issues are an important consideration for heterosexual female athletes. Similarly, *Karen* felt that heterosexual women athletes faced the challenge of ‘looking good’ [like a ‘real’ woman]. She also proposed that, ‘in all three, sexual

orientations, I guess if you are pretty, [have] long hair, [are] very attractive, it helps regardless of what sexuality you are' (*Karen*, 42 years). Hence, according to *Karen*, physical appearance and an appropriate level of femininity are prioritised by sportswomen.

While exaggerated forms of femininity in females (and masculinity in males) may result in more media coverage and sponsorship, it can also be problematic. Women may impose upon themselves an expectation whereby they adhere to a stereotypical hyper-feminised image; a result of the male gaze. Regardless of sexuality, women who physically present an image contrary to this hyper-feminised image are often ridiculed and stigmatised. This may lead to discrimination in many forms and specifically the impact of being labeled as a lesbian. The peak organisation advocating for women in sport in Canada, the Canadian Association for Advancement of Women and Sport (CAAWS) encapsulates the significant impact homophobia has on all girls and women in sport:

For women, participation in sport is often discouraged because it is still seen as contrary to societal norms for being feminine or womanly. Homophobia in sport tends to marginalize women who do not fit such gender stereotypes. Feminine women may be reluctant to participate in sport because they run the risk of being viewed or labeled as 'lesbian', and females who are not stereotypically feminine are often not welcome in sport because they will bring this label with them and thus adversely affect other women (CAAWS, 2006, p. 6).

*Grace* explained a similar viewpoint in her quote mentioned earlier in this chapter. She proposed that women's sports organisations actually overtly feminise their female athletes (by wearing skirts and/or make-up) and discriminate against lesbians to avoid the 'lesbian' image and homophobia (*Grace*, 40 years). According to *Grace*, the reason as to why this was occurring, is marketing. She explained that 'it's more marketable and palatable' if women athletes are feminine and (at least appear) heterosexual (*Grace*, 40 years).

The challenges that many lesbian and bisexual women encounter in sport due to their sexuality have given rise to the development of specific competitions (such as the Gay Games and Outgames) which aim to redress these challenges. The *NCHC* participants were asked their opinion on the value and purpose of such competitions and their responses will be subsequently discussed.

### **Sexuality and Separation in Sport**

*NCHC* played in a mainstream hockey competition in the regular winter season of 2006 and were the only exclusively women's hockey club in the competition. The high proportion of 'out' lesbian identified players meant that the club was known as a 'lesbian club'. A knowledge (by other teams) of the members sexual orientation meant that individuals and the club as a whole could become targets of homophobic discrimination.

Other such sporting teams and clubs exist in North America, Europe and Australia and were formed in a similar time period to *NCHC*, as previously discussed, during the latter stages of second wave feminism. One year prior to *NCHC* forming, in 1984, the 'Notso Amazons Softball League' was formed in Toronto, Canada. The women's only Softball League was founded upon feminist principles for lesbian and lesbian positive women (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 96). Britain's Hackney Women's Football Club (HWFC) was formed one year after *NCHC* in 1986. HWFC identifies as a predominantly lesbian team, operated solely by women, and it promotes an inclusive environment for all women. According to the HWFC website, the club 'was also the first team to instigate a fair play policy, ensuring that all women are encouraged to train and play competitive football regardless of their skills, age, ethnic origin and sexual orientation' (Hackney Women's Football Club, n.d.). The philosophy of *NCHC* is similar,

where women of all abilities, ages, ethnic backgrounds and sexualities are encouraged to participate.

Participants from *NCHC* were asked whether they thought they faced any unique issues playing in a predominantly lesbian identified team within a mainstream sporting competition. All of the lesbian identified participants felt that they had faced unique challenges related to playing at *NCHC*. This discrimination and harassment was based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. Some of the common challenges faced by the participants included homophobic comments, sexual remarks and general hostility from opposition players and spectators.

Several *NCHC* participants convey their recollections of such opposition towards the club in the following four excerpts:

Yeah, there was last year actually. One of the other club's just took it upon themselves, their spectators to yell out derogatory remarks, and make comments... it was directed at our team based on our sexual orientation, and you know some of the comments were just pathetic really (*Karen*, 42 years)

We get the occasional [homophobic] comment from other young women that we play against... I know one year, I think it was *Kingspark College* women, you think that university women would have more [of an] idea but sometimes they say to our players 'kissy, kissy, kissy' on the field (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

We experience our fair share of you know, being called dykes and you know, some fairly foul-mouthed spectators on the sidelines who will put us down because of our sexuality and they are openly hostile, but that, that only happens with a couple of teams (*Dawn*, 49 years).

Some spectators from the opposition were making comments about us because we play hard and you know, but so what...

they were saying stuff about dykes and not just dykes, you know, filthy dykes... you know, going off at us (*Claire*, 40 years).

Participants explained that these instances of verbal homophobia were carried out by both males and females involved with opposition clubs. *Grace* explained that two coaches of an opposing team, (who were younger males) were responsible for making homophobic comments on one occasion (*Grace*, 40 years). *Cassandra* also described an occurrence of verbal sexual harassment, where opposing players on the field yelled out 'kissy, kissy, kissy' (*Cassandra*, 52 years). None of the players indicated that any form of harassment or discrimination had arisen from the officials or referees during or after matches. These instances of verbal harassment resulted in at least one complaint made by *NCHC* to the head sporting organisation, Hockey Victoria.<sup>96</sup>

*Karen's* and *Cassandra's* comments above epitomised those of the other lesbian identified players that were interviewed. *Dawn* felt that was a unique issue faced by their sporting team, and explains that this only 'happens with a couple of [opposing] teams'. This homophobic discrimination and harassment occurred in a verbal form and it appears that victims (such as *Dawn*) have come to accept this as a part of the game. Griffin (1998) explains that these explicit forms of discrimination and harassment are common themes of a hostile environment towards lesbian athletes, coaches and administrators (p. 92).<sup>97</sup>

A consequence of the verbal abuse experienced by the participants at *NCHC*, is that a solidarity is formed amongst victims in their shared experiences. Symons et al. also revealed that:

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<sup>96</sup> This complaint is discussed in further detail in the section below -

<sup>97</sup> A more detailed description of a hostile climate can be found in Griffin (1998, pp. 93-99).

Many female participants, who were out in their sport, highlight individual and social facilitators of open and inclusive sports environments. These include confidence, positive self esteem concerning ones sexual and sporting identity, having a number of LGBT people out in the sports club to provide affirmation and support for other LGBT people and a friendly and supportive sports club environment for all members (2010, p. 48).

Therefore, while players from *NCHC* experienced homophobia while playing hockey, the shared experiences between club members and positive club culture provided a space that was supportive and affirming of individual and group lesbian identities.

Regardless of these instances of homophobic discrimination, many of the participants felt that these incidents did not undermine the underlying ethos of the club. However, *NCHC* is identified as a 'lesbian club' in the hockey community, and simply by virtue of being a member of the club, the participants are effectively identifying themselves as lesbian.

Elling et al. (2003) also found that lesbians and gay men preferred to participate in a sporting team within their 'own group' (p. 451). This is the notion that *Dawn* alludes to when she refer to her experiences of playing with other lesbians: 'I actually enjoy playing with lesbians...this is my ideal environment and it's the environment I choose to be in' (*Dawn*, 49 years). This is a major factor for joining such a team, along with a sense of belonging, being 'oneself' and the common gay and lesbian culture. Symons et al. (2010) further explain the benefits to lesbians and gay men participating in a same-sex or queer identified team:

The positive benefits derived from 'being yourself', feeling safe, being supported and affirmed as lesbian / gay and sporty, belonging to a larger community and gaining visibility, meaning and empowerment from this identity-making, solidarity and shared sporting and cultural endeavour... (p. 37).

These benefits explain why lesbians and gay men choose to participate in events such as the Gay Games and Outgames. The growth of the LGBT sports teams has also influenced the growth of the international LGBT sports movement. According to Symons et al. (2010), ‘many field teams in mainstream sport leagues and competitions, host mainstream events, and participate in predominantly LGBT local, regional and international sports events’ (p. 37). Many of the participants from *NCHC* had participated in at least one Gay Games. Their experiences of this involvement are detailed below.

- **Participation at the Gay Games**

Involvement in a predominately lesbian identified team has consequently led to many of the participants becoming aware of and subsequently physically taking part in one or more Gay Games events.<sup>98</sup> Six of the eight participants had participated in one or more Gay Games, in either the sports of soccer or hockey. All of these participants described the experience of participating at the Gay Games as a positive one. *Karen* described her experiences of the Sydney Gay Games in 2002:

It was just fantastic. Ah, not that there were many hockey clubs, but just the whole feeling around Sydney itself, it was just, you felt a sense of freedom in a way... just walking down the street... there was that sense of absolute freedom I felt. Just the opening ceremony, and the thousands of people, you were just there for the same reason, and look, whether there were straight people there as well participating, they were there because they embraced the people they were with. It was really quite a wonderful feeling (*Karen*, 42 years).

Most of the women in the study who participated at a Gay Games mentioned the feeling of ‘freedom’ and the Gay Games as an environment where one could be themselves. *Dawn* described her experiences of participating at the Sydney Gay Games as one of the highlights of her life (*Dawn*, 49 years).

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<sup>98</sup> Please see Chapter Eight for a further discussion of this point.

Similarly, *Claire* recounted her experiences of the Sydney Gay Games:

Oh, it was fantastic... the whole experience was fantastic, the tournament was great but the whole... the opening ceremony was just mind boggling... the stadium was filled to capacity, it was just like an Olympic opening... it was phenomenal and beautifully stage managed with shows and performances and Justice Michael Kirby made an amazing speech. Yeah, to walk around Sydney at that time, there were just thousands of athletes from all over the world and everybody had their games ID around their neck, so you knew who was part of it. It was just an amazing vibe and... it was just great and to play against teams from Germany, other Australian teams and yeah, it was excellent! (*Claire*, 40 years)

Similarly, *Summer and Grace* explained why they felt that participation in the Gay Games was a positive experience:

I mean I think it's great because you can get out and be who you are and act behave with your partner or your supporters without feeling intimidated and so I think that that's a positive thing... (*Summer*, 36 years)

I went up to the Gay Games with them you know I was going to be the orange cutter but they didn't have enough players and so I ended up playing which was great fun and since and I've never played hockey before so since then I've got involved as well (*Grace*, 40 years).

The positive experiences of the participants are confirmed by the extensive research into the history of the Gay Games by Symons. Symons (2002) found that the 'social elements that sustain communities such as shared meanings, solidarity, belonging, participation, and even equality, are fostered at the Gay Games' (p. 111).

Along with the feeling of 'freedom', many of the participants touched on the notion of a 'sub-culture' or 'community' in regards to the Gay Games. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, this 'community' is not one homogenous population, it consists of several



communities participating each with their own identities and agendas.<sup>99</sup> Symons proposes that there is ‘no one Gay Games’ that reflects one single community, there ‘is a multiplicity of Gay Games lived by the various participating individuals, groups and communities’ (2002, p. 111). While the individual experience of Gay Games participation is unique, participants from this case study found their involvement in the Gay Games to be overwhelmingly positive and affirming.

Participants were asked during their interviews if they felt that there was a need for sporting events such as the Gay Games or separate gay and lesbian sporting clubs or events. All of the participants felt that there is a need for separate gay and lesbian sporting events. Most of the women who participated in the study from *NCHC* identified as lesbian. Therefore these women had individually (and collectively) dealt with discrimination and various challenges that a lesbian athlete encounters.

*Cassandra* considered the term ‘sub-culture’ when referring to the gay and lesbian sporting population. She explained:

It’s about celebrating a sub-culture and that’s what we have been, and so why not have a celebratory games sub-culture, and isn’t it important to have sub-cultures in our community? You know, having police games and fireman games and all of the other games, they are sub-cultures too. No different to us being a sub-culture to celebrate who we are. For someone who is really quite discriminatory of it, I think that it is really important to have our sub-culture celebrated as it is and I think having clubs do it to, ah, a safe place, gives them a safe place to be because there is no doubt that there is safety in numbers...  
(*Cassandra*, 52 years)

*Cassandra* also raised the concept of a ‘safe space’. *Claire*’s feelings harmonised with *Cassandra* and she explained that ‘it’s a celebration and again it’s a safe space’ (*Claire*, 40

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<sup>99</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these identities and agendas, see Symons, 2002; and Symons 2010.

years). In her study on an Australian Rules women's football team, Hillier describes a 'safe space' as a site for 'young women to test gender and sexuality boundaries in relative safety' (2005, p. 51). *Summer* and *Connie* both felt that there was not a need for events such as the Gay Games or separate gay and lesbian sporting clubs or events from a sporting perspective, but there was a need from a social perspective. In particular, *Summer* felt that the social aspect of events such as the Gay Games are the most affirming aspect.

I think that's [the social aspect] the positive thing that comes out of it. You get to meet a whole lot of people that you wouldn't otherwise and in our environment is that where you know being gay you are the minority and for a change you are the majority, which is an interesting experience... (*Summer*, 36 years).

Because sport provides 'an excellent way to get to know people' (*Connie*, 32 years), *Connie* felt that the social features of events such as the Gay Games were the most important.

Hargreaves (2000) explains that many lesbians prefer to participate in sporting cultures where they can meet and socialise with other same-sex attracted women (p. 152). For some women, this is simply about camaraderie and community, for others it is an opportunity to find love (Griffin, 1998). As a result, lesbian sporting teams and clubs often provide a space to identify as a lesbian and belong to a community. However, these spaces and members of such teams are open to harassment and discrimination on the basis of sexuality. Policy only goes so far to protect lesbian athletes and teams from homophobia. Policy and its relation to practice at *NCHC* and Hockey Victoria is discussed in the following section.

### **Policy and Practice at *NCHC***

Not one of the players interviewed was aware of any official member protection or anti-discrimination policies available at *NCHC*. Even the president of the club, *Cassandra*, believed that there were no written official policies on anti-discrimination within the club.

Despite this, many of the participants made mention of an ethos or unwritten rule on anti-discrimination behaviour at *NCHC*. As a result of this ethos, many felt that there was not a need for an official document at the club. *Grace* explained that the lack of policy is justified by the size of *NCHC*:

Because *NCHC*'s such a small club we don't really have a lot of written policies but we have ... more important to that, we have an active, actively talked about and acted upon policy about being inclusive and diverse (*Grace*, 40 years).

*Karen* felt that there was no need for a policy, because the club members 'would not tolerate people who are quite narrow minded' (*Karen*, 42 years).

Half of the participants were aware of an anti-discrimination policy at the head sporting organisation, Hockey Victoria, while the other half of the participants were not aware if such a policy existed. Of the four participants that were aware of an anti-discrimination policy; three of them had not actually seen or read through it. These three participants simply assumed that there is one available or had a faint recollection of being told about one. The one participant that was definitely aware of the policy and had read through it had previously lodged a complaint with Hockey Victoria, so had therefore accessed the policy in the past.<sup>100</sup> This implies that participants only had knowledge of the policy if they had been in a situation where they had cause to use it.

*Dawn* was unsure whether an anti-discrimination policy existed at Hockey Victoria, but nevertheless she recommended that Hockey Victoria should have such a policy in order to protect themselves. '[Y]eah, well most places do have to protect themselves so it would be there, it would be there to be inclusive and you know celebrate diversity even if to protect

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<sup>100</sup> A description of this complaint lodged with Hockey Victoria is explained in further detail later in this chapter.

them, you know' (*Dawn*, 49 years). The implication that Hockey Victoria would need such a policy to protect their own organisation from possible legal action would not necessarily foster a culture of inclusivity and celebrate diversity. As discussed in Chapter Four, the terminology used in the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (42/1995) is intended to discourage certain behaviour, but is not designed to promote any movement towards the acceptance of sexual diversity. In this case, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is 'prohibited'. An individual or group who is/are likely to engage in discriminatory practices may avoid such discrimination merely to avoid legal action, rather than to endorse cultural change in relation to sexual diversity. It is important that club members are not lulled into a false sense of security by the existence of an anti-discrimination policy, as compliance with legislation provides no guarantee of an inclusive culture. If *Dawn*, who is a founding member of a self identified feminist club, can inflate the anti-discrimination policies capabilities, then possibly many others do also.

In 2010, the 'Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport' was developed for local sport to implement. This was an important step towards producing codes of conduct at club and State Sporting Organisation level. The State Government of Victoria launched the code to ensure that 'every person in Victoria has the right to participate in community sport which is safe, welcoming and inclusive' (Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport, 2010, p. 1). The code outlines that from 2010, all State Sporting Associations (SSAs) (including Hockey Victoria) were required to pledge their support for the code, by ensuring several actions are undertaken. One such 'action' is that the SSA must 'inform all affiliated clubs of their obligations under the Code, their expectations for reporting, assessing and acting upon breaches' (Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport, 2010. p. 3), and this would include clubs such as *NCHC*. The Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport is an

important step to changing the culture of sporting clubs and SSAs in regards to education of and an adherence to policy. It is important to note that having such a policy is only one of the steps to inclusion and non-discriminatory sporting cultures. The hockey club's ethos whereby inclusion is experienced, also plays a pertinent role.

Participants were also asked if an anti-discrimination policy did exist at the hockey club, should it include a section on sexual orientation as a possible form of discrimination. The majority of the participants felt that if policy did exist, it should include a section on sexual orientation. One of the participants, *Connie*, a self identified lesbian, felt that sexual orientation should not be included at all in such a policy (*Connie*, 32 years). *Connie* chose not to elaborate on why she felt this way.

*Grace*, who worked in a community development role in the Sport and Recreation sector, had made suggestions to Hockey Victoria in the past about including sexual orientation in their anti-discrimination legislation.

Well, I know Hockey Victoria have got a anti-discrimination policy because when we were making the complaint last year I enquired about all of that and I also sent them some information on from the Australian Sports Commission but I actually.... noted that one of the sentences needed to be changed to include sexual orientation (*Grace*, 40 years).

*Grace's* knowledge of anti-discrimination legislation and the process for lodging complaints stemmed from her position in the Sport and Recreation field, and not necessarily from her participation in recreational sport in the community.

None of the participants identified an official complaints procedure at *NCHC*. The majority of the participants felt that they would raise the issue or complaint with a committee member, or specifically the president, in most cases, if they felt the need. *Dawn* explained that a

complaints procedure was too official for their hockey club and that she personally, would not want one. Similarly, a few of the participants alluded to the idea that a complaints procedure was not necessary at the club as they all usually sat down and worked out any issues within the club. *Grace* explained this process in an earlier quote, where she suggested that the club has an actively ‘talked about and acted upon’ ethos around policy and complaints (*Grace*, 40 years).

Participants were asked whether they were aware of an official complaints procedure at Hockey Victoria which covered anti-discrimination and harassment. Half of the participants were confident that there was a specific complaints procedure available at Hockey Victoria. The other half of the participants were not aware of a complaints procedure at Hockey Victoria, although two assumed that there would be a complaints procedure available. The participants who knew that there was an existing complaints procedure at Hockey Victoria, were aware of this because of a complaint that had been lodged on behalf of the club in the past.

During the interviews, many of the participants discussed the complaint that was lodged on behalf of all participants at the club. This complaint was based on homophobic comments made towards players of *NCHC* during a match against *Kingspark College*,<sup>101</sup> As mentioned previously, *Claire* recounted the details of this incident – explaining that opposition spectators were ‘saying stuff about dykes and not just dykes, you know, filthy dykes’ (*Claire*, 40 years).

*Grace* also explained the situation which led to the complaint being lodged:

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<sup>101</sup> *Kingspark College* is a pseudonym for a university team that played in the same competition as *NCHC*.

I think that when we played that team earlier in the season they had called out something about you know a bunch of lesbians or whatever so we, we wrote a letter to the association complaining about their behavior... I just sent them a whole lot of information, downloaded information from the Australian Sports Commission around discrimination and sport and policies... so that was quite good and that team apologised and said that the coaches at the time at that week weren't the regular coaches. They were just stepping in, they apologised for the, if anyone was offended by their comments... but we just wanted to put it down on paper and we were quite open in the letter saying that people played for that club you, you know because they're accepting, you know it's a diverse and supportive environment and that, that sort of behaviour just undermined the whole thing... (*Grace*, 40 years)

*Grace* further explained that the complaint was resolved by the offending team issuing a written apology to *NCHC*. No further penalty was issued to the opposing team.

*Grace*, who did much of the research and work when the complaint was lodged, recalls that Hockey Victoria were very helpful and supportive of *NCHC*'s complaint and the complaint procedure in general. She explained:

I asked them [Hockey Victoria] to explain the process about how it would be then dealt with and listened to and who and you know, they had a specific committee that's set up and that includes people, there was you know, a guy or a couple of people I think who have legal backgrounds but are involved in hockey and whatever... and they encouraged me to ring and chat to him... because we had, I think that one of the committee members had written a letter and submitted it and then they asked me to get involved and I looked at the letter and I spoke to Hockey Victoria and this guy who was part of the review committee and I resubmitted the letter with you know with some guidance from him about the sorts of information that needed to be in it. So they were really supportive in making sure that I, well we were supported in getting all the information we needed and understanding this, the approach, the approach that would be taken (*Grace*, 40 years).

All of the participants who discussed this particular complaint felt that it was effectively and fairly resolved. It was because of this approach from Hockey Victoria, that *Grace* felt that

she would feel comfortable enough to lodge a complaint again in the future if she felt it was warranted.

Seven of the participants felt that they would feel comfortable enough to lodge a complaint of a discriminatory nature through both their own hockey club and Hockey Victoria. The other participant, *Connie*, did not know if she felt comfortable enough to lodge a complaint of this nature, as she had ‘never thought about it’ (*Connie*, 32 years). This ‘comfort’ of the majority of players may be due to the age/maturity of participants. They were comfortable within themselves, their identities, and not shy about making a complaint.

Participants who were also involved in an administrative role within the club were asked additional questions about their knowledge of anti-discrimination resources. Referred to as the ‘leaders’ at the club, two of the participants held positions on the committee of *NCHC*; *Cassandra*, the president of the club, and *Karen*, the treasurer of the club. Two other participants in the case study, *Summer* and *Connie*, shared the role of a playing coach. These four participants were asked if they were aware of any resources that address discrimination in sport generally, whether the club offered any form of training on discrimination in sport and whether any of them were aware if Hockey Victoria offered any form of training on discrimination in sport for members of affiliated hockey clubs. All four participants were not aware of any general resources that addressed discrimination in sport. All four participants also suggested that the club did not offer any form of training on discrimination in sport. Additionally, all of the four leaders at *NCHC* were not aware if Hockey Victoria offered any form of training on discrimination in sport.



The 'Club Development Manager' at Hockey Victoria explained that Hockey Victoria do indeed disseminate information to hockey club representatives in relation to 'Homophobia in Sport', 'Health', 'Working with Children' and 'Ugly Parents' via email and post (personal communication, July 6, 2010). However, this is an area that they wish to develop further and have only begun to do recently (since 2006). The 'Club Development Manager' further explained that Hockey Victoria do not enquire as to whether information, once sent to clubs, had arrived and been distributed to members (personal communication, July 6, 2010). In contrast to this, in late 2010, Hockey Victoria announced that they will be involved in a joint project with the Australian Sports Commission, 'Fair go, Sport!' This project is the first of its kind in Australia and is designed to 'promote safe and inclusive sporting environment for everyone' (Hartung, 2010). Hartung (Chief Executive Officer of Hockey Victoria) explained that a model will be developed to engage clubs on the issues above. Additionally, 'as part of the project, an online survey has been developed to identify attitudes and perceptions of harassment and discrimination related to sexuality and gender identity' (Hartung, 2010). Such a project should provide clearer communication channels between the SSA and the hockey clubs.

All participants involved in the study from *NCHC* were asked if they would be interested in finding out more information in the form of a seminar on anti-discrimination policies and inclusive practices at local sporting clubs. Four of the participants were interested in finding out more information. Significantly, three of the players (all leaders at the club; *Summer*, *Connie* and *Karen*) felt that there were not necessarily interested in finding out more information. Even though these 'leaders' at the club were not personally interested in acquiring further information, their official roles should encompass the dissemination of such materials. The final participant, *Grace*, said that she would go along to such a seminar, but

felt that she probably would not learn anything because she considered her existing knowledge on inclusive practices and anti-discrimination policies to be quite extensive.

### **Concluding Comments**

While some women avoid sporting involvement because of the lesbian label, other women gravitate to participating in sport, because they will find support amongst others who identify similarly or share similar experiences (Peper, 1994; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009; and Russell, 2006). In Reimer's (1997) study on the identity formation of lesbians in recreational level softball in the United States, she claims that for some lesbian athletes, sport can provide an affirming environment where lesbians are able to explore the formation of a positive identity unavailable to them in alternative environments. It seemed that for *NCHC* members, their club provided that opportunity.

As a one-team women's club, *NCHC* was a deliberately positive environment for the women participants. The women controlled the positions of power at the club, including the coaching roles, executive positions and committee roles. A well developed knowledge of issues that surrounded gender, sexuality and power in sport existed at the club (in particular, with one of the 'leaders' at the club), and this provided the context for a safe and identity affirming culture (for most women). The uptake of policy at the club was reactive, rather than proactive. The participants who sourced member protection or anti-discrimination policy, only did so in order to make a complaint to the state sporting association. There was not an active integration of policy at the club level.

The following chapter, Chapter Six, will also investigate the uptake of policy and the culture at club level at another hockey club in Victoria. An examination of *Melbourne Central*

*Hockey Club* elicits several themes and discussion points; the lack of policy at the club level, the male dominated governance of mixed-gendered hockey clubs and the effects of the lesbian label on all women involved in sport.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Case Study 2 - Melbourne Central Hockey Club (MCHC)**

#### **Introduction**

The pseudonym of *Melbourne Central Hockey Club (MCHC)* was given to the second hockey club investigated in this research. *MCHC* is a large university based hockey club situated in central Melbourne. The club has a variety of teams competing in many different competitions, several men's, women's and junior's teams, and also veterans and mixed teams. The participant base at *MCHC* is a group of predominantly heterosexually identified young women.

The club had more than 400 members in the season of 2006, whereby there was an even spread of male and female members at the club, with around 200 male and 200 females members. Seven of these women members from *MCHC* chose to participate in this research, therefore transcripts from these seven participants form the basis of this case study. Most of the seven participants played in the women's firsts' team.<sup>102</sup>

#### **Demographic Information**

The participants were aged between 20 years and 35 years old, with an average age of around 24 years old. Therefore the median age of participants at *MCHC* was significantly younger than that of the participants at *NCHC*. This is not surprising considering that many of the players from *MCHC* are university students or had been students at that university in the recent past. All of the seven participants were born in Australia and all of the participants

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<sup>102</sup> Due to the small sample of members, the perceptions and perspectives of the seven club members form the case study information. The findings for this hockey club are not representative of the hockey club as a whole.

have lived in a city area for much of their lives. Two of the participants had also lived in larger country towns/regional centres in Victoria (in Geelong and Ballarat).<sup>103</sup>

Four of the participants identified culturally as either Australian, Anglo-Australian or as one participant explained, 'Dinki-di Aussie'. One of the participants identified as Anglo-Saxon, one participant identified as 'dubious', and the remaining participant preferred not to comment on her cultural background or ethnicity. All of the seven participants had reached a tertiary level of education, including one with post-graduate qualifications. All participants were in some form of professional employment or were university students at the time of their interview.

Only two participants explained that their reason for joining the club was their enrolment at the university provided that opportunity. Two of the participants were unhappy with their previous clubs. *Skeeter* was searching for a new hockey club to join and found an advertisement for *MCHC* on the Hockey Victoria website (*Skeeter*, 22 years). Another participant joined the club because one of the coaches at *MCHC* recruited her from another club and the final participant joined the club because of a personal contact that played there. Several participants also commented on the close proximity of the club to their place of residence.

All participants from *MCHC* had an involvement with sport throughout most of their lives. Every participant started playing some form of sport at a primary school age, and most of the seven participants had played hockey from this age also. *Laura* explained her early involvement in hockey:

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<sup>103</sup> Geelong and Ballarat are smaller cities in the state of Victoria. Geelong is located around 75 kilometres south-west of Melbourne with a population of around 200,000. Ballarat is located 125 kilometres west of Melbourne with a population of around 80,000 people.

I started playing hockey when I was in primary school. I think probably in year, I think year 3 is the first year you can play sort of play real hockey and I've played every year since then... I've never had a year off so maybe I should. But yeah, continuously since then (*Laura*, 23 years).

Many of the participants were also involved in other sports at the time of their interview.

Five of the seven participants played another sport, either recreationally or in a competition.

These sports included basketball, swimming, football (Australian Rules), soccer, athletics, tennis and one of the participants 'went to the gym' frequently. One of the participants, *Alex*, also umpired hockey games.

Five of the seven participants interviewed identified their sexuality as heterosexual, one as 'mostly heterosexual' and the remaining participant identified her sexuality as lesbian.

*Skeeter*, who identified as lesbian, was in a relationship but was not 'out' to the other players at the club (*Skeeter*, 22 years). Previously a playing member at *NCHC* (where she was 'out' as a lesbian), *Skeeter* was participating in her first season at *MCHC*. While *Skeeter* claimed that she had not intentionally chosen to conceal her sexuality from her new team-mates, she explained that more so the opportunity had not arisen prior to the interview (*Skeeter*, 22 years). *Nat*, who identified as 'mostly heterosexual', was in a relationship with a male (*Nat*, 26 years). Of the other five heterosexual participants, three were in relationships, and the other two identified as 'single'.

### **The Origins of *MCHC***

*MCHC* has a long history. The women's section of the club was formed around 1907, and the men's in 1908. The men's and women's clubs amalgamated in the late 1970s. The hockey club did not have a clubhouse as such where all of the members could gather after

training and games. Much of the social activities that the members engaged in together were held at local pubs and restaurants.

The university in which the hockey club is situated is one of the oldest universities in Australia, and has several campuses throughout Victoria. The number of students enrolled at the university was around 34,000 at the time of the interview (2006), with 56% being female and around 26% being international students.<sup>104</sup> University life presents many opportunities and challenges for students and, therefore, is a time where students form communities of like-minded individuals. This is particularly true of those students living on campus. *Hannah* explained her link to living on campus and her university sporting choices: ‘I went to a residential college and so I played ‘chicks’ [women’s] footy and soccer and you know, everything, athletics...’ (*Hannah*, 22 years).

The sporting communities formed in the university setting are of high importance for many of the students at the university. This position is explored further in Australian university settings by June Senyard (2004) and Sonja Lilienthal (1997). Senyard’s (2004) *The ties that bind: A history of sport at the University of Melbourne* looks at the sporting and social history of Melbourne University and at the formation of sporting clubs affiliated with the university. Similarly, Lilienthal’s *Newtown Tarts: A history of Sydney University Women’s Sport Association* documents the beginnings of women’s sporting clubs at the University of Sydney, including the hockey club.

According to Lilienthal, the Sydney University Women’s Hockey Club was formed in 1908

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<sup>104</sup> While these figures were gleaned from the university’s website, this website has not been referenced intentionally to protect the anonymity of the participants.

‘by a group of enthusiastic first year students’ (1997, p. 17). This was within a year of *MCHC* (women’s club) being formed. While hockey was played at Sydney University prior to this date, the club was not officially formed until 1908 when they could register with the newly established NSW Women’s Hockey Association (Lilienthal, 1997, p. 17).

*MCHC* is affiliated with the state sporting organisation, Hockey Victoria, and through this state body, with Hockey Australia. Hockey Victoria organises and oversees all hockey competitions in Victoria. Despite being attached to the university, *MCHC* is very different to the United States College sports programs.<sup>105</sup> The university offers a wide array of sports clubs for students and the general population. In 2006, there were in excess of 40 different sporting clubs affiliated with the university, and the university also operated a large gymnasium, multi-sports complex and swimming centre.

While the *MCHC* had a formal association with the university, the actual governance of the club was carried out by the club members. The administration and governance of *MCHC* will be examined in the following section.

### **Governance at *MCHC***

Two of the participants held positions on the committee of *MCHC*. *Hannah* was the women’s secretary of the club, and she was in effect, in charge of much of the women’s administration. Another participant, *Laura* was also involved on the committee of *MCHC*. *Laura* was a member of the general committee and chose not to elaborate on her

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<sup>105</sup> This contention is discussed in Chapter Two. Generally, the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) sport in the U.S. is semi-professional compared to University sport in Australia, which is largely amateur and club based. NCAA sport consists of wide range of sport, where individuals and teams are involved in competition on a weekly basis. The NCAA has media rights deals with CBS and ESPN that are worth billions of dollars for specific sports. In Australia, a national ‘University Games’ is held once a year. These games are a non-professional event, where the emphasis is on fun, rather than performance.



responsibilities in this position. She was also an Equipment Officer (along with her male partner, who was also a member of *MCHC*). Unlike *NCHC*, the committee at *MCHC* was mostly governed by the male members of the club.

Despite the gender split at the club being half male members and half female members, all senior committee positions were held by men (*Laura*, 23 years). It appeared from the outset that the dominance of the male members in positions of power and governance at the club were part of the culture of *MCHC*. It was a naturalised view at the hockey club that the males at the club were those who occupied the positions on the committee and made the decisions that affected the club as a whole. This was evident during the initial communication with the women's secretary and the first training session attended by the researcher. *Hannah* mentioned that she would need to get permission from the (male) president of the club for the researcher to recruit female members of the club. *Hannah* was effectively in charge of the women's administration at the club, however, she was unable to make this decision. Additionally, at the first training session there was a disparity in training space allocated to the male and female playing members. The men's teams used over three quarters of the pitch in use for training sessions, while the women used less than one quarter of the pitch. This occurred on at least three occasions during the 2006 season, and was observed by the researcher.

Other instances of gender inequality were observed by the researcher. In particular, at *MCHC* (and *SEHC*) the women's training sessions were often held before or after the senior men's training sessions – which were held at around 7pm. These times were often inconvenient for women with employment and families. One participant from *MCHC*, also explained that despite her team playing in a higher level competition than the men's 'firsts'

team, the men's senior team often had a more experienced coach than the women's team (personal communication, 23 June, 2006). These gender inequalities in sport in Australia are also explored by Coakley et al. (2009, pp. 256-257); Hargreaves (2000, pp. 3-7); Symons et al. (2010, p.42, pp. 53-55, Sundstrom et al. (2011, pp. 110-115); and Stell (1991, p. viii).

*Laura* explained her thoughts on the committee at *MCHC*:

I'll just say [they are] exclusive and almost misogynist (sic), like it just, yeah, it's really frustrating. I mean there's only a couple of women on the committee... There's another woman who's the juniors convener and then there's me and sort of you know... so the president, treasurer, secretary, vice president they're all blokes and they're all sort of mates and don't really give a shit about the other sort of twenty teams at the club that they don't play in, so yeah (*Laura*, 23 years).<sup>106</sup>

All of the positions that the female members held on the committee were minor roles in major decision making processes. Therefore, most of the female participants at the club played little role and carried little influence in the running of the overall club, including some decisions that pertained to the women's teams.

Similarly, *Nat*, who had been the captain of the 'firsts' women's team felt that males in the club dominated a large proportion of the administrative roles. She explained:

I perceive it to be a relatively blokey club I guess. Whether that's the case of all hockey clubs I don't really know but there is a focus on them on the men's teams and they tend to dominate all of the, most of the administrative roles whether that's because women haven't put their names forward or otherwise, I don't know... (*Nat*, 26 years).

*Nat* suggested that the women may not have nominated for committee membership, and that that may explain an uneven gendered membership on the committee.

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<sup>106</sup> None of the other players give such a description of the committee. Essentially the only two participants that had contact with the committee were *Hannah* and *Laura* (and *Amanda* in the year previous) during the season of 2006. Neither *Hannah* or *Amanda* described the committee in such a way. This may be because *Amanda* was only involved with the committee for one season and *Hannah* had just begun her role as the Women's Secretary, or because *Laura* had had particularly bad experiences with the committee.

Even though the hockey club was linked to the university sport centre, the club did not appear to align itself with the university's equity policy. The university has an array of policies and strategies designed to encourage equity and to support diversity in all facets of the university. *Laura's* comments suggested that the hockey club's culture did not practice equality for all, with her describing the committee as 'misogynistic' (*Laura*, 23 years). In contrast, *Hannah* (the women's secretary at the club) did not share these feelings. She explained that she was approached by the president (male) of the club to take on an official role (*Hannah*, 22 years). However, *Hannah's* role was to help with the women's section of the club, not the overall club (*Hannah*, 22 years).

Participants had different motivations for taking on administrative or extra roles within the club. *Amanda*, who was a previous member of the general committee claimed that she became involved in an administrative role at the club as she was 'talked into it' by her coach. *Laura*, also on the committee and the Equipment Officer, felt that there needed to be a younger person on the committee, and that there were no other volunteers for the equipment officer job. The Women's Secretary, *Hannah*, claimed that her motivations for taking on that role were varied. Firstly, her hockey playing fees were paid for the season, secondly, she had the opportunity to give something back to the club, and the third reason (as mentioned above), was that the president of the club (a male in a position of power) personally asked her to take on that role (*Hannah*, 22 years). She did not cite women's equity as an abiding motivation of her tenure as the women's secretary.

The predominant heterosexual identity of participants, along with the motivations for and availability of governance roles at the club for women informed the culture of *MCHC*. This culture in regards to inclusion will be discussed over the following pages.

## Lived Experiences of Inclusion at the Club

All participants described their experiences of playing hockey at *MCHC* in predominantly positive terms. Many of the participants commented on the friendliness of the members of *MCHC*, and also the large social aspect of the club. There was no clubhouse at the hockey club, therefore all club functions and get-togethers occurred at a public location where alcohol was served.

While a few of the participants really enjoyed the social aspect of the hockey club, several participants described this ‘culture’ of the club in negative terms. *Nat* believed that this aspect of the club could act as a deterrent for all members to become fully involved at the club, as the social aspect of the club was dominated by a ‘blokey’ and alcohol-affected culture. She explained this point:

The social side of things are certainly...very alcohol based very, very blokey based in my view and that, for me as being a bit older and not really being into that sort of thing has been a bit of a, I guess a deterrent in terms of becoming really, really involved socially and otherwise with the club (*Nat*, 26 years).

*Amanda* agreed with *Nat* on the social aspect of the club, but for different reasons:

I haven’t quite enjoyed it because it’s quite a social club and, and there’s a lot of Uni students there so it’s a lot more [younger] people than the average crowd and they do make an effort to have a couple of drinks and social nights... (*Amanda*, 20 years).

Combined with the historically masculine nature of pub culture,<sup>107</sup> the university student culture can be linked with excessive alcohol consumption. According to Roche and Watt (1999), ‘there is extensive anecdotal information and considerable interest in the levels and patterns of drinking among university students in Australia’ (p. 389). In their research on students attending the three major universities in Queensland, they discovered that more than

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<sup>107</sup> For further analysis of the history of the gendered nature of pub culture in 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia, see Kirkby and Luckins, 2006.

two-thirds (69%) of the sample reported drinking at hazardous or harmful levels (Roche & Watt, 1999).

*Nat* further purported that the club was best characterised as a predominately heterosexual club. She explains the culture at the club:

It is a predominantly white Anglo club and probably very heterosexual in its overall tendencies. I would think not necessarily disrespectful of discriminatory of or even, un-accepting of potential lesbian or homosexual people, but probably it just isn't out there as something that, that everyone's aware of. It's... an overall message in terms of the, the bloke, what I call the blokeyness (sic), that sort of attaches to the, the drinking and the socializing, probably all revolves around a very... heterosexual kind of imagery. Men chasing chicks in really small outfits you know, choosing costume parties that will mean that the girls get dressed up in really small pieces of clothing and so on (*Nat*, 26 years).

From *Nat*'s perspective, the club's overall culture served heterosexual male interest, and reinforced heterosexual normality. This type of culture can also be problematic for non-heterosexuals, who are rendered invisible and silent.

The combination of a heterosexual male dominated sporting environment, university student alcohol consumption patterns and pub culture in Australia is a volatile mix. At times, this results in an alcohol-infused, masculine and (sometimes) homophobic culture that is difficult to challenge (Kirkby & Luckins, 2006). This culture at sporting clubs (such as the hockey club) can produce an environment into which LGBT individuals are 'on guard' about their sexuality (Squires and Sparkes, 1996). The lesbian physical education teachers in Squires and Sparkes (1996) study explained that school social gatherings (including 'informal gatherings at the pub') were not environments where they would feel comfortable being out as a lesbian, in fact, it was a space to be on guard about their sexuality (p. 79). For the teachers, this was manifest in their pretending to have a boyfriend, and/or joining in with any

homophobic banter to avoid suspicion of being a lesbian. Similar to the experiences of the physical education teachers, the 'pub culture' at *MCHC* shaped individual and the club identity.

When the participants were asked whether they felt the club was welcoming and inclusive of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and sexualities, there were a variety of responses. All participants felt that the club was welcoming of all ages, while most felt that the club was welcoming of all ethnic backgrounds. *Laura* found it difficult to assess the welcoming nature of the club on the basis of ethnicity, as she felt that *MCHC* was not ethnically diverse (*Laura*, 23 years). The lack of ethnic diversity in hockey club membership may be reflective of hockey culture in general, as different sports attract different ethnic groupings.<sup>108</sup>

In terms of sexuality, only three of the participants felt that the club was welcoming of all sexualities. Interestingly, both 'leaders' at the club (committee members), *Laura* and *Hannah*, claimed that they were unsure on whether the club would be welcoming of all sexualities. *Laura* proposed that the degree of sexual diversity at the club should give an indication on how inclusive the club culture is. She explained:

I don't know what I can really say about that... welcoming...and it also never gets talked about a lot I guess, well maybe that's because we don't have much diversity in terms of sexuality at the club, so I guess that probably answers the question...(Laura, 23 years).

*Laura* felt that if sexual diversity was not overtly visible at the club, then it did not exist (*Laura*, 23 years).

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<sup>108</sup> Information or statistics on ethnic diversity was not found in any hockey census compiled by Hockey Australia.

*Amanda* (previous committee member) proposed that there was a commonly known lesbian stigma for many women playing hockey, and that many women tried to stay a long way away from this label. She said:

There seems to be a bit of a stigma about hockey that a lot of people think...that a lot of lesbians play it and [there are] people who don't want to be put in that category... [who] kind of have homophobic attitudes [and who] distance themselves from it I think (*Amanda*, 20 years).

*Amanda* recognised that homophobic attitudes are problematic. Her response gave an indication on her feelings about the nature of inclusiveness in the culture at *MCHC*.

Additionally, *Amanda*'s identification of a widely held assumption that women who play sport (in this case hockey) are lesbians is evident in the literature. Cox and Thompson (2001), Caudwell (1999), and Shire et al. (2000) all explain that this assumption can lead both lesbian and heterosexual sportswomen to alter their behaviour – in the form of displaying explicit feminine characteristics and criticising lesbian athletes. At *MCHC*, an example of this display is outlined by *Nat* in an earlier quote. *Nat* characterised the *Melbourne Central Hockey Club* culture as heterosexual, as it was assumed that all players were heterosexual (at least in the club environment).

All participants were asked if homophobia was ever an issue for them at their current or past sporting club. The responses to this question varied. The two participants, *Sophie* and *Skeeter*, who claimed that homophobia was not an issue at their current sporting club, had both been there for less than a season. *Skeeter*, who identified as a lesbian, had clearly not witnessed homophobia at the club, which is a pertinent point. Factors such as the club wanting to present an inclusive culture and the length of her membership at the club may have come into play. The remaining five participants (who had been at the club for longer than one season), felt that homophobia had been an issue at *MCHC*. The form of

homophobia experienced at *MCHC* encompassed the stereotype that females who participate in hockey are inevitably lesbians.

*Hannah* reflected on some of the comments that she had received while playing hockey at *MCHC*:

A lot of people assume that hockey is a very lesbian sport and yes I've had a few comments like that and yeah also like when you play ... and yeah there are a few clubs where... people refer to them as the lesbian team (*Hannah*, 22 years).

*Nat's* experiences had been similar to those of *Hannah*. Although, *Nat* felt that the comments she had experienced in the past surrounding hockey were very offensive for hockey players.

*Nat* explained:

A lot of, a lot of jibes about the Australian Hockey team and what it takes to be a hockey player, but always in a very joking manner and I usually get pretty riled up about that not for my own sake because I don't really care what people say and, and it's a bit of water off a duck's back... I'm not gay...but if they want to stereotype me as such I don't really care either, but it is really offensive (*Nat*, 26 years).

*Nat* was suggesting that homophobia is the problem in hockey and not lesbians. From a wider perspective, *Nat* saw this form of stereotyping and the stigma as offensive. *Nat* had completed a law degree and had gained employment as a lawyer at the time of the interview. This professional position in the legal industry could heighten *Nat's* awareness of discriminatory issues that affect the wider community.

*Laura* had experienced a form of homophobia at *MCHC*, through a comment that her coach made to her about her physical appearance. She explained:

I've only started growing my hair fairly recent, recently, like it gets in my eyes under my helmet and I, I mentioned to someone how I... [started] wearing a bandanna because a lot of goalies do that under their gear and this is one of the coaches at the club last week actually said to me, "oh, oh well you know what



happens when you have to start wearing a bandanna” and I was like, no tell me, and he’s like “well all the goalies I know who where a bandanna are sort of a certain way”... (*Laura*, 23 years)

*Laura*’s coach was suggesting that if she wears a bandanna on her head under her helmet, that she may become or be assumed to be a lesbian.

Participants were asked if they could describe what they would believe to be an open and inclusive sporting club environment. Most participants responded with fairly uniform answers. Welcoming, open, friendly and generally making new people at the club feel welcome were among the more popular responses. Some examples of these responses were; ‘a really open environment... a really welcoming place to be’ (*Hannah*, 22 years); ‘it’s just a general openness and welcomeness (sic)’ (*Skeeter*, 22 years); and ‘a focus on welcoming people... focus on trying to integrate new players into the club through social events’ (*Amanda*, 20 years).

*Nat* felt that an inclusive environment at a sporting club should be all of the above, plus more. She felt that if a sporting environment was open and inclusive, that anyone at the club could play at any level, and also that female hockey players were able to play in teams with the male hockey players. She described how an open and inclusive space would play out at *MCHC*:

An open and inclusive sporting policy at *MCHC* is probably one that allows anyone to play at any level for which they are in a sporting sense equipped for. In terms of, I guess, it’s, I’m less aware of what the rules are about females playing in male teams... for example, if there’s no equivalent female team or even if there is. I’m less aware of that but I mean the discrimination can be for from an age perspective and holding someone back and juniors, even though they’re good enough to play in seniors or from the female perspective... it’s allowing any person to play in any team. If their sporting prowess means that they’re able to do that I guess (*Nat*, 26 years).

*Nat's* description of an open and inclusive sporting environment is clearly more complex than the other participants at *MCHC*. Again, *Nat's* profession (a lawyer) may inform her of a more developed conceptualisation of what constitutes an open an inclusive environment of a sporting club.

### **Homophobia Experiences at Past Hockey Clubs**

Four of the seven participants also felt that homophobia had been an issue for them at a previous hockey club. This could indicate that challenges such as homophobia are common at many recreational level hockey clubs. *Laura* epitomised the general responses of a few of the participants on how homophobia was an issue for her when she was playing at her previous hockey club. She recalled:

There was [homophobic] banter when I was playing at *Flatwood Hockey Club* in terms of what other, other teams would say... I don't think we were trash talked as much as men do in hockey but yeah there was definitely always a bit of that going on (*Laura*, 23 years).

*Laura's* comments normalised this type of banter and behaviour as simply part of the rivalry and competition of playing hockey. *Alex* felt that on reflection some of the behaviour from members of her former club was homophobic. She recalled; 'a lot of comments and a lot of, you know, even little songs that you sing, drinking songs and stuff were pretty bloody homophobic' (*Alex*, 22 years). *Alex* did not elaborate on whether these comments were made by the male or female members of her former hockey club. While not overt, this type of behaviour does not present a supportive environment for sporting lesbians to 'come out' in. In fact, according to Reimer's (1997) model on 'lesbian identity formation', most women would remain in the 'pre-conformist' stage in this environment. This stage is typified by the 'female believing that she is different from others', but the culture of *MCHC* would not be an inviting space for a woman to 'come out' (Reimer, 1997, p. 86).

*Sophie* felt as though she had been discriminated against at her previous club because of her self-identified heterosexual identity. *Sophie* felt that she was not selected for a particular team because of her heterosexuality. She recalled:

It was like an unwritten ground rule that you basically had to be lesbian to get into the 'ones' team. There was, there was two that were straight in the eleven, one that we weren't sure about. I don't think she was sure either but yeah it, it was just a little bit scary from a straight point of view too, like I did pre-season with them and then was told one day watching the game how many of them were actually lesbian and I said, 'oh, all right so I haven't got a hope in hell, no matter how good I am to get into the side'. So it was sort of a bit daunting so, and then in the seconds team it was probably about half and half, half straight and half gay and it was just, it was just a bit daunting to have that to sort of get past, like that shouldn't be an issue but it was there (*Sophie*, 35 years).

*Sophie* carried her own perceptions and prejudices, as everyone does. She also emphasised an 'us' and 'them' mentality, whereby she felt that the selection process at her previous club was 'rigged', and was judged on her sexual orientation, rather than her playing ability.

*Sophie's* thoughts on this issue have been played out in the publicised case of Denise Annetts and the Australian women's cricket team. Annetts felt that she was not selected for an Australian team on the basis of her heterosexuality and as a result, lodged a complaint through the New South Wales anti-discrimination board. Burroughs et al. (1995) explain that the Annetts case divided the world of women's cricket in Australia:

There were those who are angry about the personal damages endured through an association with cricket. Others draw AWCC's [Australian Women's Cricket Council] attention to the fact that heterosexuals are in the privileged position to be able to make claims of gay bias and receive overwhelming support in the media and from the general public (p. 44).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Incidentally, the Annetts case did not proceed to court and lacked substance and supporting evidence.

Whichever perspective is considered, few could view the Annetts case as a 'win' for women's sport. *Sophie's* comments (along with cases such as Annetts) show how the lesbian label can divide women in sport and further disadvantage and marginalise lesbians.

At predominately heterosexually identified hockey clubs, such as *MCHC*, inclusive practices are important to ensure that all club members feel involved. This should encompass sexual diversity. However, the participants identified a range of challenges that women of all sexualities face in sport and these are addressed in the following section.

### **Attitudes towards Sexuality Diversity in Sport**

The participants from *MCHC* were asked if they thought that there were any unique issues that women faced in sport. Specifically, they were asked if lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women faced unique issues while participating in sport. The concepts of the 'lesbian label', 'stereotypes', 'media coverage' and 'segregation' were all key points made in the participants' responses.

- **Lesbian Women**

All seven of the participants felt that there were unique issues that lesbian athletes faced in sport. Two of the participants, *Skeeter* and *Amanda*, believed that these issues were not exclusively related to sport, but are in fact the same issues that lesbians face in the community at large. *Amanda* felt that any challenges that lesbians faced in sport were 'not distinct from general [issues] in society' (*Amanda*, 20 years). *Skeeter* suggested that the challenges she faced in sport were the same as those she experienced at work (*Skeeter*, 22 years). *Skeeter's* explanation reveals that the hockey club (that she was a new member of) along with her workplace were not spaces that she could 'come out' in.

Four of the participants mention the notion of stereotypes as an issue that lesbian athletes face. *Nat* explained this:

Stereotyping I guess of (a) of particular sports and (b) of the characteristics of lesbians in sport... for example the enormous rumour or at least idea that to get into the Australian Women's team five, six, seven years ago you had to be gay and in "butch gay" at that so I think that those two in particular. And the same exists, I have a friend who's gay and she plays for a cricket association, a female cricket association and from what I gather the stereotypes are quite, oh, even more so the case, in that, in that sport so I think whether or not they're... I mean the fact that they're been singled out like that is denigrating in itself, whether or not... and the stereotyping is as well but whether or not any extra negative effects flow from that, I'm not aware (*Nat*, 26 years).

*Nat* touched on gender ideology in sport, the notion of that some women's sports have been considered gender-appropriate sports, while others are considered gender-inappropriate sports, and also the way that 'gender appropriate' is policed through sexuality in the context of sport.

Historically, sports that are seen as inappropriate for females to compete in are sports that are traditionally masculine, such as most combat sports and sports that are aggressive in nature. Even in recent times, a survey of over three hundred college students in the United States revealed that students described most sports as masculine in nature (Hardin & Greer, 2009). Therefore this suggestion that sport is still highly masculine and to be naturally participated in by men, led to *Nat*'s intimation - that a woman's sexuality may be questioned if she competes in a particular sport. This proposition is supported by research on the lesbian stigma in sport carried out by Sartore and Cunningham (2009). Sartore and Cunningham propose that the 'lesbian label exists within sport's heterosexist and heteronormative context as a means to subvert women's status, power, influence, and experiences' (2009, p. 289).

Women's association with some sports still remains problematic in terms of the lesbian stigma.

*Alex* also discussed the association of some sports with lesbianism. She explained:

I think it makes it pretty hard when there are some certain sports for instance women's football or sometimes women's hockey that can be associated, oh you're lesbians and you know that can be bandied around and I think it's a, I think, I think it's a double sided problem but not, not a problem but a double sided issue that perhaps people with that sexual orientation are attracted to those sports because there's more people like them to give them the support and their friends and a social thing... I play hockey for a social reason and I think people just jump on that band wagon and it's not always, it's really not a lot of fun... I've had friends who'll say... oh you play hockey, well gosh how many lesbians [are there] in your team? (*Alex*, 22 years)

Hillier's (2005) research on a women's Australian Rules football club lends credence to *Alex's* comments. Hillier discovered that the club was a place for many women where sexuality could be experimented with and discussed in a positive environment, regardless of the players sexual orientation (2005, p. 60). *Alex* mentions that lesbians may be attracted to certain sports because there may be more support offered by those who share a similar sexual identity. *Alex's* description also explains that the lesbian association with hockey participation is problematic for all women.

*Laura* felt that the lack of sport specific media coverage for lesbian athletes was a pertinent issue for lesbians in sport. *Laura* used the example of hockey player, Alyson Annan to explain her point:

The sort of adverse media coverage shifts me a bit, like in terms of, like I know specific[ally] the [women's] hockey, like the whole Alyson Annan saga, like do you know about that? ...she went to the, the Netherlands to, to coach and she had a girlfriend who was living there and I don't know... [it's] not as

though the media's really into hockey anyway but I felt like it sort of turned on her after that (*Laura*, 23 years).

Annan was one of the most celebrated women hockey players in Australia's history, an Olympic gold medallist, and 'appropriately' feminine and 'seemingly' heterosexual.

However, after the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, Annan split with her husband and began a public lesbian relationship with Dutch hockey player, Carole Thate (Hannan, 2007). *Laura* proposed that this event, a lesbian 'scandal', had resulted in an adverse media interest in Annan and also perhaps women's hockey in general.

- **Bisexual Women**

While most of the participants felt that the issues facing bisexual female athletes in sport would be similar to those faced by lesbians in sport, there were also a couple of different concerns. Three of the participants felt that bisexual athletes did 'not really' face any unique issues in sport. *Alex* felt as though the negative stigma attached to bisexuality was less than that attached to lesbianism. 'I don't, I don't think there's... the negative stereotype associated with bisexuality compared to lesbianism' (*Alex*, 22 years). *Amanda* felt that perhaps bisexual women athletes would face less discrimination than lesbians, as bisexuals can 'use' their heterosexual tendencies to fit in with the 'norm'. '[Bisexuals] can just focus on the heterosexual part of [their sexuality]' (*Amanda*, 20 years). *Amanda* was implying that to avoid discrimination or negative stigma, bisexual women could 'just focus' on relationships with males in some social situations.

Two other participants felt that a bisexual woman athlete would face similar issues to that of lesbian athletes. *Skeeter* in particular felt that this is the case because both lesbian and bisexual women are different from the (heterosexual) norm.

I think the fact is that it's, it's a matter of difference and differences that people won't accept them, so it's not that I might have different issues than my friend who sleeps with a guy, it's that we are both different from the norm or from the dominant majority and so I think it's probably similar... (*Skeeter*, 22 years)

*Skeeter* touched on the larger issue, that all who deviate from the norm (appropriately feminine and heterosexual) in sport will face similar challenges. *Amanda* misrepresented bisexuality in her comments above, suggesting that bisexual women can 'pick and chose' a partner's gender depending on the event or function they are attending.

- **Heterosexual Women**

Both *Nat* and *Laura* felt that regardless of sexuality, all women in sport received sub-standard treatment. *Nat* explained her thoughts:

Just the very general, not lack of popularity, but less of popularity of women's sports generally as sort of... and in... a lot of ways [has] been seen as second class sport really. Either, perhaps, because people don't perceive that we throw far enough or hit hard enough or whatever, there's no money that flows to female sport as a result, because the general population doesn't take it seriously (*Nat*, 26 years).

Similarly, *Laura* described that in her opinion all women in sport are subject to comparable challenges:

I mean like there are, there are issues in, in sport that I mean, that are, that all women are subject to I guess. It's sort of I mean because they're... the stuff that I was talking about in terms of the committee and the fact that all women are kind of sort of regarded as being second class (*Laura*, 23 years).

*Nat* also mentioned that women were open to objectification in sport. According to *Nat*, 'objectification...exists for all females in sport' (*Nat*, 26 years). *Nat* and *Laura* cited different reasons as to why all women were oppressed in sport, such as performance, sponsorship and media interest. While more pronounced in relation to lesbian athletes and



female participation in ‘male’ sports, this subjugation of women athletes is an issue for all females.

Several other participants felt that heterosexual female athletes did face unique issues not necessarily faced by women of other sexualities. Both *Amanda* and *Alex* felt that one of these issues for heterosexual women was the unjust lesbian label they suffered if they played sport in general and specifically hockey (*Amanda*, 20 years; and *Alex*, 22 years). Demers (2006) explains that in women’s sports, the words “female athletes” and “lesbian” are often voiced in the same breath. Demers further asserts that women are often labeled lesbians ‘in an attempt to cast doubts on the validity of their performances and discourage them from competing’ (2006, p. 2). Irrespectively of the sexual orientation of any woman, the lesbian stigma is ‘unjust’ for all.

*Sophie* felt that one unique issue faced by heterosexual women was segregation in sport related to their sexuality. She recounted her experience:

Yeah, the only, the only problems I... have in the past is just women being women and like the, the lesbians would gang up on the straight girls but it was just a, you know, that’s going to happen in any circle whether the blondes go against the brunettes or you know, whatever... (*Sophie*, 35 years).

*Sophie*’s experience was unique in that it is more usual to find lesbians in the minority, stigmatised and marginalised. Lesbians ‘ganging up’ on their heterosexual team-mates is less researched than the oppression lesbians face in sport. Shire et al. (2000) found that when the club had a majority of lesbian players at the club, the culture of the club often centred around the lesbian players. Disputes between team-mates (regardless of sexual orientation) do occur in sport, and these may be more about personality, than sexuality.

One consequence of disagreements between team-mates of different sexual orientations, has been the formation of lesbian and gay sporting teams and clubs. The participants views on sexuality and separation in sport is discussed in the following section.

### **Sexuality and Separation in Sport**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, six of the seven participants at *MCHC* identified sexually as heterosexual or ‘mostly’ heterosexual. The remaining participant identified as lesbian. Therefore it could be assumed that for many of the participants, discrimination issues against lesbian athletes or predominantly lesbian identified sporting teams had not been experienced first-hand.

Participants were asked whether they thought that there was any unique issues for women playing in a predominantly lesbian identified sporting team, competing in a mainstream sporting competition. All of the participants felt that there would be some unique issues faced by women in such a team. Most participants suggested that this would most probably take the form of verbal harassment. This would include ‘on-field heckling’, ‘homophobic banter’ and ‘comments from the opposition’ which would involve ‘lots of bagging’ (*Sophie*, 35 years; *Laura*, 23 years; *Hannah*, 22 years; and *Amanda*, 20 years).<sup>110</sup>

The self-identified lesbian participant, *Skeeter*, had played in a predominately lesbian identified team in the past (*NCHC*). She claimed that unique issues that face such a team would be the internal dynamics of the team, the image of the team, and what she terms the ‘incestuous’ nature of the team members. *Skeeter* described the perceived image of her previous team:

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<sup>110</sup> The term ‘bagging’ is an Australian colloquialism for insulting another person.

Okay, image wise I think we... weren't particularly well looked on as a team but I'm not sure if that was for a predominantly lesbian team or if it's was because we were predominantly older team or if it was because they were quite a nasty team on the field. All of these things are entirely possible (*Skeeter*, 22 years).

*Skeeter* explained that the 'incestuous' nature of the team refers to the members of the team having sexual relationships with team-mates. This practice is documented by Shire et al. (2000) in their ten year longitudinal study: 'more and more women in the hockey club were having relationships with each other and were 'coming out' as they found it easier to be open about their sexuality' (p. 54). This 'incestuous' nature of *Skeeter's* previous hockey club provided a space for women to explore and affirm non-heterosexual sexual identities.

*Skeeter* also felt that the incestuous nature of a team depended on how many lesbians were in the team at the time. She explained:

[At the club prior to *NCHC*]... I'd think there was probably about four or five people in the team who were gay. That made the possibility of having slept with someone on the team fairly remote, whereas at [my previous club] the possibility is really rather high. So there's a lot of really odd team dynamics because such and such has slept with such and such and they used to go out and, and now they're both with these people who used to go out with these people and it's just as ridiculous, like you know in the L word<sup>111</sup> where they've got someone in the middle and everyone's connected, yeah it's like that. Everyone's connected at [my previous club] and I think that made it really hard and I found it really odd because everyone gossiped but no one gossiped to me so I didn't know who was doing what or why people didn't like each other so I used to sort of stand there going, I'm new to this, I want to play hockey, what's the issue. Which made it very confusing and very difficult for them and I think often hindered their opportunities to become a better club because they were too caught up in it... (*Skeeter*, 22 years).

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<sup>111</sup> The 'L Word' is an American and Canadian co-production television drama series originally shown on Showtime portraying the lives of a group of lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and their friends. In the 'L word', there is constant reference to a 'chart' which outlines which characters have had sexual encounters with others.

Along with the challenges of playing in a sporting team with a current or ex-partner, *Skeeter* felt that this issue within the club affected their chances of becoming a ‘better’ club or playing in a higher competition. If the focus at training sessions and games concerned social relationships within the club as much as physical sporting performance, this may have affected the players from reaching their full potential as hockey players. However, the benefits of the ‘community’ formed at these hockey clubs may be more valuable to players than performance on the hockey pitch.<sup>112</sup>

One of the participants from *MCHC* had participated in the Gay Games. *Skeeter* participated in the Gay Games in Sydney in 2002, with her previous club *NCHC*. She recalled this experience:

I was playing with the team that was playing quite a low grade in our Victorian competition, yet when we went to the gay games we... were in the grand final against [European country]. Now that’s not something I’d ever done before and I don’t know if that’s something I’ll ever be able to do again and it’s was probably one of the best games I’ve ever played at such a high level and it was terrific fun and it was great for our team and it was just this amazing experience... It’s [the Gay Games] just a comfortable environment to be yourself in... (*Skeeter*, 22 years).

*Skeeter* felt that the Gay Games provided several benefits for participants. She identified it as an opportunity for recreational level athletes to participate against athletes from other countries, and that this would be one of the only opportunities for them to do so in sporting competitions. She also noted that it was a space where she felt comfortable in being herself (*Skeeter*, 22 years).

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<sup>112</sup> This notion of community at the Gay Games has been explored in detail by Symons (2002). In reference to the Gay Games, Symons suggests that the ‘social elements that sustain communities such as shared meaning, solidarity, belonging, participation, and even equality, are fostered at the Gay Games...’ (2002, p. 111).

All of the participants were asked during their interviews if they felt that there was a need for sporting events such as the Gay Games or separate gay and lesbian sporting clubs or events.

Five of the seven participants felt that there is a need for events such as the Gay Games. All five of these participants felt there was a need for the social aspect of the games. *Sophie's* statement was indicative of a typical response from these five participants:

I think it's a great opportunity for, for lesbians and gays to mix within their own circles and meet a lot more people. I know that in, in me joining the hockey club I've got to meet a lot of people so in, in having the Gay Games they would get to meet a lot of people that way... (*Sophie*, 35 years).

*Amanda* held a similar perspective on the social value of the Games for lesbian and gay people:

People would be able to go to something like that, relate to other people who've been who play single sports and who may have suffered discrimination and but it probably I mean that's never been seen as a serious sporting thing I think it's more about the social side of that (*Amanda*, 20 years).

The Gay Games are designed to be a mass participatory event. Many Gay Games participants attend the games to engage in the social aspects, some to participate and others to engage in competition.

*Nat* was undecided about whether the Gay Games were a necessary event on the sporting calendar. She commented:

okay in a perfect world perhaps there wouldn't be the need for that sort of I guess separate type of game, event, but you know, if people want to celebrate what they are and do that with people of their community then that's great too. I mean who, really it does it really matter that there's an extra sporting event on the field if that's the reason they're doing it. If the reason they're doing it is because they don't feel that they can access mainstream sport, the mainstream sporting teams, then that's a really big problem and a really massive problem with society, so there are I suppose, there are two ways of looking at it (*Nat*, 26 years).

*Nat* picked up on a larger scale issue in sport, that is, that some gay and lesbian athletes do not participate in mainstream sport because they feel it is not safe, welcoming, inclusive or accessible. For the most part, the Gay Games and other such events provide the opportunity to feel all of these things.

The remaining two participants felt as though there really was not a need for separate gay and lesbian sporting events, such as the Gay Games. *Skeeter* felt that even though she had participated in the Sydney Gay Games in 2002 and enjoyed the feeling of participating against hockey players from other countries, that there was not necessarily a need for them to exist. In fact, she was opposed to the existence of major sporting events in general:

This is a conversation I've had with a lot of people and I don't think there's a need necessarily... but I don't think that there's a need for the Commonwealth Games. I don't think there's particularly a need for any kind of sport, major sporting events... (*Skeeter*, 22 years)

*Skeeter* did not elaborate on why she thought there was not a need for major sporting events. However, as previously stated, she did explain that events such as the Gay Games give people an opportunity to play at a level that many would not otherwise have, such as playing against teams from other countries (*Skeeter*, 22 years).

The participants at *MCHC* were also asked about their knowledge and perceptions of anti-discrimination policies in place at the club and state sporting organisation level. The following section explores the participants' understanding of policy and practice.

### **Policy and Practice at *MCHC***

Not one of the players interviewed were aware of any official anti-discrimination policies available at *MCHC*. *Hannah*, the women's secretary at *MCHC* believed that there was a

policy, but she was not aware of the details of it (*Hannah*, 22 years). While a former leader at the club *Amanda*, assumed that there is a policy at the club, but has not seen it, therefore was not certain whether a policy actually existed or not (*Amanda*, 20 years).

The culture of the university with which the club is affiliated, is proactive in its inclusivity and diversity. There is a ‘supporting diversity’ page within the main university website, which addresses diversity issues for students, faculties and Indigenous Australians among others. Sporting clubs affiliated with the university sit under the umbrella of such university wide policies. Additionally, the university’s sport website provides a link to the ‘Play by the Rules’ website and resource for sporting individuals and clubs, created by the Australian Sports Commission.<sup>113</sup> Despite a requirement of sporting clubs to implement an anti-discrimination policy, the hockey club does not have a specific policy of which the players were aware.<sup>114</sup>

Five of the participants were not aware of an anti-discrimination policy at the head sporting organisation, Hockey Victoria. Only *Amanda* and *Hannah* (who had both been committee members) were aware of an anti-discrimination policy existing at Hockey Victoria. *Hannah* confirmed that she had seen information about an anti-discrimination policy advertised on Hockey Victoria’s website, while *Amanda* also remembered seeing some information about such a policy on Hockey Victoria’s website (*Hannah*, 22 years; and *Amanda*, 20 years).

Participants were also asked should an anti-discrimination policy exist at Hockey Victoria, whether they felt it should include sexual orientation. Five of the seven participants felt strongly that such a policy should include sexual orientation, while one of the other

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<sup>113</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the ‘Play by the Rules’ resource, see Chapter Four.

<sup>114</sup> Participants (including the leaders) interviewed at the club were not aware of the ‘university sport’ umbrella implementing or disseminating any form of policy in regards to diversity and inclusion at the club.

participants was not sure. One participant, *Sophie* felt that such a policy should not have to cover sexual orientation. Unfortunately, *Sophie* chose not to elaborate on why she felt this way.

Five of the seven participants suggested that there were no official complaints procedures at *MCHC*. Both leaders at the hockey club, *Amanda* (past committee member) and *Hannah* claimed that there was an effective complaints procedure at *MCHC*. *Amanda* suggested that on her count there were five people that club members could report to if there is a problem. *Hannah* explained her knowledge on a complaints procedure at the club:

I know that like complaints about team members comes with the women's committee so, like if there were any complaints so far this season then I would have to deal with them... mainly the only real complaints I've had this year are people who want to play up in a higher grade and hoping to give them the opportunity... (*Hannah*, 22 years).

*Hannah* felt that the complaints procedure policy at the club was common knowledge.

However, five of the other participants were not aware of the procedure, nor were they aware of a contact person to raise a complaint with. *Hannah's* awareness of this information may have been the result of her role on the committee. Additionally, it is possible that this information had not been disseminated to all other club members effectively.

Not one of the participants had lodged a complaint of a discriminatory nature in sport at the time of the interview. *Hannah* explained that a complaint had been lodged in the past against a team she had previously played in. She recalled this occasion:

We were playing against another college and apparently... our spectators were referring to her as... a big fat dyke or something and that college... wrote a letter to me being the hockey captain... I had to sort out that issue so yeah... that just came into my head (*Hannah*, 22 years)



*Hannah* explained that the complaint was resolved through the clubs (without the involvement of Hockey Victoria) and an apology was given to the woman involved.

Participants were also asked if they would feel comfortable enough to lodge a complaint of a discriminatory nature with their club and also with Hockey Victoria. Five of the seven participants felt as though they would feel comfortable enough to lodge a complaint through the club, while one of the participants was not sure. Only one of the participants felt uncomfortable about lodging such a complaint, this was *Laura*, a leader at the club. *Laura* chose not to provide a reason for why she would not lodge a complaint within the club, however one may speculate in light of her earlier quote about the misogynistic nature of the committee at *MCHC*.

Five of seven participants felt that they would be comfortable enough to lodge a complaint of a discriminatory nature with Hockey Victoria. The other two participants felt as though they were not sure that they would feel comfortable enough. *Hannah* felt that unless it was a ‘really bad’ complaint, she would hesitate to take it as far as the state hockey organisation (*Hannah*, 22 years).<sup>115</sup>

The remaining participant, *Skeeter*, felt that she would have to think very carefully prior to lodging a complaint. She explained:

Lodging a complaint with Hockey Victoria, I don’t know how I would feel about that... in the past I haven’t felt that they are especially accessible, but dealings I’ve had with them recently have been quite positive so I might be more favourably inclined. I would want to think about it very carefully because Hockey in Victoria... it’s a very small world and everyone knows everyone else and I’m not very well known, but I’m well known enough because I played for state teams and that sort of stuff,

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<sup>115</sup> *Hannah* did not elaborate on the nature of a ‘really bad’ complaint.

would get around pretty quickly so I think I'd probably think pretty carefully about it before I did it... (*Skeeter*, 22 years)

*Skeeter* felt as though the complaint would not be kept confidential at the state sporting organisation level and because of this, would feel less inclined to lodge a complaint. *Skeeter* intimates that by lodging a complaint, she may jeopardise her participation and acceptance in the sport.

The assumption that lodging a complaint is a point of embarrassment or something of which to be ashamed is a concern. The 2009/2010 annual report from the 'Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission' showed that 22 complaints were lodged in sport during this period and that not one of these complaints made in relation to sport were based on sexual orientation (Victorian Equal Opportunity, 2010). The participants at *NCHC* demonstrated that incidents related to sexuality/homophobic discrimination do occur.<sup>116</sup> A representative from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) explained that the process of lodging a complaint based on sexuality discrimination was confronting for many, particularly in the realm of sport (personal communication, January 31, 2011).<sup>117</sup> This representative suggests that complaints of any nature are rare in sport with only around 1-2% of complaints made to the Commission that are sport related (personal communication, January 31, 2011). Lodging any form of complaint was difficult for most people, and this difficulty was further exacerbated with sexuality issues (personal communication, January 31, 2011).

Participants were asked whether the club or Hockey Victoria offers any form of training on discrimination in sport for members of the hockey clubs. All participants explained that they

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<sup>116</sup> To read about the complaint made by members of *NCHC*, please see Chapter Five.

<sup>117</sup> The representative from the VEOHRC explained that despite recent changes made in lodging a complaint, where a 'representative' (such as a sporting club, coach, etc) can lodge a complaint for an individual, the complainant's name is still needed in any documentation.

were not aware of any form of anti-discrimination training. Five of the participants were also unaware of any form of training on discrimination in sport for any members of hockey clubs by Hockey Victoria. Two of the leaders at the club, *Hannah* and *Laura* felt that Hockey Victoria did provide training on discrimination in sport, but were not sure of this, so could not elaborate further.

Participants involved in an administrative role within the club were asked an additional four questions on their awareness of anti-discrimination resources available to them. These participants included the women's secretary of the club, *Hannah* and the two other participants on the committee at the hockey club, *Amanda* and *Laura*.<sup>118</sup> These three participants were asked if they were aware of any resources that addressed discrimination in sport generally, whether there was a specific volunteer at the club responsible for any form of training on discrimination in sport and if there was, how effective that process was.

Both *Amanda* and *Hannah* were not aware of any resources that address discrimination in sport generally (*Amanda*, 20 years; and *Hannah*, 22 years). *Laura*, however, explained that she may know of some resources that address discrimination in sport, but did not describe these resources specifically (*Laura*, 23 years). *Laura's* knowledge of the law may inform her knowledge of anti-discrimination legislation, rather than her involvement as a committee member and club level hockey participant.<sup>119</sup>

When asked about whether there was a specific volunteer at the club responsible for any form of training or increasing awareness on discrimination in sport, both *Hannah* and *Amanda* were unsure of whom this specific volunteer would be. Only *Laura* was aware of a specific

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<sup>118</sup> As state earlier in this chapter, *Amanda* had been a general committee member in the year prior to the interview, therefore she was asked these additional questions also.

<sup>119</sup> *Laura* (as well as *Nat*) had also undertaken a law degree at university.

volunteer within *MCHC* who was responsible for increasing the awareness of anti-discrimination policies for club members. She described who this individual at the club might be:

There's a bloke on the committee who's the, like the, sort of the general secretary or, or public officer or something like that. [He's] often circulating sort of training courses that we can do... The first aid course and something else, but I do remember there being something about sort of inclusive or something, but it would've been from Hockey Victoria you know, but yeah that was a while ago... (*Laura*, 23 years)

*Laura's* response suggests that there is a representative from the club who is responsible for dispersing information from Hockey Victoria through to the hockey club participants, however, this process had not been effective in informing all members of the club. The 'Club Development Manager' at Hockey Victoria explained that they do indeed disseminate policy and resources to hockey club representatives. However, the Club Development Manager explained that there was no follow-up call or email to check if this information had been received and passed on to members of the club (personal communication, July 6, 2010).

All participants involved in the study from *MCHC* were asked if they would be interested in finding out more information in the form of a seminar on anti-discrimination policies and inclusive practices at local sporting clubs. Six of the seven participants felt as though they would be interested in finding out more information. The former committee member at the club, *Amanda*, felt that she was not necessarily interested in finding out more information.

### **Concluding Comments**

The executive committee at *Melbourne Central Hockey Club* was controlled by male members of the club, and this committee was not a fair and accurate representation of the members at the club. It was evident that the hockey club had an equal numerical spread of male and female memberships and that both the male and female members played at a

competitive level. However, the women only held one position on the general committee (*Laura*) and the position of the women's secretary (*Hannah*). Therefore, the women members did not control the positions of power at the club. Additionally, the lack of policy in place at the hockey club meant that members would only call upon policy if it was required, therefore creating an environment of 'reaction', rather than 'pro-action' in regards to policy implementation.

The heterosexist club culture at *MCHC* may constitute a challenge for lesbians who wish to 'come out'. The hetero-normative culture and practices that surrounded the male governance and social gatherings at the club did not provide a space for sexuality diversity. The third and final case study, *South Eastern Hockey Club (SEHC)*, was also a predominantly male governed mixed-gendered hockey club. *SEHC* is introduced and analysed through the participants' stories in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Case Study 3 - South Eastern Hockey Club (SEHC)**

#### **Introduction**

The pseudonym of *South Eastern Hockey Club (SEHC)* was given to the third hockey club investigated in this research. *SEHC* is a very large hockey club situated in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne. *South Eastern Hockey Club* consisted of a total of 24 teams in the season of 2006. The club had teams representing various divisions in the men's, women's, male veteran's, female veteran's and junior competitions. Seven of the senior teams (including veterans) were women's teams.

In 2006, *SEHC* had around eighty female participants. Six of these women from *SEHC* chose to participate in this research, therefore transcripts from six participants form the basis of this case study. This case study analysis depicts the perspectives and perceptions of these six participants, who are not representative of the club as whole. However, several of the participants interviewed were members who have been at the club in excess of 20 years, and have experienced the culture of the club for a long period of time. This chapter will explore topics and issues such as the origins of the *South Eastern Hockey Club*, the governance of the club, the club culture, and policy and practice.

#### **Demographic Information**

The participants in this study were aged between 24 years and 53 years old, with an average age of around 30 years. Therefore the median age of participants from *SEHC* was older than that from *MCHC* (24 years) and younger than that of the participants from *NCHC* (42 years). Four of the six participants were born in Australia, one of the participants was born and spent some of her younger life in England, while another was born and raised in Africa, mostly in

South Africa. Four of the participants had lived in a city area during much of their lives, while the other two had lived in country areas. Three of the participants identified culturally as Australian, one as English, one as a combination of Australian, South African and German, and the final participant described her ethnicity as ‘very good’! It is difficult to ascertain if the final participant was joking, did not understand the question or did not want to answer the question.

Three of the six participants had reached a post-graduate level of education, another had reached a tertiary level of education, while the other two participants had reached a secondary level of education. All participants were professionally employed in a variety of jobs at the time of their interview. This employment varied and included a cancer research scientist, a school teacher and an accountant.

All the six participants interviewed identified their sexuality as heterosexual. All of the participants were in relationships with men at the time of the interview. Three participants identified their status as ‘having a male partner’; one had a boyfriend, and the remaining two of the participants were married. One of the participants explained that she had been married and divorced and now was living with a new male partner.

Not unlike the participants from the other hockey clubs, all participants from *SEHC* had an involvement with sport throughout most of their lives. Five of the six participants started playing some form of sport at a primary school age, while the other participant started playing sport (hockey) at 12 years of age (her first year of secondary school). Most of the six participants had played hockey from this age. *Leah* explained that she ‘took up hockey and started with a boy’s hockey club, so I was the only girl, and forged my way ahead there’

(Leah, 33 years). Three of the participants were not involved or had not participated in any sport other than hockey at the time of the interview. The other three participants did play another sport, either recreationally or in a competition. These sports included tennis, touch football, sailing, golf and running.

All of the participants cited different reasons for joining the hockey club. Three of the participants had joined *SEHC* because they had a family member or friend playing at the club; a sister, daughter and friend. One of participants found an advertisement for players at *SEHC* in a local newspaper. Another participant joined the club because of the geographical location of *SEHC*, as she lived very close to the club. The final participant joined the club as she was coaching some of the junior players from *SEHC* at the school where she taught and had found out about *SEHC* from the junior players.

### **The Origins of *SEHC***

*SEHC* was formed in 1993 after two separate hockey clubs from the south eastern region of Melbourne made the decision to amalgamate. *SEHC* was formed by a women's club, *Angel Hockey Club*, which merged with a men's hockey club in the local area, *Southern School Hockey Club*. Helen recalled the amalgamation:

We've only been *SEHC*... [for] eleven years, before that we were *Angel Hockey Club* and they were the *Southern School Hockey Club*... we [*Angel Hockey Club*] were like just a women's club, we were quite small and you had to participate on the committee and so I just got involved probably in the first or second year I was playing for *Angel Hockey Club* and so it's just been part of the culture for me to be involved in a club and not just go along play the game and nick off afterwards and not know what's going on... (Helen, 53 years).

Helen explained that before the merger between the two clubs, the small membership of *Angel Hockey Club* (an all women's club) meant that most participants had to become



involved on the committee. However, since the merger, this had not been the case (*Helen*, 53 years). *Helen* intimates that becoming involved in the committee since the amalgamation was not a necessity as it had been with *Angel Hockey Club*. At *SEHC* male members would generally occupy these governing positions.

Three of the members interviewed were original members of *Angel Hockey Club*. *Helen*, *Steph* and *Rosie* had been involved with the hockey club prior to the merger. *Steph* felt that the amalgamation of the women's and men's club had been advantageous to club culture. She explained: 'it had a really good sort of coming together and we were both fairly strong clubs and I reckon now it's become for me, probably a much more family friendly club' (*Steph*, 34 years). Since the amalgamation, the club had been very successful on the field. This success has included premierships won by various men's, women's, veterans and juniors teams. *SEHC*, unlike the other two clubs, had a club house or club rooms available to them over the hockey season, where photographs of successful teams hung on the walls, premierships trophies were displayed and the club spirit was alive. These facilities included a full hockey pitch, three Australian football/cricket ovals and several multi-purpose playing fields. These facilities belonged to a private school nearby, but were utilised by *SEHC*. The club has a team song in which they sang after winning matches (personal communication, July 18, 2006), along with a selection of team and individual profiles on their website.

During the season of 2006 (when the interviews were undertaken), all executive positions on the committee, except for one, were occupied by male members of the club. This configuration will be explored further in the following section.

## **Governance at SEHC**

In 2006, the positions of ‘President’, ‘Vice President’ and ‘Treasurer’ were occupied by male members of the hockey club. Only one position on the executive committee, the ‘Secretary’ was occupied by a female member of the club (and research participant), *Steph*.

Five of the six had been involved with *SEHC* in leadership roles, both on the field (captains) and off the field (committee members and women’s hockey coordinators). Both *Helen* and *Rosie* were former general committee members, *Rosie* held the role of the captain of the firsts (highest playing level) women’s team and as the ‘Women’s Coordinator’, *Leah* held the position of captain of the fourths team and was a member of the ‘Selection Committee’ for that team, *Julie* was the ‘Umpires Coordinator’ and *Steph* held the position of ‘Secretary’ for the hockey club. *Jenny* was the only participant who had not been involved in an official capacity at the club. At the time of the interview, *Jenny* was playing in her first season at the hockey club.

Like *MCHC*, the committee at *SEHC* was mostly governed by the male members of the club and there was a natural association between the male members of the club and the positions on the committee. Most of the key positions on the hockey club’s committee (such as president and treasurer) were held by the male members. With an even distribution of male and female members at the club, this configuration was not necessarily the most fair or representative in regards to gender.<sup>120</sup> It was implied by participants that this gendered hierarchy was normal practice within the club. None of the participants explained that this was an unusual occurrence.

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<sup>120</sup> In 2006 the club consisted of 24 teams. There were five women’s teams, five men’s teams, two women’s veteran’s teams, two male veterans teams, four junior girls teams, four junior boys teams and two mixed juniors teams. This configuration meant that the distribution of male and female members at the club was fairly even during this season.

Participants explained different motivations for taking on administrative or extra roles within the club. The most common response was that the women felt that they were ‘giving back to the club’ if they carried out an extra role at the club. The secretary, *Steph*, felt that she wanted to take on that particular role at the club, as most of her social circle was based at *SEHC*. She commented:

I’ve, I’d been involved with it for so long, so I’ve got a lot of my social life, is also revolves not entirely, but a fair, a fair patch of it revolves around the hockey club with the, with the girls more than the guys, as such although when we were 18 we used to hang out with the, the guys from the hockey club. I took the role on because they were looking for a secretary and at that time I was separated and living by myself and my time was basically my own and I thought well that’s a pretty easy job... as it turns out it’s not as easy, it’s not as easy as what I thought but I took that on and then we sort of had a good a good feel with it last year and I’ve continued it this year... (*Steph*, 34 years).

Not unlike other sporting clubs, a heavy involvement within the club at both the competing and officiating level requires an immersion into the culture of the club. *Steph* explained that after she had separated from her previous partner, that the hockey club provided a space where she could socialise and occupy some of her spare time.

### **Lived Experiences of Inclusion at the Club**

All participants described their experiences of playing hockey at *SEHC* in positive terms. Many of the participants had been at the club for a long period of time (three of the participants had been at the club for 20 years or longer), which was testament to how much they enjoyed their experiences at *SEHC*. Most describe the environment at *SEHC* as friendly and fun. *Julie*’s comments provided a typical response from many of the participants:

The girls were just so accepting and just took you on board and just so kind and friendly and genuine and we always whether, whether it’s a social function or after practice, have a few beers just [to] socialise, just to catch up. Its great going to practice, you kind of think cause (sic) at the moment I travel about forty

minutes to get to practice twice a week and that doesn't seem much if you think about the enjoyment you get out of it but it's just great catching up with girls...(*Julie*, 24 years).

Even though *Julie* traversed several suburbs to attend training each week, she felt as though the inconvenience of travel times was outweighed by the social benefits of playing in such an environment. *Jenny* had also found the environment at *SEHC* very constructive. At the time of the interview *Jenny* was in her first season at *SEHC*, and she felt that the feedback she received from some of the more experienced players was invaluable.

All participants were also asked if they felt that the club's environment was welcoming of all ages, all ethnic backgrounds and all sexualities. All six of the participants felt that the clubs environment was welcoming of all of these factors. *Leah* (captain of the fourths women's team) expressed a slight concern with age when she explained that age has been a factor in the past with selection for certain teams. She recalled:

Once you pass a certain age they overlook you for promotion to higher up teams, so they'll tolerate you in the lower teams. I have quite a few very good players in my team and they've been overlooked because they're over 40 and they don't see that there's a future in encouraging the player higher up. They think that they need to go out to pasture sort of thing go down, go down to the fourths (*Leah*, 33 years).

*Leah's* suggestion above explained that the club's culture was not inclusive of players from all age groups to perform at their personal best.

When participants were asked if they could describe what they would consider to be an open and inclusive sporting environment, most responded with fairly uniform answers.

'Welcoming', 'open-minded', 'friendly' and 'open to all sorts of people' were among the most popular responses. Five of the six participants defined their own hockey club, *SEHC*, as

an environment which was open and inclusive. As discussed earlier, *Leah* explained that the hockey club culture can be discriminative of age.

As touched on above, *Leah* again highlighted an example of age discrimination within the club:

I'm not that happy about the age thing and I think if selection for teams should be based on merit and nothing else, how old you are shouldn't matter. There's a fabulous full back in my team and she plays very well. In fact she's gone up to play in Darwin for the State...Veterans team but she won't ever get selected to play anything higher than the fourths just because she's 50 and so and I think that's ...so I think that [the team selectors should] just put everything aside like that and just go...a good player and let them have a go and then you know, cut out the bull shit (*Leah*, 33 years).

*Leah's* example came from her experiences playing and captaining the 'fourths' women's team at the hockey club.

The remaining five participants described (in a variety of ways) the culture of the club to be inclusive and welcoming. *Steph* described the culture of *SEHC* as open and inclusive, yet explained this is illustrated by the array of teams at the club. She explained:

I do think that we fit that description 'open and inclusive' and mainly because we're... men and women, a juniors and veterans. We abide by the rules of Hockey Victoria and who state that you know you have to be under 18 to play juniors therefore that's just the rule. I don't believe anyone has been turned away that I know of in my time (*Steph*, 34 years).

*Steph* felt that because the club did not turn anyone away for participating, that this meant the club culture is accepting and inclusive. However, her description of a welcoming environment did not necessarily include inclusion in regards to gender or sexual diversity, nor did it include a proactive adoption of policy at the club.

*Rosie* also explained the ways in which she thought the hockey club was inclusive of all people. She stated:

I think about the new people that have come into the club over the last few years, you know welcoming them into the club, they were welcomed regardless of, you know, where they came from who they're sleeping with... but in terms of the club being open minded and open to all different sorts of people coming in I would hope to think we're a club that's like that (*Rosie*, 34 years).

Similarly, *Helen* explained: 'I think we're [the hockey club] very open and welcoming and, it doesn't worry us what sort of people [we have at the club]' (*Helen*, 53 years).<sup>121</sup> *Helen's* later comments in this chapter about the transitioned female hockey player called into question her full commitment to being welcoming to all.<sup>122</sup> Essentially *Rosie's* and *Helen's* comments suggested that they really were not sure if their hockey club is inclusive of all 'sorts of people', they just 'hoped' it was.

Most of the participants believed that there were no or very few lesbian identified women at the hockey club. *Rosie* had been at the hockey club prior to the women's and men's club amalgamating and during that period had never known a woman to openly and visibly identify as a lesbian or as having a female partner. She observed:

I don't think *SEHC's* been a club like different clubs, I mean and people talk about hockey being a largely populated by gay women and I think some clubs are certainly... there are clubs that people talk about as being, have a lot more gay members. *SEHC* - perhaps not being one of them but then as I said I might not even know that either. I'm, I'm just thinking I'm sure that the goalie in our seconds is openly gay. It's funny you know no-one... I've never in the whole time I've been there known someone to come out with a partner though... (*Rosie*, 34 years).

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<sup>121</sup> During the interview with *Helen*, it was noted by the researcher that she was incredibly uncomfortable in her body language when questions surrounding sexuality and homophobia were asked of her.

<sup>122</sup> See later in this Chapter for *Helen's* comments about competing against a transitioned (male to female) hockey player.

All of the participants felt that the unspoken and invisibility of sexual diversity at the hockey club was not a problem. Whilst the participants did not necessarily expect invisibility of lesbian women, the lived experiences of lesbian women at the club were unspoken and unheard. Consequently, all of the participants felt that there were not any major problems between the lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women players at the club (as these women were not visible or heard). The voices and perspectives of heterosexual women were the only ones present at the club.

The lack of lesbian players (or the invisibility of lesbian players) throughout the history of the club may have created circles of silence in regards to club culture. Squires and Sparkes (1996) explore at length the ‘invisibility’ and ‘silence’ surrounding the lesbian physical education teachers in their study. Many of the lesbian physical education teachers felt that their schools were heterosexist environments and spaces where they could not ‘come out’. As a consequence of this, many remained silent and invisible, thereby rendering their perspectives and voices unspoken and unheard and hence, maintaining the circles of silences that characterise lesbian and gay issues and rights in education and in sport. At *SEHC*, the voices and perspectives of those who remained invisible and silent, were not heard or seen. This could be explained by safety or perceived safety concerns, as the environment at the club is heterosexual, where all are assumed to be heterosexual within and outside of the club environment. The participant’s views on sexuality issues in sport in general are further explored in the section below.

### **Attitudes towards Sexuality Diversity in Sport**

As with the other case studies, sexuality related issues in sport were explored. The participants from *SEHC* were asked if they thought that there were any unique issues that

women faced in sport. Specifically, they were asked if lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women faced unique issues while participating in sport. The concepts of ‘stereotypes’, the lesbian label, and childcare issues were all key points in the participant’s responses.

- **Lesbian Women**

Three of the six participants felt that lesbians did not face any unique challenges that other women did not also experience in sport. An example of this opinion came from *Sophie* – ‘I wouldn’t say there’d be problems with that’ (*Sophie*, 35 years). One of the participants who felt that lesbians faced a unique challenge in sport was long standing member, *Rosie*. *Rosie* explained that ‘the only issue that I could think that they would face is if people are uncomfortable with the fact that they’re gay’ (*Rosie*, 34 years).

Of the three participants who felt lesbians did face unique issues in sport, two mentioned the notion of stereotypes as a challenge that lesbian athletes face. *Leah* gave her account of the challenges that she felt were unique to lesbian athletes:

I think that they get stereotyped too much but it seems to be like that approach at *Nova Hockey Club*, but as soon as the woman had short hair or as soon as she was strong looking then that would’ve meant, automatically meant that they were a lesbian. And in fact he [her coach], he said that I was at one stage and that I, because I dressed a bit differently and my hair was a different colour and so and I, I said no, you know oh I’m living with someone (male partner)...(*Leah*, 33 years).

*Leah*’s perspective infers that the lesbian stereotype also has an impact on all women, regardless of sexual identity.

Similarly, *Rosie* thought that this stereotype was significant to lesbians playing hockey:

I don’t know whether hockey seems to... well hockey has that stigma. I talk to people about playing hockey and they’ll



automatically think that I'm a lesbian because I play hockey...  
(*Rosie*, 34 years).

Again, this stigma affects all women, irrespective of sexuality. This stereotype is particularly relevant to strong athletic women who do not adhere to a traditional heterosexual feminine imagery. The lesbian label stereotype is a strong repeating theme throughout the case studies.

- **Bisexual Women**

While three of the six participants were not aware of any unique issues that face bisexual women athletes, two other participants felt that the issues facing bisexual female athletes in sport would be similar to those faced by lesbians in sport. *Jenny* reflected that bisexuality was generally less accepted in society than lesbianism:

I think it's less generally accepted and so they might, they're, they're at risk, I guess of finding themselves a topic of discussion but if, it again it's not actually something I've experienced...(Jenny, 35 years).

Bisexuality is generally less celebrated, has fewer support groups, or high profile role models as heterosexual, lesbian or gay sexualities. Society generally likes to separate sexuality as either 'straight' or 'gay', so 'bisexual' interferes with such dichotomous labeling. Bisexuality is also defined within the overall (LGBT) lesbian and gay label. Additionally, Ravel and Rail (2007) suggest that many individuals with bisexual tendencies refuse such labels (p. 413).

- **Heterosexual Women**

Three of the participants perceived that there were no particular challenges that faced heterosexual women in sport. The other three participants felt as though heterosexual women did face unique issues playing sport, however, all of these reasons differed greatly. *Rosie* felt that the issues that women faced in sport were the same for all women, regardless of sexuality (*Rosie*, 34 years).

However, *Leah* felt as though childcare was a unique issue faced by heterosexual women in sport. She explained:

There's a woman who's a single mum in my team and she has two children and to get, to be able to get to training... see a big thing with being promoted in a team is that you need to be going to training to, to the higher up teams and she would find that if she wanted to go to training, she has to hire a babysitter and she said that she can't afford it (*Leah*, 33 years).

*Leah* went on to further explain that this particular player was not able to improve her playing position at the club because of these childcare issues. *Leah* appeared unaware that issues such as childcare can also affect non-heterosexual women.

Not unlike participants from the other hockey clubs in the research, the women's secretary *Steph*, explored gender ideology as it related to sports. *Steph* explained 'that you're thought of as lesbian... (be)cause you can play sport' (*Steph*, 34 years). Again, the idea that many women who play a 'gender inappropriate sport' such as field hockey in Australia perceived to be lesbians was raised.

*Helen* felt as though she had experienced a unique issue as a heterosexual female hockey player, and that was playing against a transitioned hockey player who had purportedly undergone gender re-assignment surgery. *Helen* felt as though she was disadvantaged by playing against this particular woman (*Helen*, 53 years). She explained:

H She's big...she's just like a man and she hits the ball like a man and...playing against her, I think it's very unfair, because it's just like playing against a six foot man and... I mean we all joke about you know who would room with her. I mean I'm sure she has a lot of issues...

C okay, so do you think she has an unfair advantage or ...?

H oh God yes, yes I mean we're all very intimidated by her because as well she swings the stick a bit like a golf club. I mean she's got the power of a man in her arms. I mean if you

got hit with that stick, let alone the ball... so we just back off  
(*Helen*, 53 years).

The current organisation of sport is into two ‘distinct and oppositional categories based on a simplistic view of sex and gender makes sports participation particularly difficult for transgender and intersex peoples’ (Symons et al., 2010, p. 57). Therefore, sports participants who compete against individuals who do not neatly fit into these categories are deemed different and ‘intimidating’. Confusion about the strength and ability of the transgendered athlete is common. Transgendered professional golfer Mianne Bagger<sup>123</sup> commented that she was bothered by claims that she had an ‘unfair’ advantage over other women golfers that she competed against (Love, Lim & DeSensi, 2009).

A lack of clearly defined information and education about transitioned athletes and their physical capabilities in sport is to blame for *Helen*’s misconceptions. *Helen*’s view on competing against a transitioned hockey player did not appear to be representative of the hockey clubs or her team-mates, as none of the other participants use this language.

However, *Helen* herself showed no empathy towards this transitioned individual and her comments could be understood as transphobic in nature. She also reinforced a hetero-normative image of male and female, where males are larger and stronger and ‘hit the ball harder’, and women are smaller and weaker. *Helen* also reinforced the ‘normalised’ binary nature of gender, as male and female as normal and natural, and focused on the ‘traditional’ definitions and categories of gender and sexuality.

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<sup>123</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, Mianne Bagger identifies herself as a ‘transitioned’ woman. Bagger had Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) from biologically male at birth to female in 1991. She has since played golf as a professional on the European Ladies Golf Tour. At present, Bagger is not able to compete on the prestigious Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour in the United States, because of their unchanged ‘female at birth’ rule.

Participants were also asked if homophobia was ever an issue for them at their current or past sporting clubs. Five of the six participants had not experienced any form of homophobia at their current hockey club at *SEHC* or at another sporting club in the past. While *Helen* felt that she had not experienced overt forms of homophobia playing sport, she had also experienced others' assumptions that all women hockey players were lesbians.

*Leah* claimed that she had experienced homophobia at a previous hockey club, and that the coach at this hockey club was responsible for this homophobia. She recalled this incident:

When I was at the *Nova Hockey Club* that I was telling you about before, that were nasty, the coach would yell from the sidelines things to the opposition while we were playing, things like... calling women lesbians and other horrible things that go along with that and I thought it was just so wrong and nasty and, and so that was another reason to leave the club because I just felt that's not the sort of culture that I want to be involved with (*Leah*, 33 years).

A pertinent point from the above quote is that *Leah* considers being labeled a lesbian as 'horrible'. Much of *Leah's* comments are ambiguous. While *Leah* claimed that the culture of labeling women 'lesbians' because they are participating in hockey is 'wrong and nasty', she felt that the lesbian label is a derogative term. While negative connotations exist with the lesbian label, the label will continue to cause damage to women. None of the other participants from *SEHC* reported any forms of homophobia at a previous sporting club.

Women participating in field hockey in Australia face a number of challenges. The participants from *SEHC* revealed that some of their challenges include stereotypes around sexual orientation, homophobia and childcare issues. For some lesbian women who have experienced homophobia through their participation in mainstream sport, joining a lesbian identified sporting team/club has been a worthwhile and rewarding experience. The

following part of this chapter delves into sexuality and separation in sport, in particular, participation in and the need for the Gay Games.

### **Sexuality and Separation in Sport**

To reiterate, all six of the participants at *SEHC* identified as heterosexual. So, again it could be understood that, for many of the participants, discrimination against lesbian athletes or predominantly lesbian identified sporting teams was not a major consideration. This form of discrimination was not their lived experience, and most of these women had not considered the experiences of discrimination for women of differing sexualities.

Participants were asked whether they thought that there were any unique issues for women playing in a predominantly lesbian identified sporting team competing in a mainstream sporting competition. Three of the participants felt that there would be no unique issues faced by women in such a team. Whilst *Julie* recognised that lesbian identified teams may face particular challenges, she was unable to specify them. The other two participants both considered that these issues would mostly be of a verbal (abuse) nature. These particular issues included homophobic harassment and abuse from other teams and spectators in the mainstream league (*Helen*, 53 years; and *Jenny*, 35 years).

While responding to this particular question, *Helen* normalised heterosexual sexual orientation, by explaining the difference between lesbians and ‘normal heterosexual people’.

She explained:

I’m sure that they’d be aware of it but they’d, it’s probably just like life isn’t it and I think we’re becoming, normal heterosexual people are becoming more aware and more understanding of, of lesbians and homosexuality aren’t we, I hope we are (*Helen*, 53 years).

Although *Helen* is trying to express that she is becoming ‘more aware and more understanding’ of homosexuality, she still falls back on the assumption of heterosexual normalcy (hetero-normativity) and homosexual otherness. She also intimates that homosexuality was something that needed to be accepted (by heterosexuals).

Not one of the six participants had participated in the Gay Games at the time of the interviews. However, all of the participants were asked during their interviews if they felt that there was a need for sporting events such as the Gay Games or separate gay and lesbian sporting clubs or events. Five of the six participants felt that there was not a need for events such as the Gay Games. Several of these participants expressed that Games such as the Commonwealth and the Olympic Games were also unnecessary. The remaining participant felt that events such as the Gay Games would be useful for the gay and lesbian community in terms of the community and the social relationships formed at such events. *Jenny* commented on the benefits of the Gay Games for the LGBT community:

They (LGBT) might feel a need for, for people to have a [space] where they feel comfortable in. You know it’s hard for everybody to meet partners and things these days and the two places we tend to do it are at work or at clubs... sporting clubs and so if...you run a business from home or you’re in a business where people weren’t like minded then that wouldn’t be then an option and this would provide, you know, an excellent opportunity to network in, in that way so...people who play sport do it ‘cause they love it so it’s just another chance to really play a game if you like as well (*Jenny*, 35 years).

*Jenny* clearly saw events such as the Gay Games as a space where positive relationships and networking could occur, along with the opportunity for sport lovers to ‘play more sport’.

Two of the participants were quite opposed to separate gay and lesbian sports events and saw the games as a form of segregation. *Rosie* questioned that because ‘we don’t have

heterosexual games, why do we have gay games?’ (*Rosie*, 24 years). For the most part, large sporting events are a place where heterosexual athletes feel comfortable and safe in regards to their sexuality because of the dominant hetero-normative culture of such Games. As this is the norm, this hetero-normativity is rarely questioned.

*Helen* was the other participant who was opposed to the Gay Games and separate gay and lesbian sports events. When *Helen* was asked if she felt there was a need for separate gay and lesbian sporting events, she answered, ‘no not really, can’t they just participate with normal people?’ (*Helen*, 53 years). *Helen*’s comments regarding the Gay Games sit between ‘repulsion’ and ‘pity’ in Riddle’s (1985) ‘Homophobic Levels of Attitude’, where lesbians are considered not ‘normal’ and where all should ‘fit’ into heterosexual discourse and culture. On a number of occasions during her interview, *Helen* normalised heterosexual sexual identity and a demarcation between male and female. *Helen* also provided another example of a hetero-normative world view when she recounted the experience of participating against a transitioned (male to female) hockey player.<sup>124</sup> The Gay Games and other similar events<sup>125</sup> have provided a space where gender and sexuality diversity is welcomed. For the most part, the Gay Games provides a space that is free from discrimination and homophobia. In addition, the Gay Games have provided significant inclusive policies for all of the Game’s participants.

Several of the participants felt that lesbian athletes would encounter verbal abuse in sport. Additionally, some of the participants from *SEHC* were opposed to non-heterosexual women in sport starting their own teams and leagues and looked at this process as ‘segregation’. Moreover, as outlined above, several participants questioned the need for any major sporting

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<sup>124</sup> Please see earlier in this chapter for further information about this.

<sup>125</sup> Such as the Outgames that began in 2006. For a description on the Outgames, see Chapter Two.

event, including the Gay Games. Policy and practice at the *South Eastern Hockey Club* will be explored in the section below.

### **Policy and Practice at *SEHC***

Not one of the interviewed participants was aware of any official anti-discrimination policies existing at *SEHC*. A leader at the club, *Steph*, suggested that while there was ‘definitely a behavioural management code of conduct, as far as... behaviour on the field...’, she was unaware of a specific anti-discrimination policy<sup>126</sup> (*Steph*, 34 years). *Rosie* also explained her knowledge of any policies or codes of behaviour at the club:

We do have some policies on things, but I couldn’t tell you what they are and whether they include things like that. Like with, certainly racial discrimination, we certainly we have a policy because we had a situation a couple of years ago whereby someone racially discriminated, was racially discriminated against in a game and things came out from our president saying this is totally unacceptable (sic) at *SEHC*... that person no longer plays for the club so... they obviously have a policy in regard to that, whether that expands to sexuality I don’t know (*Rosie*, 34 years).

A point worth noting is that both *Steph* and *Rosie* had been at the hockey club for in excess of twenty years and if they are unaware of a concrete policy that dealt with discrimination at the club, newer members may also be unaware.

Additionally all six of the participants were not unaware of Hockey Victoria’s anti-discrimination policy. While half of the participants assumed that such a policy would and should exist, they had not physically seen a copy of it (*Steph*, 34 years; *Julie*, 24 years; and *Jenny*, 35 years). A point worth noting is that *Steph*’s role as the secretary of the hockey club meant that she would be the committee member who received notifications and information from the SSA, Hockey Victoria. Participants were also asked regardless of whether they

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<sup>126</sup> *Steph* was unable to locate and provide evidence of a ‘behavioural management code of conduct’.



were aware of an anti-discrimination policy or not, if they believed that such a policy should cover sexual orientation. Five of the six participants categorically felt that a policy should include sexual orientation. The remaining participant, *Helen*, felt that such a policy should not have to cover sexual orientation.

*Helen* explained her position by suggesting that the policy should not cover sexual orientation unless it is referring to a male transitioning into a female. She stated:

I mean I feel sorry for her but I just think it's, it's just... not fair but... if that's what she wants to do I guess she should be allowed to. I can see because obviously she has got permission to do it but that would obviously be a big discrimination issue if they [State Sporting Organisation] said no wouldn't it? ... that's why they've said yes, she can play but I don't think they took into account, you know, the physical sides that and, and yeah the, the intimidations you have on, on the opposition... I mean I think it's fine if she's played in your team... (*Helen*, 53 years).

*Helen's* statement highlights some contradictions and inconsistencies. She explained that while it is unfair to have a male to female transitioned athlete compete in a women's hockey competition, they should be protected under the discrimination policy. *Helen* also explained that if the transitioned player was one of her team mates on the field, then there would not be a problem.

A significant point is that all of the participants were unaware of Hockey Victoria's anti-discrimination policy, including the secretary of the hockey club, *Steph*. Upon consultation with Hockey Victoria, the 'Club Development Manager' explained that policy information is forwarded onto hockey club representatives at regular intervals (personal communication, July 6, 2010). The Club Development Manager further explained that this type of information is usually forwarded onto the 'Club Secretary', who in this case at *SEHC* would

be *Steph*. Clearly, this meant that there were problems with the communication between Hockey Victoria and *South Eastern Hockey Club* in regards to such information.

All of the six participants explained that there were no official complaints procedures at *SEHC*. However, all of the participants felt as though they knew which person at the club to report to if they needed to do so. These people varied and included the committee, the captain of the team, the coach of the team or the women's coordinator. Half of the participants were aware of a complaints procedure at Hockey Victoria, while the other half were not. Not one of the participants had lodged a complaint of a discriminatory nature in sport at the time of the interview. *Rosie* was the only participant who had lodged a complaint of any sort through her involvement with hockey, and this was for 'bad' or unfair umpiring (*Rosie*, 34 years).

Participants were asked if they would feel comfortable enough to lodge a complaint of a discriminatory nature with their club and also with Hockey Victoria. All of the participants from *SEHC* believed that they would feel comfortable enough to lodge a complaint of a discriminatory nature through both their hockey club and also through Hockey Victoria. The six participants were also asked whether the club offers any form of training on addressing discrimination in sport and whether any of them were aware if Hockey Victoria offered any form of training on discrimination in sport for any members of hockey clubs. All participants (including *Steph* – the secretary of the hockey club) were not aware of any form of training on discrimination in sport at the club or by Hockey Victoria for members of hockey clubs.

All of the participants involved in the study from *SEHC* were asked if they would be interested in finding out more information in the form of a seminar on anti-discrimination

policies and inclusive practices at local sporting clubs. Five of the six participants felt as though they would be interested in finding out more information. Of particular note, the one participant who was not necessarily interested in finding out more information was *Helen*, who also did not support the notion of having ‘sexual orientation’ covered in an anti-discrimination policy, unless it pertained to a transitioned woman.

Participants that were involved in an administrative role within the club were asked an additional four questions. Only *Steph* was involved in an official role on the committee at the time of the interview. *Steph* was asked if she was aware of any resources that address discrimination in sport generally, whether there was a specific volunteer at the club responsible for any form of training on discrimination in sport and if there was, how effective that process was. *Steph* stated that she was not aware of any resources that address discrimination in sport generally (*Steph*, 34 years). *Steph* further explained that the specific volunteer at *SEHC* responsible for increasing the awareness of anti-discrimination policies for club members was the women’s secretary (her position). However, as explained earlier, *Steph* claimed that she had never received any information on anti-discrimination from Hockey Victoria to disperse to members (*Steph*, 34 years). Therefore, in *Steph*’s opinion, the overall process of receiving and circulating information between Hockey Victoria and the hockey club was very ineffective.

### **Concluding Comments**

The participants at *South Eastern Hockey Club* were not aware of many challenges that lesbian, bisexually and heterosexually identified women encountered in sport. This could be attributed to their similar lifestyles, the apparent lack of sexuality diversity at the club, the consequent absence of alternative voices and perspectives, as well as the dominance and

pervasiveness of hetero-normativity. It is important to note however, that it is difficult to comment on the culture of a sporting club after interviewing so few of its members. It is also difficult to make conclusions about the diversity of a sporting club, when the interview participants all identified as heterosexual and had such similar experiences at the club. Therefore, the analysis of interview material from *SEHC* could simply demonstrate a diversity of opinions, perceptions and perspectives, rather than drawing a picture of the club culture. A thematic analysis of six women's perspectives and opinions does not necessarily reflect a representative sample of the eighty women at the hockey club.

Overall, the participants from *SEHC* barely acknowledged the state sporting association's member protection/anti-discrimination policy. While complaints had been made in regards to 'bad' umpiring, little was understood about discrimination surrounding LGBT individuals at the club level. Chapter Eight will draw on all three case studies to discuss the similarities and differences across them with particular attention afforded to policy, club cultures and practices, governance, hetero-normativity and homophobia.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

A comparison of the three case studies analysed in the previous three chapters will be made throughout Chapter Eight. These comparisons will be made specifically in relation to the aims of the research project. These initial aims were to: to examine the scope of anti-discrimination legislation and policy and the expectations that it carries for hockey associations and community-based clubs; to examine the scope of club or team policies with respect to participation based on gender, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity, and how these policies are perceived by the participants and managers (i.e., how they interpret the requirements of anti-discrimination legislation, managers perceptions of inclusiveness in the club, procedures for staff/member education, complaint procedures, etc); and to examine the lived experience of inclusiveness by team members, including their perceptions of team/club policy, procedures, team culture and the experiences of playing within the competitive mainstream hockey league. The theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, critical feminist theory and Connell's theory of gender relations and identities, are further used in relation to the interpretation of case study material in Chapter Eight.

However, in light of there being no formal club policy in relation to the second aim of the study, the discussions below examine the guiding principles or unwritten policies (ethos) of the clubs. This aspect of the results links closely with the participant's accounts of the lived experience of playing hockey and being a part of the hockey subculture. For this reason, a discussion of the results related to informal policy (research aim two) and lived experience (research aim three) will be combined. A discussion related to the first aim of the research

will follow which clearly indicates the lack of formal policy related to discrimination at the hockey clubs in question.

The major differences and similarities between the hockey clubs in terms of the club ethos and participants lived experiences will be discussed. Many hockey clubs in Victoria are male governed and, by extension, their cultures are (for the most part, heterosexually) male dominated. This was evident in two of the three case studies in this research. In general, many hockey clubs in Victoria also consist of more than one hockey team, most commonly men's, women's and junior's team (and some also field veteran's teams). The two mixed-sex hockey clubs in the case studies of this research operated under a predominately patriarchal form of control, with male members of the club holding the positions of 'power' on the clubs' executive committees. This masculine culture privileges the men's competitions as the most important. In such a culture, the men's training sessions are held at the most convenient times, men's training sessions required a greater portion of the hockey pitch than did the women's training sessions and men's teams are often afforded more experienced and more highly paid coaches.

While all hockey clubs involved in this research played in a domestic competition in inner suburban Melbourne in the regular season of 2006, the structure and culture of these clubs varied greatly. These variances included the age of participants, club politics/power structures, an awareness of sexuality related issues and definitions of inclusiveness at each club. These differences will be discussed over the following pages.

## Principal Differences

The principal differences from the outset were found to be between *Northern Central Hockey Club* and the other two clubs in this research. *SEHC* and *MCHC* were similar in their structure and culture. By way of example, both clubs were predominantly governed by the male members of the club and club culture resembled a space where female achievements and challenges appeared to take second place to male achievements and male team requirements. *NCHC* had a significantly different culture in relation to gender and sexuality in all facets of the club. These differences, including the governance, founding principles, age (of individuals) and demographics of each club will be explored in the following sections.

### 1. Power and Politics - Governance

Generally, the gendered make-up of the committee members of both *SEHC* and *MCHC* did not reflect the overall club membership. The Executive Committee at *SEHC* was (presumably heterosexually<sup>127</sup>) male dominated, with males holding most of the positions of power at the club,<sup>128</sup> such as president, vice president and treasurer. Despite there being equal numbers of female and male members at the club, only one position on the executive committee was occupied by a female member (secretary).

The committee at *MCHC* was also governed predominantly by the male members of the club, despite the gender distribution at the club being roughly equal (*Laura*, 23 years). Three of the participants held ‘minor’ positions on the committee of *MCHC*. The positions held were the

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<sup>127</sup> The researcher presumed that the male members were heterosexual, however, without interviewing the male members of the club, this is simply a presumption. This presumption is based on two factors. Firstly, the culture of male team sports do not lend themselves to a ‘safe space’ for gay men to ‘come out’, and gay men are largely silenced and invisible in the sport of hockey. Secondly, the researcher observed many male members at training sessions at both *SEHC* and *MCHC* and noticed many of the men meeting up with female partners after training, particularly at *MCHC*.

<sup>128</sup> Not one interviewee from any hockey club mentioned or discussed gay men at their clubs.

‘Women’s Secretary’ of the club (who was in charge of much of the women’s administration) and two minor positions on the general committee at *MCHC*. Not unlike *SEHC*, all senior positions for the club on the committee were held by men. This male dominance on the committee could represent the discursive power discussed by McKay (1997), whereby the sports arena ‘valorizes elite [male] performance so prominently...’. McKay (1997) questions whether women can be valued equally to men in such an environment. This is difficult when women must compete in a culture that is generally measured on men’s performances, and not on women’s performances and achievements. While there are some exceptions, this culture generally continues in this tradition when there are a majority of men playing and administering within sports and sporting organisations. Both *SEHC* and *MCHC*’s governance did not seem to result in a fair and proportionate representation of members at the club in regards to gender.

Connell’s (1987) theory of gender relations and identities focuses on such gender imbalances of power, particularly the institutional arrangements both between and among men and women. According to McKay (1997), such a situation means that ‘men dominate executive positions, voting rights, and budgets, (p. 21). McKay (1997) further suggests that the ‘vertical segregation’ of genders is evident in the small numbers of women in leadership positions at major sporting organisations. This dearth of women leaders is still prevalent in Australian sport (Sundstrom, Marchant & Symons, 2011). However, hegemonic power can also be viewed as ‘persuasive’, the result of ‘people’s positive reactions to values and beliefs, which, in specific social and historical situations, support established social relations and structures of power’ (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 22). Hence significant importance is placed on men’s experiences, achievements and leadership of sports and sporting organisations and this



comes to be viewed as natural, the ‘norm’ even at the local level. This appeared to be the cultural and structural ‘norm’ at both *SEHC* and *MCHC*.

In stark contrast at *NCHC*, most of its members had played an integral role in the governing and administration processes of the one-team club. Two of the participants held executive committee positions at the club (the president and treasurer), and a further two participants shared the role of a playing coach. Additionally, two other participants in the research were past executive committee members at the club.<sup>129</sup>

At mixed-gendered hockey clubs, it is common to find a culture which limits the available roles in leadership for women at club level.<sup>130</sup> Apart from the subtle restrictions placed on women by club culture, women also face challenges such as domestic pressures, gender stereotypes, identity, and traditional roles and images of women and men. All of these factors affect the ability of women to take on leadership positions. According to Shaw and Hoeber (2003), there are numerous reasons explaining this under-representation of women in leading positions in sport:

[A]ssumptions about appropriate leadership characteristics, the organizational environment, and reward practices. To illustrate, a commonly held belief is that leadership roles entail a commitment of time and energy beyond minimum job requirements, but women are often expected to deal with child care and domestic responsibilities that must be negotiated above and beyond their public responsibilities (p. 348).

In contrast, many males are often able to commit more time at work and do not necessarily have the responsibility of contending with issues such as childcare.

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<sup>129</sup> As the club was an all women’s club, the other Executive Committee members were also women. However these women were not involved in the research.

<sup>130</sup> This is evidenced by the lack of females in executive committee roles at various hockey clubs in Victoria. Information was gained through web-links on the Hockey Victoria and Hockey Australia websites.

Many lesbian parented families have more of an egalitarian family model, based on the equality of adult family members and flexible parenting and gender roles (Dunne, 1998; Perlez & McNair, 2004, p. 136). According to the most recent study of family life in Australia, mothers within heterosexual coupled families still do the bulk of the household work and childcare even when in full-time paid work (Hayes, Qu, Weston & Baxter, 2011). Such commitments to work, domestic duties and childcare has an impact on leisure time.

Knoppers and Anthonissen (2008) explain the above point in further detail. They conducted research on executive directors/senior managers at 50 major sporting organisations in The Netherlands. At the time of this study, all of these positions were held by white males (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008, p. 94). The directors interviewed explained that they ensure that their domestic life (wife and children) did not interfere with their 'business practices'. In many situations, the wives and partners of those interviewed had chosen to work part-time or not at all, to accommodate childcare challenges, school pickups and their male partner's career choices (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008, p. 96). Knoppers and Anthonissen explained that 'women's domestic arrangements are often perceived to undermine women's willingness to work many hours and to be available [for the family] at all times' (2008, p. 97). However, these 'domestic arrangements are simply the 'norm' and what is expected of many women – decisions about workforce participation and caring for children are mediated through norms, values and perceptions of moral obligation' (Craig & Sawriker, 2009, p. 685). McKay's (1997) research with males and females in sports organisations in Australia, New Zealand and Canada found similar results. McKay (1997) explains that most men interviewed at sporting organisations viewed childcare as a 'woman's issue' (p. 57). He further explained that 'irrespective of their marital status, nearly all men had continuous career paths and only one had taken paternity leave' (McKay, 1997, p. 57). Knoppers and Anthonissen's (2008)

and Craig and Sawriker's (2009) research provides proof that conventional heterosexual relationships are common. Additionally, Knoppers and Anthonissen's (2008) and McKay's (1997) research indicates that females are not traditionally associated with positions of power in sports organisation.

Gender stereotyping is also complicit in the reproduction of the disparate power relations in sporting clubs. For example, Sartore and Cunningham explain that a woman's nature is perceived as 'helpful, warm, kind and gentle' (2007, p. 248). However men are 'commonly stereotyped as agentic (i.e., achievement orientated) in nature and include beliefs of being confident, strong, assertive, and independent' (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 248). Sartore and Cunningham (2007) explain that the characteristics used to commonly describe men are representative of competence and the higher social status and power of men. These descriptors help explain why males are often appointed to leadership roles, when women are not.

This is hardly surprising when males 'control most sites of organised coercion and surveillance in society (e.g., the police, military, judiciary)' (McKay, 1997, p. 16). Connell (1987) explains this 'structure of power' as a social structure 'deeply embedded in power inequalities and ideologies of male supremacy' (p. 107). For positions that require knowledge of or expertise in a particular sport (such as executive positions, selectors or coaches), women are often overlooked in favour of a man. In mixed-gendered and male dominated playing cultures such as those of *SEHC* and *MCHC*, women find it difficult to be appointed in a leadership position. Men are generally seen to possess more knowledge, expertise (because of their involvement with sport), power and are often favoured over women with similar sporting experiences. McKay's found in his comprehensive study of

women in leadership within sport in Australia, Canada and New Zealand that women were perceived to lack the knowledge about sports and the time to commit to a leadership position within sport (1997, p. 176). Hegemonic power, involving persuasion rather than coercion, is also at play here.

The culture of hockey clubs such as *SEHC* and *MCHC* privilege (heterosexual) men as the natural leaders of the club, and this power appears to have been rarely questioned. In fact, the female members of both *SEHC* and *MCHC* were familiar with and largely consented to, this culture of male dominance of executive positions at the hockey club. This consent had been ongoing, with male members making up the vast majority of executive representation at the clubs for a long period of time.

Alternatively, the participants from *NCHC* belonged to a hockey club exclusively for women. Consequently, there were no hierarchical issues based on gender at *NCHC*. In addition, the women leading the club were more highly aware (than any female leaders at the other two hockey clubs) of the issues relating to gender and sexuality predominately because these issues related to them personally.

## **2. Founding Principles**

Another substantial difference between the three hockey clubs were the principles upon which the clubs were founded. The precursors to both *SEHC* and *MCHC* began as all women's hockey clubs, however, both eventually merged with all-male hockey clubs and were absorbed into the men's hockey club culture and governance. Using themes of 'Feminist Vs Patriarchal', 'Performance Vs Participation' and 'Age and Demographics', the following section explores the founding and operating principles of each club.

### **a. Feminist Vs Patriarchal**

*MCHC* was established originally as a women's hockey club in 1907. One year later, in 1908, the men's club was formed. In the late 1970s, the men's and women's clubs amalgamated to form one single club. Existing as a women's only hockey club during this period in post-federation Australia was no mean feat. Cashman (1998) and Crawford (1984) both explained that hockey was a sport that provided an acceptable space for women's participation during this period. Cashman further explained that because hockey (unlike football and cricket) was less developed as a male domain, it could be claimed by women (1998, p. 89).<sup>131</sup> Hockey was introduced into Australia as a sporting pursuit for females, therefore women's participation in hockey came with little opposition during this period in Australian sport.

*SHC* also operated as a women's only hockey club for many years. The women's club (originally known as *Angel Hockey Club*) was founded in 1957 and operated as an all-women's hockey club for around 35 years. In 1993, the women's club merged with a local men's hockey club - named *SEHC* shortly after. One of the remaining participants from *Angel Hockey Club*, *Helen*, explained that before the merger, the size of *Angel Hockey Club* (an all women's club) meant that most participants had to become involved on the committee.<sup>132</sup> Prior to the merger between the women's and men's hockey clubs, *Angel Hockey Club* was similar to *NCHC* in regards to the lack of patriarchal control at the club. However, since the merger and the creation of *SEHC*, the club's culture had become more patriarchal, with issues such as governance, coaching roles and remuneration being highlighted by the women's secretary (*Steph*, 34 years).

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<sup>131</sup> This position is further explained in Chapter Four.

<sup>132</sup> Three of the participants interviewed had been involved with the hockey club prior to the merger; *Helen*, *Steph* and *Rosie*.

Power in regards to these issues raised by *Steph* is inherently gendered, with male members generally controlling these areas at both *SEHC* and *MCHC*. Connell (1987) explains that this type of power is usually deeply embedded in structures of authority, control and oppression and male supremacy. Essentially, this type of power is a natural ethos for many men to perform and carry out and is not a natural characteristic for most women.

Very few of the participants from either *MCHC* or *SEHC* discussed gendered equality within the hockey clubs. No participant from either club made mention of any feminist principles in play at their club. Essentially, even the most widespread and institutionalised form of feminism (liberal feminism) within western society was not consciously played out at *MCHC* and *SEHC*. Most of the interviewed participants did not protest the unequal representation of male members governing the clubs, nor did they make reference to any perceived gender inequalities within the club.

In contrast to *MCHC* and *SEHC*, *NCHC* was founded on distinct feminist principles and was formed as a deliberately positive space for women who wanted to participate in hockey. *Dawn*, the only founding member still participating at the club, explained that the club was established in 1985, and that it ‘promoted and practiced feminist principles and the participation of sport’ (*Dawn*, 49 years). *Dawn* further explained that the club started with sixteen participants and all wanted to share a commitment to honouring mature-aged women’s participation in hockey (*Dawn*, 49 years).

The creation of *NCHC* evolved out of the period of ‘second wave feminism’, where women were focused on putting an end to all forms of discrimination in regards to gender (Freedman, 2003). During her interview, *Dawn* highlighted both the liberal and radical feminist beliefs

which informed those who founded the club, particularly as it related to equal opportunity for women and, indeed, for lesbians (*Dawn*, 49 years). The second wave of feminism coincided with the outbreak of other social movements, in particular, the lesbian and gay movement. According to Willett (2000), it was the ‘gay and lesbian movement’ in the 1970’s which saw the first gay rights organisations established.

The feminist founding principles continued to be honoured at *NCHC* some twenty years after the club was established. This indicates that the women involved with the club were passionate about its ongoing existence. On several occasions in its history, *NCHC* had been close to ‘folding’ because of a drop in participant and committee member numbers. However, the club continued despite these ‘close calls’. *Cassandra*, the president of the *NCHC*, felt that there was a ‘crisis’ within the club when she stepped in as a committee member (*Cassandra*, 52 years). Similarly, *Dawn* mentioned that she had volunteered for administrative roles in the past when the club was on the verge of folding (*Dawn*, 49 years). Involvement in a small feminist-identified sporting club meant that members are more active on an administrative level, when compared to other clubs. According to research conducted by Nichols and Shepherd on volunteering in sport, ‘the 35-54 age cohort is over-represented in volunteers’ at sporting clubs (2006, p. 205). Therefore, this appearance of pro-activity or a willingness to contribute could also be attributed to the age of the participants.<sup>133</sup>

Another principal difference that surfaced from the interview material and case studies was the reasons women from each club participated in hockey. These differences will be examined in the following section.

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<sup>133</sup> See the discussion on the age differences between each club later in this chapter.

## **b. Performance Vs Participation**

The participants in the research had different motivations for playing hockey. Some of the participants placed particular focus on ‘performance’, while others focused on ‘participation’. Both *SEHC* and *MCHC* field more than one women’s team; seven women’s teams at *MCHC* and six women’s teams at *SEHC*.<sup>134</sup> Typically, the participants at both of these hockey clubs made reference to the team that they participated in and distinguished between the levels of each team. Prime examples of this came from players from both clubs: ‘I play in our women’s first team’ (*Laura*, 23 years) at *MCHC* and ‘I’ve been captain of the first side’ (*Rosie*, 34 years) at *SEHC*.

Further to the point above, several players (particularly from *SEHC*) made the distinction between playing ‘up’ in the higher grades and playing ‘down’ in the lower grades. *Leah*, the captain of the fourths team at *SEHC*, demonstrated this:

I have quite a few very good players in my team and they’ve been overlooked because they’re over 40 and they don’t see that there’s a future in encouraging the player higher up. They think that they need to go out to pasture sort of thing, go down, go down to the fourths (*Leah*, 33 years).

This statement gives the impression that women from all of the teams at the club strived to participate in the first team and to play in a team below the first team was sub-standard, thereby creating a hierarchy within the club in regards to team selection and participation. Another example of women striving to compete at a higher level was found in *Skeeter’s* comments. *Skeeter* explained why she left *NCHC* to become a member at *MCHC*:

*NCHC*...they were a low, a lower grade team and they were friendly and I played, I went to the Gay Games with them and I liked them so I played with them for a couple of years, but being only a one-team club or I guess how far you can go with that so, so I came here [to *MCHC*] (*Skeeter*, 22 years).

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<sup>134</sup> This did not include the veterans and junior women’s teams.



*Skeeter* hoped to play at a higher level and changed clubs to do so, explaining that there were more opportunities to do this at clubs like *MCHC*. However, for *NCHC* there was a specific reason why they had one-team at the club.

At *NCHC*, the culture of participation is different to *MCHC* and *SEHC*. The club has only one-team to fill each week and many members of the club intentionally did not want to field another team for fear of creating a hierarchy at the club between the ‘first’ and ‘second’ team. As mentioned in the case study, the only original founding member still at the club, *Dawn*, explained this point:

I’ve really argued very strongly... because as soon as you have two, two teams, you start talking about well whose better than who, which one’s you’re A team which one’s your B team and all of a sudden you’ve got a...the hierarchy there and you start being divisive (*Dawn*, 49 years).

*Dawn* feared that the addition of another team at the club would foster a culture of performance and competition over participation, and these characteristics would not align with the founding principles of the *NCHC*.

Another way that *NCHC* valued participation over performance was the inclusion of all women at the club regardless of their abilities to play hockey. President of the club, *Cassandra*, explained that ‘at the club we have always maintained that we encourage women of all abilities, of all ages, of all classes, of all educational abilities’ (*Cassandra*, 52 years). While the club had some competitive individuals, this was not representative of the team culture. *Cassandra* further explained that the club considered it most important that everyone ‘who turns up’ got a game, rather than simply focusing on winning a match.

I like the idea that we have encouraged people to play who are of all abilities, and that includes me. You know I am not the

greatest player, but they give me a gig each week and that's lovely (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

*Cassandra*'s comments reveal that one's hockey ability is not a defining factor relating to team selection at *NCHC*. In fact, all players were able to participate if they so desired.

### **3. Age and Demographic**

Another major difference between both *SEHC* and *MCHC* compared to *NCHC* was the median age for each club and the demographic information. The median age of participants at *MCHC* was 24 years, and at *SEHC* it was 30 years compared to 42 years at *NCHC*.

The median age for *MCHC* is directly related to the fact that many of the players were current or past students at *Mount David University* and the university provided the hockey fields and change rooms. In general, the demographic of the participants from *MCHC* was predominately white, middle-class and heterosexually identified. All of the participants had acquired (or where in the process of acquiring) a minimum of one tertiary degree. *MCHC* is situated in an inner Melbourne middle-class suburb. *Mount David University* is viewed as one of the leading universities in Australia and students attending the university would need a high entry level academic standard.

Similarly, the demographic of *SEHC* participants was typically white, middle-class, tertiary educated, heterosexually identified, partnered or married women. Generally, the women fitted into two distinct categories. The first category (and this accounted for the majority of participants) were 25-35 year-old women who were in long-term heterosexual relationships but did not (yet) have children. Therefore family and childcare commitments were not challenges faced by this group of women. The second group can be categorised as women who had been at the club for a long period and had already raised children and were able to

commit time to their own leisure pursuits. The location of the hockey club attracts those who live nearby, and the suburb of the hockey club is seen as a middle-class area of the 'leafy' south eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

While the *SEHC* median age is higher than that of *MCHC*, the focus needs to be directed to the biggest difference between the groups; the sixteen and twelve year gap between *NCHC* and the other two clubs. As explained earlier in this chapter, the 'older'<sup>135</sup> players at *SEHC* were 'put out to pasture' (*Leah*, 33 years). In contrast, women of a similar age at *NCHC* were being embraced as individuals on and off the hockey pitch.

*Cassandra* explained the age group of the club and related this to the political nature of the club:

I am the oldest at 52, nearly 53, the youngest would be, how old would the youngest be? I am just trying to think, in their 30's I think... so we are actually an older club. Because of that, I think we have a lot of women in there with older lesbian politics, and it really hasn't clashed, well in a sense we haven't, in a sense our coaching issue, the male coaching issue that sort of clashed with a few younger women who had different sense of lesbian politics and I thought that that was interesting because they had no issue with a male coach, whereas the older ones, us, who have come through the radical lesbian times of the 70's and 80's have an issue with a male coach, and a few fractures just seemed to open there and a few things were said by different camps and I thought it was a thing... we are a set of older women and I think that we have older politics. You know, we are not really a post-modern queer, political club I think... we are more an older feminist club, with a basis of older feminism I think and that is where it has been... now that may change when younger women come to the club, you know, when all of us old farts move on. That will probably... the political landscape may change within the club and what it does and how it goes (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

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<sup>135</sup> *Leah* is referring to players who are over the age of 40 years old.

It was clear that some of the participants from *NCHC* were aware of ‘post-modern queer’ politics (*Cassandra*). However these politics did not inform the fabric or structure of the hockey club. The age of the participants at *NCHC* may have played a part in this outcome. The occupation of ‘mature’ women at the club had been the driving force behind the club’s political make-up. The women at the club who have lived and been active through second wave feminism<sup>136</sup> recall directly the subordination of women and have chosen to continue to operate as a single-team women’s club. According to Hargreaves (1994), radical ‘sports feminists’ during this period chose to create clubs and teams of their own, without the involvement of males’ (p. 40). Symons (2010) also explains that many ‘lesbian feminists’ involved in sport also chose to participate in women’s only teams and clubs. The founding principles of these teams and clubs (such as *NCHC*) have been based on second wave feminism, in particular, radical feminism and radical lesbian feminism.

As all but one of the participants at *NCHC* identified as lesbian, most had a heightened awareness of general issues in regard to gender and sexuality independently and through the hockey club. The age group of these women informed their political views of feminism, and to some extent radical lesbian feminism and these issues were important to the women at the club. Thompson (2001) explains that the emergence of radical feminism in the early 1970s saw an identification of, and opposition to, male domination in social situations (2001).

*Dawn* explained an instance of segregation at the club in regards to a social function:

One of the women had a function and she wanted it to be a women’s only function and felt very strongly about that and one of the straight women on the team wanted her male partner to attend and felt real angry about that, but it was that woman’s choice to have a women’s only function and she felt that the player should’ve respected that... (*Dawn*, 49 years).

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<sup>136</sup> See Chapter Two in particular for a more detailed discussion on the waves of feminism.

The club lived this form of lesbian feminist separatism in some ways – *NCHC* had no male members, male committee members, male coaches or any male help with organising the playing season or social events.

Membership of a lesbian identified club, for these women at least, provided solidarity and an affirming space. The deliberate composition of a core group of women of a similar age group, with similar interests and political beliefs has led to a hockey club culture which conceived of inclusion in many ways. The differing notions of inclusion among the three clubs will be explored further in the next section.

#### **4. Definition of Inclusiveness**

The term ‘inclusion’ elicited a variety of responses. It was clear that participants at the three hockey clubs conceived of the term ‘inclusion’ in relatively disparate ways. The very definition of ‘inclusion’ or ‘inclusive’ was different for each participant, and this could be seen as reflected in club culture. It is pertinent to acknowledge that the ‘open’ and ‘inclusive’ language used by participants, is primarily grounded in liberal feminism. Most of the responses related to ‘open and inclusive’ sporting environments involved a ‘participation for all’ philosophy, in terms of inclusive team selection policies, and an inclusive ethos on gender and sexuality diversity. Equality and inclusivity from a more radical view point, where power structures and patriarchy are explored, was only broached by some participants from *NCHC*. The absence of a more proactive feminist mindset at *MCHC* and *SEHC* may have resulted in exclusionary practices being overlooked. Exclusion is not the only factor at work here. Other factors, such as the culture of governance (i.e., who is making decisions at the hockey club that affect the club as a whole) are also at play. However, notions of

governance/power/politics were not explored to any major extent by the participants from *MCHC* and *SEHC*.

One of the *MCHC* participants (*Nat*) suggested that an inclusive environment should also be reflected in mixed-gendered team participation, and should include all in regard to age and gender (*Nat*, 26 years). She explained:

An open and inclusive sporting policy at *MCHC* is probably one that allows anyone to play at any level for which they are in a sporting sense equipped for... I'm less aware of what the rules are about females playing in male teams... if there's no equivalent female team or even if there is. I'm less aware of that, but I mean, the discrimination can be for from an age perspective and holding someone back and juniors, even though they're good enough to play in seniors... Or from the female perspective...it's allowing any person to play in any team. If their sporting prowess means that they're able to do that (*Nat*, 26 years).

*Nat's* profession as a lawyer would inform her understanding of liberal law and how this translates into a sporting club environment. In contrast to *Nat*, most of the participants from *MCHC* described an inclusive environment at the hockey club more generally, by defining it as a space that was welcoming, open, friendly and generally making new people at the club feel welcome. None of these descriptions provided a reflection on gender or sexuality diversity.

At *SEHC* the majority of definitions of inclusiveness related to team selection. *Leah* provided an example of this thought – 'I think selection for teams should be based on merit and nothing else' (*Leah*, 33 years). The secretary of the club *Steph* (quoted in Chapter Seven), felt that *SEHC* could be defined as an inclusive club for several reasons; membership was available to both male and female, the club abided by the rules of Hockey Victoria, and the club never turned away prospective members (*Steph*, 34 years). While important, the

definitions and reasons given above to demonstrate that *SEHC* is inclusive belie an understanding which is largely ignorant of the broader challenges relating to inclusivity at the club. In fact, the factors outlined by *Steph* provide a limited view of inclusivity. There was not a proactive practice or policy at *SEHC* that was reflective and supportive of a diverse range of people. There was also no acknowledgement of systemic inequality at the hockey club, where one group (or gender) was privileged over another.

At *NCHC*, the definitions of inclusiveness at sporting clubs incorporated issues such as gender and sexuality. This was demonstrated both by the principles upon which the club was founded, and by the comments made by the club's participants. *Claire* described an inclusive club as having a men's, women's, juniors and veteran's teams, as well as a club that is open to all ethnicities and sexualities (*Claire*, 40 years). *Karen* defined an inclusive sporting club as one 'that is open to any type of person, regardless of skill level, education level... It doesn't matter who you are, what you do' (*Karen*, 42 years).

*Cassandra* felt that *NCHC* is a club that embraces inclusivity. She described how:

Our premise is that we encourage diversity at the club. So if you are the worst player, it doesn't mean that you're not going to get a gig on the field...we have given people that have never played before the chance to play, we have given women who are poor a chance to play, because our fees aren't that high... (*Cassandra*, 52 years).

*Cassandra's* definition of inclusion emphasises 'diversity'. Diversity encompasses different people of all sexualities, genders, ethnicities, marital status, socio-economic status and abilities. Along with other participants from the hockey club, *Cassandra's* definition of inclusion extends well beyond the understandings provided by the majority of the participants from *SEHC* and *MCHC*. Unlike the other two hockey clubs, the women at *NCHC* had 'lived' the oppression, exclusion and resistance towards women during the period of second wave

feminism. This background of the participants at *NCHC* had clearly informed the ethos of the club in regard to inclusion of all.

Another major difference between both *SEHC* and *MCHC* compared to *NCHC* in regards to inclusion was that the participants from *NCHC* were active in their inclusive practices. The *NCHC* club celebrated women at the club, regardless of sexual orientation. Recognising and embracing the differences between, and among women had been part of the club's lived practice. Inclusion was enacted in various; the founding principles of the club and the ethos of inclusion in regards to sexual orientation, ethnicity, playing standard and financial position. Even though *SEHC* and *MCHC* participants suggested their respective clubs were inclusive, because they had not turned anyone away, there was little evidence (with the women who participated) in the clubs' membership of diversity in terms of politics, economics, ethnicity or sexuality.<sup>137</sup> At *NCHC* however, it was evident that despite there being no formal policy on inclusion, their membership clearly embodied an ethos or practice of inclusion to a greater degree than did either of the other two clubs. *NCHC* had a different, more diverse perception of inclusion and diversity. This is not to say, though, that *NCHC* had achieved a space that was inclusive of all, but that *NCHC* had a club culture which encouraged a more diverse membership than did *MCHC* or *SEHC*.<sup>138</sup>

However, inclusion is understood and enacted in a variety of ways. Others may look at *NCHC* differently in regards to inclusion. In the literal sense of inclusion, participation would be open to all individuals. This would mean that if a club was strictly inclusive, men,

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<sup>137</sup> However, only a small percentage of the women members of both *MCHC* and *SEHC* were interviewed. Therefore, diversity in terms of politics, economics, ethnicity or sexuality may have been more visible with a larger sample.

<sup>138</sup> A note worthy point about *NCHC* is that as a lesbian identified club, new members drawn to the club were usually lesbian identified. Therefore, the identity of the club may have also restricted diversity in relation to sexual orientation, in particular, more heterosexual women (and men).



women, children, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, all ethnicities, socio-economic classes, abilities and disabilities would all be welcomed, provided for, programmed, represented in promotional material, imagery and the committee at the club. This was not the case at *NCHC*. In fact, women who were over the age of 35 and identified as lesbian, made up the core group. Only one participant identified as heterosexual, and there were no male members, resulting in the club not being diverse in regards to sexual orientation and gender. *NCHC* also did not provide nor implement a policy to ensure that individuals were treated the same and trained in anti-discrimination. Also, the club did not challenge the SSA on their lack of monitoring of such a policy. Therefore, in other ways, *NCHC* may not be viewed as proactive in regards to inclusion and diversity. The founding principles of the club, informed by 1980s feminism, and the core group of women at the club at the time of the interviews, meant that male membership (in particular) of the club would be problematic. This could also be viewed as exclusionary for gay men who generally experience a more challenging and overtly homophobic environment in team sports than do gay women (Symons et al., 2010, pp. 39-45).

Like any community, sporting clubs experience politics and conflicts, and a space that is entirely inclusive of all is an idealistic notion. However, if we frame diversity in communities as a positive feature, the boundaries of communities can change and expand. In the context of this research, comparatively speaking, the club culture at *NCHC* provided a space that was more 'open' to sexuality diversity than both *SEHC* and *MCHC* in terms of female sexuality. Another example of the alternate views of inclusion was apparent through the analysis of participant's responses to events such as the Gay Games. This analysis is explored further in the following section.

### a. Gay Games

An event such as the Gay Games, despite adhering to inclusive principles<sup>139</sup> was labeled by some participants from *MCHC* and *SEHC* as ‘exclusionary’. These participants felt that the Gay Games was an event that only encompassed the distinct interests of lesbians and gay men, rather than the interest of all individuals. *SEHC* participant, *Rosie*, explained that there is no such thing as a ‘heterosexual’ games, so there should not be a need for the Gay Games:

I don’t understand... but then again I... think there’s obviously someone feels that there’s a need for them because that’s why they exist and whether it’s making a stand, I don’t know. But we don’t have heterosexual games [so] why do we have gay games? (*Rosie*, 34 years).

Mainstream sporting events and mainstream society, where sexuality is predominantly heterosexual, has provided a place (in the past at least) for homophobia and exclusionary practices. Although there are political issues between communities within the LGBT population,<sup>140</sup> essentially the Gay Games provides a space where gender and sexual orientation is celebrated and diversity is expected. Along with providing policies to promote an equal representation of women and men, participation opportunities regardless of age, ability, HIV/AIDS and transgender status and offering alternatives to the heterosexist traditions of some sports (such as same-sex ballroom dancing), it is a space that can be described as inclusive of all who wish (and can afford) to participate.

However, some of the participants from *MCHC* also looked upon events such as the Gay Games as a positive social experience for the queer community. Examples of this include comments from *Nat* and *Sophie*. *Nat* described that ‘if people want to celebrate what they are and do that with people of their community, then that’s great’

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<sup>139</sup> Gay Games participation is open to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation and gender. This is not to say that the Games are accessible to everyone. Travel and registration costs at the Games would mean that the Gay Games are not accessible to all.

<sup>140</sup> This proposition is explored further in Chapters Two and Five.

(*Nat*, 26 years). *Sophie* thought it was a ‘great opportunity for, for lesbians and gays to mix within their own circles and meet a lot more people’ (*Sophie*, 35 years). Both of these comments described a support for events such as the Gay Games.

*Laura* also explained that being around similar people was advantageous:

*Laura*                Yeah I can see definitely there would be a need for it. I mean in the same way as there’s a need for uni games I like playing in the uni games I like hanging out with students, I mean, I’m, I don’t know I, I can see how that would be...

Interviewer        so being around people like yourself?

*Laura*                yeah

Interviewer        is a good thing?

*Laura*                it’s always a good thing (*Laura*, 23 years).

*Nat*, *Sophie* and *Laura* may not have been aware that the Gay Games were open to participants of all sexual orientations, and not limited to gay and lesbian athletes. However, their comments indicated that they were supportive of spaces such as the Gay Games. They further indicated that they felt these spaces were important and valuable to the LGBT community.

Eight of the participants had participated in the Gay Games in Sydney in 2002.<sup>141</sup> Most felt the Games were an inclusive sporting space. *Karen* from *NCHC* explained one aspect of this inclusivity:

The whole feeling around Sydney itself, it was just, you felt a sense of freedom in a way... just walking down the street... Just the opening ceremony and the thousands of people, you were just there for the same reason, and whether there were

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<sup>141</sup> Seven participants from *NCHC* and one participant from *MCHC* had participated at the Gay Games in hockey.

straight people participating, they were there because they embraced the people they were with. It was really quite a wonderful feeling (*Karen*, 42 years).

*Karen* mentioned that there were also heterosexually ('straight') identified participants at the Gay Games in Sydney, and that all involved embraced the inclusive policies at the Games, along with the feeling of 'freedom' [as a lesbian identified woman] being overwhelming (*Karen*, 42 years). *Karen's* anecdote above provides one aspect of the inclusive nature of the Games. Another principal difference found between the clubs was the language used by participants, which will be analysed in the following section.

### **b. Language**

The language and terminology used by some of the individuals in their explanations and comments suggested an underlying hetero-normative bias. Of particular note was the language used by one of the *SEHC* participants, *Helen*. On several occasions, *Helen* framed heterosexual women as 'normal' and therefore implied that women who did not identify as heterosexual were 'abnormal'. When asked about the need for the Gay Games, *Helen* enquired why 'can't they just participate with normal people?' (*Helen*, 53 years). *Helen* also used this form of language when she explained 'I think we're becoming, normal heterosexual people, are becoming more aware and more understanding of... lesbians and homosexuality aren't we, I hope we are' (*Helen*, 53 years). *Helen* expressed a desire to become more aware and understanding of lesbians and homosexuality; however, the language of her comments normalised heterosexuality as a dominant sexual identity.

This sort of language was also evident in the response by *Alex* from *MCHC*:

There were actually gay or lesbian people within the college,<sup>142</sup>  
no one victimised them as long as they weren't over the top...  
like nobody really cared what their preference was as long as  
they didn't make a point of saying I'm gay... (*Alex*, 22 years).

While *Alex* is referring to her experiences at the residential college at University, the quote above reveals her perspectives on being 'gay'. Providing that gays and lesbians were not overtly identifying themselves as gay or lesbian, they were not victimised. Therefore, if you were gay, you were tolerated, as long as you did not "flaunt" it (don't ask, don't tell). *Alex's* comments above closely resemble what Griffin (1998) would describe as a 'conditionally tolerant' climate or culture – where lesbian visibility is a problem. However, *MCHC's* culture is difficult to define in terms of one of Griffin's climates, particularly because the group of women interviewed were not necessarily an accurate representation of the club members and club culture.

It is important to note that the language used by the participants expressed the perceptions of those interviewed, rather than a clear picture of club culture in regards to inclusion. The majority of participants from *SEHC* and *MCHC* used language that was tolerant and inclusive. However, as Riddle (1985) argues, 'tolerance' is still a form of homophobia, where many LGBT are seen to have 'developmental' problems that they will 'grow out of'. Additionally, the language used by some of the participants was extremely powerful and in fact, created subjugation. The language used by these participants from both *SEHC* and *MCHC* implied a dichotomy between heterosexual and lesbian, was heterosexist in nature and reinforced a hetero-normative culture.<sup>143</sup> In contrast to this, the language used and

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<sup>142</sup> *Alex* is referring to the 'residential college' at the university in which she lived. There are many residential colleges across the larger universities in Australia. While this residential college has little relevance to the *MCHC*, the college is another sub-culture (like the hockey club) within the overall university culture.

<sup>143</sup> As this language was not used unanimously by all participants from these two hockey clubs, the use of such language are more about individual personalities and beliefs, rather than club culture.

culture informing *NCHC* implied an ethos of inclusion and club culture as a ‘safe space’ for all female hockey players.<sup>144</sup>

### **c. Safe Spaces**

Many of the participants at *NCHC* talk about or allude to the notion of a ‘safe space’ within the team’s environment. Hillier’s (2005) study on women’s (Australian Rules) football in Melbourne, revealed that the association of lesbianism with women’s team sports does have what could be termed an ‘upside’. This upside is that there is the provision of safe spaces for women to explore and affirm diverse and non-conventional discourses of gender and sexuality. In her research, Hillier (2005) makes note of accepted ‘conversation spaces’ at the football club, and non-heterosexual forms of sexuality seem to be accepted conversation spaces at *NCHC*, unlike both *SEHC* and *MCHC*.

Generally, the space at *NCHC* provided more freedom for all of the members to express themselves. *NCHC* is perceived by the participants as a space where alternate sexualities could be played out – without the usual prejudice of mainstream (heterosexual) society. *Grace* explained this by reflecting on how welcoming and inclusive she felt that the team’s environment was for new players joining the team: ‘I think it provided a safe place for them [new players] to be and hang out and there’s no pressure or expectation about who they are or what they are...’ (*Grace*, 40 years). Similarly, *Cassandra* felt that ‘it’s [the club environment] a celebration and again it’s a safe space...’ (*Cassandra*, 52 years) and *Claire* also explained ‘it’s still a really safe place’ (*Claire*, 40 years).

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<sup>144</sup> The Interviewer interviewed over half of the registered participants from *Northern Central Hockey Club*.

Other teams and clubs around the world operate in a similar environment or culture. An example of this is the Hackney Women's Football Club (or soccer) in London. As mentioned in Chapter Five, Hackney Women's Football Club (HWFC) was founded in 1986 and was the first totally women run team and the first predominately lesbian team in London. HWFC was also the first team to instigate a fair play policy, ensuring that all women are encouraged to train and play competitive football regardless of their skills, age, ethnic origin and sexual orientation (Hackney Women's Football Club, n.d.).

As discussed in Chapters Two and Five, Elling et al. (2003) conducted research into gay and lesbian sporting clubs in the Netherlands. Elling et al. found that both gay/lesbian and heterosexual volleyball players had joined a gay and lesbian volleyball club and '[h]aving friends at the gay club and the specific atmosphere' were the predominant motives for joining the club (2003, p. 446). While the sexual orientation of the participants at the gay and lesbian volleyball club was still a relevant factor, the volleyball club space was described as a safe space that was tolerant of other participants' differences.

To sum up, there were several elements of contrast among the hockey clubs in this study. Most of these differences in the club policies related to discrimination and culture, and in the lived experiences of the participants. In essence, the principle differences between the clubs (*NCHC* on the one hand, and *MCHC* and *SEHC* on the other) can be most readily related to the research aims two and three. Despite the fact that there were many differences between the three hockey clubs, there were also some similarities. These commonalities amongst the case studies will be investigated in the following section.

## **Principal Similarities**

A number of similarities relating to the three hockey clubs became apparent after analysing each case study. These similarities included: a) the lack of sophistication surrounding gender and sexuality identity; b) the lesbian stigma associated with being a woman and playing hockey; and c) the level of awareness of anti-discrimination policy at club and head sporting organisation level.

### **a. Explaining Gender and Sexuality Identity**

One particular similarity that all participants shared was a lack of sophistication in the language surrounding gender and sexuality identity. Few participants addressed any of the challenges encountered by bisexual (and to a lesser extent, transgendered) women in sport. While the arena of sport can be problematic for lesbian women, this arena can be a particularly difficult space for bisexual and transgender women.

Most of the participants appeared to have a pre-conceived idea about bisexuality. For instance, several participants suggested that bisexual women could ‘pick and choose’ a partner, depending on the social situation and that transgendered women are physically ‘stronger’ females than women born as female and thus carried an unfair advantage in sport. The following excerpts provide examples of this point. *MCHC* participant, *Amanda*, felt that perhaps bisexual women athletes would face less discrimination than lesbians, as bisexuals could ‘use’ their heterosexual tendencies to fit in with the ‘norm’ - ‘[Bisexuals]... can just focus on the heterosexual part of that...’ (*Amanda*, 20 years). *Claire* from *NCHC* suggested that ‘if you are bisexual and you are with a man, that is going to benefit you, I guess. And if you are bisexual and you are with a woman, then you will have to keep it quiet’ (*Claire*, 40 years).



In regard to transgendered women, *Helen* from *SEHC* explained her perceptions of a male to female transitioned hockey player – ‘she’s just like a man and she hits the ball like a man and...playing against her, I think it’s very unfair, because it’s just like playing against a six foot man’ (*Helen*, 53 years). These comments were among several made by *Helen* during her interview.

These conceptions of bisexuality and transgender fit neatly with the dichotomy and hierarchy of gender and sexuality – men as stronger, women as weaker, heterosexuality as normal and homosexuality (and bisexuality) as abnormal. The concepts of ‘male’ and ‘female’, and ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘homosexuality’ provide a reinforcement of the ‘normal’ and traditional structure of gender and sexuality identities. However, these descriptors do not reflect the diversity of gender and sexuality identity in society. Boundaries between genders and sexualities are crossed, and power relationships in gendered and sexuality contexts are not rigid.

A post-structuralist lense on gender and sexuality can offer this different perspective. Namaste (1996) suggests that individuals are influenced by ‘politics or social structures’ that are ‘constituted in and through social political arrangements’ (p. 195). Therefore, a post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is influenced by social constructions (and is central to ‘queer theory’). Gender identity should not be derived from sexuality identity, nor should sexuality identity be derived from gender identity. Such a practice is especially problematic where common assumptions are made in the case of transgendered individuals. Another similarity that was evident across all three hockey clubs in the research was the awareness of the lesbian stigma associated with participating in hockey.

### **b. Lesbian Stigma Associated with Women Participating in Hockey**

Most of the participants felt that there was a perceived lesbian sexual identity associated with their involvement in a sport such as hockey. This lesbian 'stigma' can affect all women involved in sport. This label can affect the team that a sportswoman chooses to join, her appearance and her performance and the relationships between team-mates. Women who are stereotypically feminine are at times, 'reluctant to participate in sport because they run the risk of being viewed or labeled as 'lesbian'', whereas, women who are not 'stereotypically feminine are often not welcome in sport because they will bring this label with them and thus adversely affect other women' (CAAWS, 2006, p. 6).

Russell (2006) suggests that sportswomen are 'all too aware of the existence of the lesbian label within their own and other sports' (p. 108). In her research on rugby, cricket and netball players, Russell explains that the lesbian stigma in sport is a difficult issue to work through for female athletes:

For some of the women this was a difficult issue to reconcile because they wanted to play any sport they chose but were aware that by doing so they would attract certain sexual associations. Participants in all three sports attested to the inevitability of the questioning of their sexuality because of their participation... (2006, p. 108).

The challenge with such a stigma is that there are negative connotations associated with being defined as a lesbian. Symons et al. (2010) discuss these negative connotations:

Because the subject 'lesbian' is coded in many negative ways, being positioned as a lesbian brings with it a question mark over that subject's attractiveness, her femininity and her good character, and as a result many women fear this label. For these women, perhaps the majority of women, being labeled lesbian will have a powerful impact, especially on the ways that they participate in sport. In team sports that are traditional bastions of masculinity such as football, the lesbian label is pervasive and many women will not play those sports because they are likely to be called a lesbian (p. 41).

Sartore and Cunningham (2009) propose that the lesbian label exists within sport as a way to challenge women's 'status, power, influence, and experiences' (p. 289).<sup>145</sup> Therefore the lesbian label, along with women policing their appearance and playing ability, maintains a conservative gender order and hegemonic power over women's sport.

Connell (1987) describes this culture in terms of the structure of 'cathexis'. Cathexis, one of the three structures in Connell's (1987) gender relations and identities theory, is described as a structure that dictates 'normative' or stereotypical sexual behaviour for women and men. Representations of Connell's (1987) description of cathexis are found in all parts of society and manifest in many ways, including heteronormativity, the sexualisation and objectification of women and homophobia. As a result of these representations, McKay (1997) explains that cathexis involves individuals monitoring their bodily practices and personal appearances. McKay's (1997) research of sporting organisations found that men did not monitor their personal appearance or 'bodily practices', however, women 'regulated their everyday appearance in accordance with heterosexual taboos in order to be taken seriously' (p. 89). An example of this monitoring included carefully deciding on the style and colour of an outfit to wear to ensure they were 'taken seriously' by their male colleagues, while still remaining feminine (McKay, 1997, pp. 89-90). McKay further explained that due to the heteronormative culture in power and cathexis structures, the women interviewed 'wanted to avoid any association with lesbianism' (1997, p. 90). Therefore, gender and sexuality work differently for both men and women in sporting contexts. The present study contends that the female participants, particularly at *MCHC* and *SEHC*, adhered to a dominant sexuality (heterosexuality) in both their appearance and behaviour. That is, they 'enacted' heterosexuality. Many of the women were aware of the lesbian label and homophobia in

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<sup>145</sup> Hillier also discusses this stigma in her analysis of a women's Australian Rules Football team. See Hillier (2005).

women's sport and how this label was used to maintain hegemonic masculinity. Essentially, participants who monitored their appearance and behaviour reinforced hegemonic power and the stigmatizing impact of the 'lesbian label'.

An awareness of the lesbian stigma was evident in all three case studies. At *MCHC*, *Amanda* proposed that there is a commonly known lesbian stigma for many women playing hockey and that many women try to steer clear of this label. She explained:

There seems to be a bit of a stigma about hockey that a lot of people think that a lot of lesbians play it and then so people who don't want to be put in that category... kind of have homophobic attitudes to, to distance themselves from it I think (*Amanda*, 20 years).

*Amanda* is further suggesting that women who want to play hockey may distance themselves from participating, since they risk being assumed lesbian (due to their participation).

Therefore, the lesbian label may act to drive down participation in sports such as hockey.

*Alex* (also from *MCHC*) felt that the lesbian label in hockey is predominantly aimed at women of a certain age:

I think you know if you are playing one of those sports [which] are associated with lesbianness (sic)... it is sometimes frustrating or hard to... put up with it and I think there is a bit of a stereotype that with any women if you play sport past the age of I don't know 27, 28 then you're a bit weird, but you, whether you're sacrificing time with your family or whatever or maybe you've been a bit selfish for taking some time out of the weekend or weeknight to do that other than going to the gym or something like that...so I think women in general if you play a sport past an age then that's viewed a bit odd but also whilst guys can go and play football on the weekend... and they're expected to sometimes especially in relationships between guys and girls, the girls are expected to not maybe take up some time on the weekend with their own... sport (*Alex*, 22 years).

According to *Alex*, women in their early to mid twenties are able to play hockey with less of a lesbian suspicion, whereas women over the age of twenty-eight are more likely to be labeled

a lesbian because they have not stopped playing sport due to family commitments. Such a suggestion is worthy of future research. Factors such as marital status, religion, childcare and home duties all play a role in a woman's physical activity involvement.<sup>146</sup>

The participants from *NCHC* also considered the lesbian stigma to be a challenge for most women in sport. *Cassandra* considered this challenge by proposing that women who play sport, are more likely to be 'branded a dyke' (*Cassandra*, 52 years). *Cassandra* further explained that being labeled a lesbian is problematic for some women: 'I am sure there is (sic) some heterosexual women who are playing sport and being branded a dyke is an issue, you know, they don't want to be called that' (*Cassandra*, 52 years). Similarly, *Grace* felt that some women's sports are fearful of the issue:

I reckon that some women's sports are a bit paranoid about that stereotype about being lesbians, so they discriminate against women who don't... who are lesbians or who they're trying to dispel the myth about, you know, that all cricket players are lesbians or that all hockey players are lesbians.... (*Grace*, 40 years).

*Grace* raised a concern that is shared by others. Russell labels this as 'victim blaming', where in some sports, lesbians are blamed for 'hurting their sports because of the image they present' (2006, p. 114).<sup>147</sup>

At *SEHC*, *Steph* believed 'that you're thought of as lesbian... (be)cause you can play sport' (*Steph*, 34 years). *Leah* felt that the physical appearance of the women also played a part in such stereotyping:

I think that they get stereotyped too much but it seems to be like that approach at *Nova Hockey Club*, but as soon as the woman had short hair or as soon as she was strong looking, then that

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<sup>146</sup> See Messner and Bozada-Deas (2009); Thomsson (1999); and Koca, Henderson, Asci and Bulgu (2009).

<sup>147</sup> This concept is also shared by Halbert (1997).

would've meant, automatically meant that they were a lesbian...  
(*Leah*, 33 years).

*Leah* explained that while many women who play sport are automatically labeled a lesbian, a woman with 'short hair' or 'who looked strong' was under further suspicion of being a lesbian (*Leah*, 33 years).

*Karen's* (from *NCHC*) perspective paralleled the comments above from *Leah* (at *SEHC*). She explained that for women playing sport who are attractive (with long hair) and portray an overtly feminine image, that the suspicion of identifying as a lesbian is reduced. According to *Karen*; 'I guess if you are pretty, long hair, very attractive, it helps regardless of what sexuality you are' (*Karen*, 42 years). Griffin explains that many women athletes and coaches portray an intentional feminine image to avoid lesbian accusations:

Conforming to traditional norms of femininity in dress and mannerism is another way women coaches and athletes provide evidence of heterosexuality. This "heterosexual drag show" includes wearing skirts, make-up, and especially for college basketball coaches – high heels while coaching... it is easy to see how important appearance is, even at the expense of practicality and comfort (1998, p. 71).

Many women may find wearing high heels while coaching impractical. It may also seem unlikely that some women would go to these lengths to avoid the lesbian label. However, the structure of sport is such that this type of labeling is common practice, and while there is such labeling of female athletes, women will 'conform' to the heterosexual norm in such an extreme manner.

Another similarity that emerged from all case studies was the lack of awareness of policy at the local sporting club and the governing sports body level, along with a lack of awareness of policy outside of sport. The following section also represents a similarity among the clubs. However, its connection to the first and second research aims warrants a separate section.

## **Anti-Discrimination Policies**

There is little in the way of policy at the club level with the three hockey clubs. This is the case despite Brackenridge's (2001) suggestion that there has been an increase in anti-discrimination and code of conduct documents amongst head sporting bodies in general in the last two decades (p. 216). However, as Brackenridge explains, there has been little research which tests the effectiveness of such documents (2001, p. 216). There is an apparent gap between policy and its uptake by local sport bodies, particularly in the area of anti-discrimination and code of conduct policies. This phenomenon is outlined by Eime et al. (2008) and Duncan (2007) in terms of Australia. Eime et al. (2008) suggest that policies in the area of 'welcoming and inclusive environments' were lacking in structure and content, and this made it difficult for the sports clubs to implement. Over fifty representatives from state sporting associations were surveyed in Victoria by Eime et al., and many of the participants felt that the focus area of 'welcoming and inclusive environments' was lacking organisation (Eime et al., 2008, p. 150). In literal terms, it is difficult to analyse the effectiveness of policy. This is especially the case if it has not been disseminated thoroughly at the club and backed up by educational workshops to raise awareness and ensure that members understand policy and the process of implementing it at the sporting club level.

Duncan (2007) suggests that the very culture of sport leads to behaviour that is not accepted in other arenas of everyday life, such as the workplace, school or other public areas. Without the uptake of effective policies, behaviour such as verbal abuse, homophobia and physical violence often goes unreprimated in sport (Duncan, 2007). This inequality, abuse, prejudice and violence in sport are often manifestations of the gender order. Whilst contested by feminists and LGBT advocates in particular, the gender order remains relatively unchanged. Using both theory and evidence, both Connell and McKay explain that

hegemonic masculinity and heterosexism are entrenched and are still highly resistant to change that promotes significant equality within the gender order (Connell, 1995, pp. 81-84; McKay, 1997, pp.129-141). McKay documented this resistance within Australian sporting settings when policies of affirmative action and gender equality were advocated during the 1990s. Promoting women into sport leadership positions within Australian sport remains a significant challenge, as outlined by both Crawford (2009) and Sundstrom et al. (2011). Symons et al. (2010) also explain that addressing homophobia and heterosexism within Australian sport is a work in progress. These factors combined underline the challenges of having effective awareness, policy and practices that enable the complete inclusion and equality of gendered and sexual diversity of Australians in sport.

- **The Lack of Policy at the Hockey Clubs**

Practically all research participants indicated that they were unaware of the existence of anti-discrimination policies at their hockey club. When asked about such policy, the response generally involved a shrug of the shoulders and a comment along the lines of either ‘I’m not sure’, or ‘not that I know of’. While a few participants felt that there may be one in existence, not one of the players from any of the three hockey clubs had seen an anti-discrimination policy at their clubs. *Amanda* from *MCHC* assumed that there was such a policy at the club, but had not seen it. Similarly, *Rosie* from *SEHC* explained that ‘we do have some policies on things, but I couldn’t tell you what they are and whether they include things like that’ (*Rosie*, 34 years). Therefore, while there may be some form of policy at both of these clubs, the members have not been made aware of such resources and they had not been educated on how such policies apply to member protection.



While all participants at *NCHC* claimed that there was not an anti-discrimination policy at the hockey club, several participants alluded to an ethos within the club in relation to discriminatory issues. *Grace* described this ethos and explained why she thought *NCHC* did not have a written policy:

Because *NCHC*'s such a small club we don't really have a lot of written policies but we have... more important to that, we have an active, actively talked about and acted upon policy about being inclusive and diverse (*Grace*, 40 years).

While inclusion is considered important to members of the club at *NCHC*, most participants believed that an (implemented) written policy was not essential.

Similarly, many of the players interviewed (from all three hockey clubs) assumed that there was a written anti-discrimination policy at the head SSA, Hockey Victoria. However, they had not viewed or utilised such a document. Those players who were aware of this policy were those who had used the policy in regards to complaints made through their clubs. While the bulk of the complaints made by hockey clubs involved issues such as umpiring, one complaint was made by *NCHC* in regards to homophobic comments made by an opposing club.<sup>148</sup> The very process of lodging a complaint made those participants involved aware of a state wide (Hockey Victoria) anti-discrimination policy. However, knowledge of such a policy has only emerged through the process of lodging a complaint, and has not been the result of educational information dispersed by Hockey Victoria, nor pro-activity on behalf of the club.

In regards to challenging homophobia in sport, pro-activity is pertinent. According to Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier, and Mitchell, 'homophobic abuse is recognised as different from

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<sup>148</sup> Please refer to Chapter Five on the *NCHC* case study. This complaint was satisfactorily resolved by Hockey Victoria.

other types of bullying and discrimination’ (2010, p. 16).<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, Hillier and Mitchell (n.d.) observe that ‘the impacts [of homophobia] are likely to be greater and the interventions more difficult to put in place’ because of the broader historical and institutional backing that has been given to homophobic beliefs, the greater difficulty in challenging homophobic abuse/bullying experienced by teachers, coaches, sport leaders, and the fact that many LGBT and same-sex attracted youth are in the closet, are fearful of discrimination/abuse and through these experiences are isolated and less likely to speak out. Therefore, a proactive approach to combating homophobia is required.

While a ‘Member Protection Policy’ did exist on the Hockey Australia website that ‘covered’ all state hockey associations (such as Hockey Victoria) and hockey clubs, most participants were unaware of its existence. The Hockey Australia Member Protection Policy included sexuality as a protected attribute under the ‘discrimination’ category. What is particularly noteworthy is that none of the three clubs had a physical or ‘hard copy’ document dealing with anti-discrimination policies or a ‘code of conduct’. Moreover, not one of the participants (from any club) was surprised to learn that their hockey club did not possess such a document or policy. According to the ‘Play by the Rules’ website, a key strategy to consider for sports administrators at sporting clubs is to ‘develop or adopt a member protection policy’ and ‘codes of behaviour’ (Play by the Rules, n.d.). This strategy has not been implemented with all sport clubs, as evidenced by the three hockey club case studies.

This situation could be reflective of the taken for granted assumptions that naturalise the gendered power structures, governance and distribution of resources, which in turn has an impact on the conceptualisation, policy enactment and practice of sexuality diversity and

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<sup>149</sup> This study found that 46% of LGBT participants involved in mainstream sport were not ‘out’ as LGBT to anyone in their sporting club, whilst a 21% were out to all. The reasons for not being out included fear of being judged, harassed, discriminated against, abuse, physically assaulted, not feeling safe (p. 10).

inclusion of the mixed gendered clubs. Discussion of gender, sexuality and inequality are sensitive and contentious issues involving power and politics. The stigma of the 'lesbian label' generates silence and shame and effectively controls many women who play hockey. Cultural change that questions gendered and sexual power and inequality and promotes inclusive policy and practice requires effective and informed leadership and community involvement. It is difficult to raise awareness, initiate conversations around sensitive topics such as sexuality and gender diversity, or hear from those who have essentially been silenced. Leadership can come from the SSA's, providing direction, motivation, good practice examples and resources. However, policy delivered from the top down can also be imposed and resisted. Dyson (2010) explains that policy implementation is best to come from a combination of the 'top-down' (policy delivered by the SSA) and 'bottom-up' (community development model) approaches. A community development approach involving grass roots club members may be more effective. This has been the approach taken with the awareness raising and policy implementation of the 'Respect and Responsibility' program used in the Victorian Football League by academic and community development worker Dr. Sue Dyson. It has also been the successful approach promoting gender and sexual diversity within four Victorian Hockey clubs in the Fair go, sport! project.

Clearly, the messages at national and state level sporting organisations were not necessarily filtering down to club or local level sport in 2006.<sup>150</sup> Various reasons for this might include; poor communication channels between the head sporting organisation and clubs, volunteers' ability and capacity to carry and disseminate these messages, and a lack of proactive education provided and supported by the head sporting organisation on anti-discrimination policies and complaints procedures. This lack of knowledge could reflect a lack of individual

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<sup>150</sup> This situation may have changed since the research was conducted in 2006.

interest in policy and procedures, along with the challenges of time, resources, confidence and priorities. This could also be reflective of the current power structures as naturalised and taken for granted.

Another challenge is that policy is often imposed from above, in this case the SSA, and not constructed together with a club or community. While this lack of knowledge at the club level may be reflective of the culture of certain hockey clubs, it may also reflect the manner in which club members are involved in decisions about policies. Perhaps an adoption of a ‘community development’ model, such as that used by Dyson for the ‘Respect and Responsibility’ program would be successful in engaging hockey club members and volunteers on such policies, thereby facilitating the dissemination and education processes. As outlined in Chapter Four, to increase the uptake of policy at club level and change the culture, adopting principles of the ‘primary prevention programs in the community’ would be advantageous (WHO, cited in Dyson, 2010, p. 25). Some of these principles outlined by the WHO may be enacted at local hockey club level. Suggestions on how they can be enacted are provided in various ways in the table below (Table 7).

**Table 7 – ‘Enactment of WHO principles at local hockey club level’**

WHO principles for the ‘primary prevention programs in the community’	Enactment of principles at local hockey club level
<p>Principle One – The use of participatory methods for effectively engaging participants; and</p> <p>Principle Three - Employing and training facilitators with high quality skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The training and implementation of willing ‘program drivers’ at the hockey club level to act as ‘facilitators of change’. These program drivers would ideally be current and well respected ‘leaders’ within the clubs.</li> <li>• Ensuring the expert training of Club Development Managers at Hockey Victoria (and Hockey Australia) to provide advice, guidance and training in these areas.</li> </ul>

<p>Principle Four - Providing long term follow-up to support and sustain changes brought about by the program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A commitment by the SSA (Hockey Victoria) to follow up with interactive training and workshops (if required) at regular intervals over a long period of time. This is particularly pertinent for two reasons – firstly, cultural change does not happen immediately and a period of time is required; secondly, the ‘program driver’ volunteers will need time to carry out their role at the club (Volunteers are usually unpaid and have outside commitments that take priority, such as family, childcare and employment).</li> <li>• A commitment to keep the lines of communication open between all hockey clubs and the SSA for a long period of time. This communication would be between the program drivers and Hockey Victoria Club Development Managers, where ideas about effective engagement of policies and cultural change can be shared.</li> </ul>
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Brackenridge (2001) proposes a ‘checklist’ (specifically for sexual exploitation) for sporting bodies that are planning to develop and implement policies such as a code of conduct. She suggests that sharing information and strategies with other similar organisations through benchmarking, ‘both helps to develop confidence [in policies] and also facilitates exchange of good practice’ (Brackenridge, 2001, p. 217). Several other state sporting organisations in Victoria have provided a good framework for providing information and education around these issues. Basketball Victoria has provided an array of resources over several years, particularly in the area of wheelchair basketball, and boast a newsletter on their website, labeled ‘Inclusion’ (Basketball Victoria, n.d.). Similarly, Women’s Golf Victoria has been actively promoting educational sessions and policy surrounding equal opportunity and has recognised the need for a policy on sex reassigned golfers (Women’s Golf Victoria, n.d.).

Strategies used and policy developed by such organisations provide a framework and path for others to follow.

At the time that the interviews were conducted, Hockey Victoria had little in the way of anti-discrimination type policy on their website. The club members needed to consult the Hockey Australia site to view the policy, as this policy was not distributed effectively to the hockey clubs. Since the interviews were held, the Hockey Australia (which encompasses all state organisations) 'Member Protection' policy has been made available on the Hockey Victoria website, along with a 'Play by the Rules' web link and many other resources aimed at 'club development'. The Club Development Manager from Hockey Victoria explained that this is an area in which they wish to develop further (dispensing policy out to clubs) (personal communication, July 6, 2010).<sup>151</sup> These changes have been a positive inclusion on the state organisation's website. However, a pertinent point is that the Club Development representative also mentioned that Hockey Victoria do not enquire as to whether such information, once sent to clubs, had arrived and been distributed to members (personal communication, July 6, 2010).

To effectively change the culture of the hockey clubs, changes need to be made at club level. One way of making change at this level is by having informed leaders or 'program drivers' at the club. Essentially, changes made at club level may be more likely to change the culture of the club, rather than enforced changes from the level of the head sporting organisation. Even when there is no policy at the head sporting organisation level, there can be clubs who adopt a culture, or an ethos, of inclusion. This is especially the case when there are strong and willing leaders at the club who support such changes in culture.

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<sup>151</sup>The Club Development Manager explained that information in relation to 'Homophobia in Sport', 'Health', 'Working with Children' and 'Ugly Parents' is currently sent to the hockey clubs via email and post (personal communication, July 6, 2010).

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Conclusion**

The aims of this thesis were to; examine the scope of anti-discrimination legislation and policy and the expectations that it carries for hockey associations and community-based clubs; to examine the scope of club or team policies with respect to participation based on gender, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity, and how these policies are perceived by the participants and managers (i.e., how they interpret the requirements of anti-discrimination legislation, managers' perceptions of inclusiveness in the club, procedures for staff/member education, complaint procedures, etc); and to examine the lived experience of inclusiveness by team members, including their perceptions of team/club policy, procedures, team culture and the experiences of playing within the competitive mainstream hockey league.

Experiences of homophobia and the lesbian label were central issues in the context of this research. This final chapter highlights the contribution that this thesis has made to the body of academic research, and provides an overview of the main findings and themes, limitations and recommendations.

The first aim of the thesis was encapsulated in Chapter Four. The breadth of anti-discrimination legislation and policy pertaining to Australian sport and the obligations of local sporting clubs to implement such policy were explored. Policies such as the 'Victorian Code of Conduct for Community Sport', the AFL 's 'Respect and Responsibility Program' and resources such as the 'Play by the Rules' and 'Come Out to Play' were analysed in terms of the policy and education available to national and state sporting bodies, along with the local sporting club. At the state sporting association level, the Hockey Australia 'Member Protection' policy has been made available on the Hockey Victoria website, along with a

‘Play by the Rules’ web link. These resources outline the expectations for local sporting clubs to implement and practice inclusive practices for all members.

The second aim of the study was to investigate how the participant’s interpreted such policy at the club level, including personal perceptions of inclusivity at the club, education of participants and key volunteers at the club in anti-discrimination and complaint handling procedures. In relation to the second aim of the study, the research revealed participants’ knowledge regarding anti-discrimination policies, little uptake of policy at the club level, the limited capacity of volunteers at club level to disperse policy and information, and the lack of ‘follow-up’ by the Club Development Manager/s from Hockey Victoria.<sup>152</sup> Other themes included the identity and community formation possibilities, the lesbian label, the potential for inclusive spaces in regards to sexual diversity in recreational sport, and the influence of leaders at the clubs.

A major theme that emerged from this thesis was the participants’ lack of knowledge about anti-discrimination policies in place at the SSA and the hockey club in 2006. This lack of knowledge indicated that there was a breakdown with the process in place between Hockey Victoria and affiliated hockey clubs in the distribution of such policy and education. While representatives from Hockey Victoria claim that policy was circulated to clubs, many administrative level participants claimed that it was not. The process of engaging and educating ‘Member Protection Officers’ or volunteers from each hockey club was insufficient at the time of the interviews. This situation represented a major problem with the education

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<sup>152</sup>This research was conducted in 2006, and this may not indicate the process currently used by Hockey Victoria to ‘follow-up’ the distribution of policy between the SSA and hockey clubs. In fact, the ‘Fair go, sport!’ project recently undertaken by Hockey Victoria promises a safer space for LGBT individuals involved in hockey. This project adopts the community development model discussed in Chapter Eight, has embraced gender and sexuality diversity and provided vital leadership in this area for Australian sport since this research project began. For further information about the project, see [www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/fairgosport/](http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/fairgosport/)



and engagement of recreation level athletes on issues related to diversity and inclusion. Utilisation of the community development model recommended by the WHO and Dyson (2010) may begin to address this problem.

Linked to the theme above, the capacity of the volunteer at recreational level clubs was another theme that emerged out of the research. As Hockey Victoria suggested that they did indeed circulate information to the hockey clubs on anti-discrimination and fair play in sport, the chain of dissemination was breaking down at some point in this process. Volunteers who take on administrative roles within sporting clubs need to have the capacity to carry and disseminate these messages to club members. Clearly, this dissemination was not happening at the three sporting clubs analysed. Often the volunteers at these three hockey clubs had everyday challenges with family and work, as many other members had, so information not immediately relevant to the club or team appeared to be forgotten about and not circulated. Additionally, the organisation of weekly matches, including players, umpires, resources and other management concerns may have taken priority.

The practice of implementing policy addressing sexuality diversity in recreational sport in Australia is just beginning. Facilitating and encouraging the adoption of policy at the recreational sporting club level is a difficult process when volunteers are responsible for such information reaching club members. Professional development in other arenas of employment and services (such as big business, education, health and the public service) is well resourced, and expected to be taken up and embraced by employees as part of their employment conditions. However, the arena of sport, particularly at the recreational level, is in a different situation. Firstly, the obligations of devising and adhering to a policy are only loosely outlined in recreational level sport and secondly, the 'top-down' approach to

implementing policy in sports is not particularly successful. Legislation or policy change at state sporting associations (or even at some sporting clubs) does not mean that cultural changes are made at club level. This has certainly been the case for at least three recreational level hockey clubs in Victoria during 2006.

In relation to the third aim of the study (whereby the lived experience of inclusiveness was examined), an additional major theme that was present in the research emerged, particularly at the all-women's hockey club. This theme was an ethos of ethical behaviour and 'inclusion' at sporting clubs. In place of a formal anti-discrimination policy at the clubs, all clubs had a general ethos that promoted good behaviour and inclusion. However, the *NCHC* participants spoke widely about a rather unique ethos at the club in regards to inclusion and participation. Participants claimed that the hockey club had an ethos to be inclusive regardless of how members identify in terms of sexual orientation and that the club had no need for a formal anti-discrimination policy, as they already promoted non-discrimination. For the most part, *NCHC* (as a women's only club) practiced a 'safe and inclusive' culture for women, particularly for mature-aged lesbian identified women. While the club may have been seen as exclusionary (as a one-team women's hockey club that did not have male members, coaches or officials), the culture of *NCHC* was a deliberately empowering experience for the female participants.

Another theme has been the effect of the lesbian label on women's sports. The majority of the participants were aware of this label and had experienced homophobia through their involvement with hockey. The effect of the lesbian label on women's sport has been discussed in detail in earlier chapters of this thesis and has been an ever present challenge in

women's elite sport. This thesis demonstrates that the lesbian label is also a challenge to women in recreational level hockey, irrespective of sexual orientation.

Another theme that emerged that related to the third aim of the research was the dominance of male leaders and male committee members at the two mixed-gendered hockey clubs. At both *MCHC* and *SEHC*, the executive committees were not representative of the overall membership of the clubs. Both of these clubs had an equal number of male and female members, however both were governed predominantly by the male members. Many of the women interviewed from these clubs also appeared to hold a naturalised view that men will not only take on the leadership roles, but they would also perform them to a higher standard. The effects of male governance at the two hockey clubs meant that the (presumably heterosexual and unified) male voice was the voice of authority at the clubs.<sup>153</sup> It was ingrained in these two clubs that the male sporting pursuits should be privileged over the women's experiences. At *MCHC* in particular, this unequal form of governance was played out in the appointment of coaching staff. While the women's first team was competing at a higher level than the men's team, the men's team was assigned a more experienced and more highly paid coach.

Another theme and difference between the male dominated governance of *MCHC* and *SEHC* and the women governed *NCHC* was the focus on performance over participation. The two larger and mix-gendered hockey clubs tended to focus on playing performance in a different manner to *NCHC* participants. At *MCHC* and *SEHC*, this performance focus was manifest in hierarchical discussions of 'going up' or 'going down' in playing levels and teams. Clearly,

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<sup>153</sup> Presumptions of heterosexuality have been made about the male committee members of the club. This information is derived from personal conversations with participants in the study surrounding the male committee members. Participants from *MCHC* and *SEHC* did not identify any of the male leaders at their respective clubs as gay, bisexual or transgendered. Clearly, interviews were not held with these male members.

going up or down was not a possibility at *NCHC* (as a one-team club). It was evident that *NCHC* was more focussed on participation and community, rather than members being concerned with playing at a higher level or fearing being ‘dropped’ to a lower level.

A final theme that emerged from the participants’ responses was a lack of sophistication in the language used that encircled gender and sexuality identity. The language and concepts used by participants around bisexuality (and to a lesser extent, transgender) matched the traditional and ‘normal’ dichotomy and hierarchy of heterosexuality and homosexuality. This language did not represent an accurate depiction of gender and sexuality identity in society, as boundaries between genders and sexualities can be and are crossed. Participants did not recognise gender and sexuality identity as fluid or as existing in many forms. Instead, their comments were framed in predominantly biological constructions. This, however, is not surprising, as most writings, images and explanations in society that surround gender and sexuality are presented in this manner.

### **Gaps and Improving Current Practices**

There remains a gap in research in the area of reported lesbian sporting experience in Australia. Past research in this area has rarely been conducted at the club or recreational level of sport, nor has it adopted the same qualitative methods as in this research project. There is also little research on the impact of anti-discrimination or member protection policy on sporting club culture. In this study, the progress being made in anti-discrimination legislation, research and initiatives, and its impact in the community, including sport (in particular, hockey) has been investigated. This research informs our understandings of the nature, capacity, challenges and opportunities surrounding volunteers at local sporting clubs.

This thesis has also identified failures in communication and distribution systems responsible for circulating policies and procedures in regards to anti-discrimination policy, from State Sports Association (SSA) level through to sporting club level. Therefore, this research calls for changes in the Hockey Victoria processes utilised to deliver policy to hockey clubs in Victoria. The ‘top down’ approach to delivering anti-discrimination policies is not working in its current form. The adoption of a community development model may increase the chances of this policy being employed by sporting clubs, along with changing the culture encompassing sexuality diversity at club level.

This research has also revealed a more detailed look at the sporting culture of the community level sporting club and its impact on the identity and wellbeing of members, with particular focus on diversity issues relating to sexual orientation. This project has broadened understandings of sexuality diversity within women’s sport in Australia and may contribute to the development of more effective social inclusion policy within the recreational level of sport. Another significance of this research lies in its ability to demonstrate how relevant sport is as a source of identity and community involvement, and to what extent sport advances certain social justice objectives. Conversely, this research has also shown how the lesbian label in women’s sport is very much active in the minds of many sportswomen.

These findings will prove useful to all SSA’s for future reference in regards to these issues. This research can increase awareness of social diversity in the recreational sport community, not only with gender, but also sexuality, and can be used as a resource or reference for many people and sporting organisations. Club administrators, coaches, teachers (particularly physical education teachers) and educational organisations, for example, could use this

information to address, in ethical terms, the ‘social health’ of their organisation, and to address, in risk management terms, compliance with anti-discrimination legislation.

## **Limitations**

As with all qualitative and quantitative research projects, limitations can often affect the full potential of a study. One specific limitation to the thesis was the interview format. While every effort was made to conduct the interviews using a semi-structured format, on several occasions the interviewer felt that she did not ask the ‘extra question’. The ‘extra question/s’ may have elicited more extensive and nuanced responses.

A further limitation was the absence of any anti-discrimination documents or policies at the club level. Although all three hockey clubs were asked to provide the researcher with any such policies, no evidence of the existence of such documents was elicited from the executive committees at each of the clubs. The researcher asked all participants about a ‘physical’ or electronic copy of such a policy. This was asked of participants during their interviews and outside of the recorded interview period. While (very) few participants (particularly at *SEHC*) suggested that there ‘should be’ one in existence, no policies were found. Not one participant could produce any type of policy such as a ‘code of conduct’, ‘member protection policy’, ‘rules of behaviour’ or any policy related to the expected behaviour and actions of club members.

One final challenge (and possible limitation) was encountered when recruiting for this research project. For many of the women who attended the information sessions conducted by the researcher, the research topic was sensitive. Some of the prospective participants were visibly uncomfortable at hearing about the proposed research project and several were

concerned that a study investigating ‘sexuality diversity in women’s team sports’ was a ‘lesbian study’. The researcher needed to assure participants that the research would focus not only on the experiences of lesbians, but rather of all women, as this was a question asked by several prospective participants. The stigma of being associated with such a study for some participants was conceivably a challenge and problem. Many of the participants who chose to ask further questions about the study did so via email and not in front of their teammates. This was particularly the case at *MCHC* and *SEHC*. This limitation meant that participants were difficult to recruit and that only one case study (*NCHC*) became a representative sample of the entire club. Apart from *NCHC*, no sample size was over half of the female population at the club; therefore a more rich and representative picture could have been drawn of club cultures and values. The *SEHC* and *MCHC* case study information was essentially the perspectives and perceptions of those interviewed, and may not have been representative of the hockey club as a whole.

While not necessarily a limitation, but certainly worthy of mention, was the appearance of the researcher. While not overtly ‘butch’ in appearance, the researcher did present to the information sessions with short hair and without adhering to an image of ‘traditional femininity’. The researcher did consider if her appearance stimulated specific questions and assumptions about the ‘lesbian’ research prior to any information being dispersed.

As with many research projects, more questions arise than are solved and future recommended research is suggested. A list of recommendations is provided in the final section below.

## **Recommendations**

The information gleaned from the study gives rise to several recommendations for further research and/or development in this area. Recommendations in the areas of research and policy implications are explored below.

- **Policy Implications**

A more succinct process and communication plan is required for distributing information between state sporting associations, such as Hockey Victoria, and their affiliated sporting clubs.<sup>154</sup> While other sporting organisations can be used as a model for this process, further education and engagement of resources, such as the Australian Sports Commission or Play by the Rules resources needs to be undertaken. This would outline to state sporting associations and sporting clubs their obligations and responsibilities for implementing policy. Models such as the community development model prepared by the WHO, and utilised by Dyson in the AFL's Rights and Responsibilities program<sup>155</sup> should be implemented to ensure further club level engagement with policy. Such a program or model would need to be implemented by the state sporting association, to provide resources, guidance and professional assistance for hockey clubs to facilitate this. It is recommended that such a model would provide a shift in culture at sporting clubs in regards to sexuality diversity, particularly if 'champions' within the sporting club are utilised to educate and inform other participants on policy and ethical behaviour. This process is more effective than implementing policy from the SSA level. Ultimately, of course, the hope is that clubs will embrace inclusivity and diversity. Indeed, if a lived practice of inclusive culture at a sporting club is practiced, a code of conduct or anti-discrimination policy is not as difficult to implement.

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<sup>154</sup> Again, this research was conducted in 2006, and this may not indicate the process currently used to distribute information between Hockey Victoria and its affiliated clubs.

<sup>155</sup> This program and model was discussed in Chapter Three.



Acting on this recommendation will require substantial financial assistance, as well as a lot of time. Enabling effective cultural change at these three hockey clubs will take time and engagement by the club leaders and members. Change in the culture of local hockey clubs may also give rise to a more diverse membership, thereby creating positive outcomes for such a project. Hockey club memberships may also increase, as well as the growth and development of the sport in general.

- **Research**

Firstly, it is acknowledged that this thesis relies heavily on the theoretical framework provided by the work of Connell. Connell's theory of gender relations and identities and structures of 'labour, power and cathexis' and McKay's (1997) adaptation of this framework in a sporting context, underpins this dissertation. However, future studies using alternate theoretical frameworks, such as Foucault, may prove equally fruitful in eliciting new understandings in this general area of research.

Further research into the governance structure in community sport in Australia needs to be undertaken. This thesis has demonstrated that the male members are holding more positions on the committee than are female members, within at least two mixed-gendered hockey clubs in Victoria. Whilst factors such as marital status, sexuality, childcare, age, employment, ethnicity and religion may play a role in a woman's capacity to both engage in sport, and to contribute to governance of a sporting club, further research is required as to how and why this phenomenon is manifest in club level sport. Future research needs to investigate the process for appointing committee members within the sporting club format and whether or not equal opportunity or affirmative action policies are utilised or adhered to. In particular,

future research needs to focus on the gendered nature of governance at sporting clubs, specifically at mixed-gendered sporting clubs.

Further research is also recommended regarding volunteers at local sporting clubs.

Specifically, the capacity of volunteers in this setting is worthy of further work. The volunteers in this study were unpaid and were required to complete a variety of tasks within their roles. These tasks involved attending to the ongoing weekly operations of the hockey clubs, specifically, the organisation of players, team, umpires and hockey pitches. These immediate tasks, along with commitments outside of the hockey club, left little time for other responsibilities at the club. This research has highlighted the capacity of the volunteer at three hockey clubs, and it would be worthy to investigate if this is a trend amongst other hockey and local sporting clubs. If this were the case, changes need to be made in regard to the roles of volunteers in delivering important messages to the clubs, one of which would include attending to policy and education surrounding anti-discrimination and sexuality diversity.

A research project looking at the nature of inclusion and diversity at various recreational sports in Australia is required. Hockey is one sport, and it would be useful to ascertain if there are similar patterns in regards to inclusion and diversity in other female team sports. Further analysis of similar challenges for women and other minority groups in sport (such as gay men, lesbian and bisexual women and transgender individuals) would be a valuable project in Australia. Longitudinal and sport-specific research, in areas such as ‘female appropriate’ sports (such as netball or swimming) and ‘female inappropriate’ sports (such as rugby or boxing) could be contextualised and analysed to provide a significant contribution to the field of sport and sexuality diversity studies.

Finally, the lesbian label challenge in women's sport needs to be recognised and researched further in all levels of sport in Australia. Both the small amount of research conducted in Australia (Come Out to Play) and similar research internationally, unmistakably demonstrates that this label detrimentally impacts on all women in sport. Greater recognition and combating of the label and its significant negative impacts on lesbian sportswomen and sports workers specifically, as well as on all women engaged in sport, needs to occur. This can be undertaken through research, education and resources. Such education regarding the lesbian label needs to be available for all recreational level athletes, particularly female athletes engaged in traditionally male sports, such as cricket, rugby, Australian rules and soccer.

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## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX A – Information Letter for Sporting Clubs**

**[VU Letterhead]**

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Chelsea Litchfield, and I am interested in conducting a research project involving your Club members as part of my PhD program at Victoria University. The project involves looking at inclusiveness of sexual diversity in community sport clubs, and it is expected that this research will give a more detailed look at sporting club culture and its impact on the identity and well being of members. The study will involve some policy analysis as well as interviews with club members and officials. The interviews will explore topics such as sexuality (i.e., sexual orientation), inclusiveness and discrimination as they may relate to club policies, practices and culture. All procedures involved in the study, along with ethical risks and safeguards, have been approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. The club will be offered an executive summary of the research and access to the more detailed (de-identified) case studies written up in the thesis if you are so interested.

At this stage, we are simply seeking permission to meet with your Club officials and members at time convenient to your Club (e.g., after training session or Club meeting, etc.), distribute an information letter about the study, answer any questions they may have, and extend an invitation to participate. By meeting with them, there is no obligation on the part of the Club officials or members to participate.

I hope that you see this as an opportunity to contribute to best practice when it comes to participating and managing community club sport, and I look forward to your reply.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at [Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au](mailto:Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au).

Yours sincerely,

Chelsea Litchfield

## APPENDIX B – Recruitment letter to Club Members

[VU Letterhead]

Dear Club Member,

**As part of my PhD research, I would like to invite you to participate in a study titled:**  
***Sexual Diversity: Inclusiveness in Women's Club Level Sport.***

This Victoria University approved study involves an interview to explore your experience and perceptions of the mix of people in your club and your sense of belonging and identity. The interview will explore topics such as sexuality (i.e. sexual orientation), inclusiveness of sexual diversity and discrimination as they may relate to club policies, practices and culture.

While the interview may deal with potentially sensitive issues, care will be taken to maintain privacy, confidentiality and your well-being.

If you would like more information about this study and your participation in it, please contact the researcher, Chelsea Litchfield, at [Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au](mailto:Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au)

Yours truly,

Ms Chelsea Litchfield



## APPENDIX C - Recruitment letter to Club Officials

[VU Letterhead]

Dear Club Official,

**As part of my PhD research, I would like to invite you to participate in a study titled:**  
***Sexual Diversity: Inclusiveness in Women's Club Level Sport.***

This Victoria University approved study involves an interview to explore your experience and perceptions of the policies and practices that address the mix of people in your club and its culture. The interview will explore topics such as sexuality (i.e. sexual orientation), inclusiveness of sexual diversity and discrimination as they may relate to club policies, practices and culture.

While the interview may deal with potentially sensitive issues, care will be taken to maintain privacy, confidentiality and your well-being.

If you would like more information about this study and your participation in it, please contact the researcher, Chelsea Litchfield, at [Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au](mailto:Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au)

Yours truly,

Ms Chelsea Litchfield

## **APPENDIX D – Information to Participants**

**[VU Letterhead]**

### **INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:**

The aim of this study is to examine diversity and inclusiveness in a community based sport club. The study involves an interview that will explore topics such as sexuality (i.e. sexual orientation), inclusiveness and discrimination as they may relate to club policies, practices and culture. While the interview may deal with potentially sensitive personal situations and feelings, participants will not be asked to disclose any names, and all discussion material will be strictly confidential. That is, all interview materials will be audio-taped and coded in such a way that names do not appear on notes, transcripts, tapes, or any other record of the interview. Participants should know that participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and that participants are free to discontinue at any time, (even after the commencement of an interview) without the need for explanation.

Interview participants will be asked before the interview commences not to mention names or other identifying information about themselves or others during the interview. Participants will be informed beforehand that any sensitive or suspect information that is inadvertently disclosed during the interview process will not appear in transcripts or in any other written materials. Participants will have access to view the transcript of their interview and are permitted to veto content.

Should you have any concerns or queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact the Student researcher, Chelsea Litchfield ([Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au](mailto:Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au)) or the Principal Investigator, Dr Dennis Hemphill (Tel. 03 9919 4486). If at any stage you have a concern about the conduct of the research or how you were treated, please contact the Secretary of the University Human Research Ethics Committee at Victoria University, P.O. Box 14428 Melbourne, MC 8001 (Tel. 03 9919 4710). If you have any queries about anti-discrimination issues, please contact the University's Equity and Social Justice Branch (Tel. 03 9919 4598). If participants feel that their participation in this has raised any troublesome issues for you, please feel free to contact, free of charge, Dr Harriet Speed on 03 9919 5412 who can provide counselling support.

## **APPENDIX E – Sample Interview Guide for Athlete Participants**

### **Part One – General Background Information**

Can you give a brief description of yourself?

Things to explore - where did you grow up, your family background, age, education, occupation, main interests, etc.

### **Part Two - Involvement with local sport**

Can you describe your current involvement with local sport? (Other sport involvement, main sports played, organisations, roles, interests, motivations, achievements, etc)

Can you tell me how you became involved with this sporting club?

### **Part Three – Local Sporting Club Experiences**

- How would you best describe the experience of playing sport at this club?

Some main areas to explore:

- Club and team environments? ie: friendly, welcoming, etc. (irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, race, etc.)
- Perception of relations, if any, between lesbian and heterosexual athletes in the team

### **Part Four – Gay and Lesbian Issues in Sport**

Do you think there are any unique issues that face lesbian and gay athletes in sport?

Do you think there are any unique issues that face predominately lesbian identified sporting teams playing in mainstream sporting competitions?

Do you think there is a need for separate gay and lesbian sports clubs and events?

Can you recall if homophobia was ever an issue for you and/or your sporting club during your sports involvement – elaborate?

### **Part Five – Anti-Discrimination Policy**

Could you tell me about your awareness of:

- anti-discrimination and harassment policy - how it applies to your sporting club and head sporting organisation.
- Whether this anti-discrimination policy covers sexual orientation.
- Lodging a Complaint – Do you know anything about the complaints procedures at your sports club and association? Elaborate
- Is there any education about the anti-discrimination policy?
- If no education exists – would you be interested in finding out more information or formal training?

Any further comments?

## **APPENDIX F - Sample Interview Guide for Manager, Administrator, Coach and Official Participants**

### **Part One – General Background Information**

Can you give a brief description of yourself?

Things to explore - where did you grow up, your family background, age, education, occupation, main interests, etc.

### **Part Two - Involvement with local sport**

Can you describe your current involvement with local sport? (Other sport involvement, main sports played, organisations, roles, interests, motivations, achievements, etc)

Can you tell me how you became involved with this sporting club?

### **Part Three – Local Sporting Club Experiences**

- How would you best describe the experiences of being involved at this club?

Some main areas to explore:

- Club and team environments? ie: friendly, welcoming, etc. (irrespective of age, gender, sexuality, race, etc.)
- Perceptions of relations, if any, between the lesbian and heterosexual athletes in the team, etc.

### **Part Four – Gay and Lesbian Issues in Sport**

Do you think there are any unique issues that face lesbian and gay athletes in sport?

Do you think there are any unique issues that face predominately lesbian identified sporting teams playing in mainstream sporting competitions?

Do you think there is a need for separate gay and lesbian sports clubs and events?

Can you recall if homophobia was ever an issue for you and/or your sporting club during your sports involvement – elaborate?

### **Part Five – Anti-Discrimination Policy**

Could you tell me about your perceptions of:

- Awareness if an anti-discrimination policy exists.
- anti-discrimination and harassment policy - how it applies to your sporting club and head sporting organisation.
- Whether this anti-discrimination policy covers sexual orientation.
- Lodging a Complaint – Is there an effective complaints procedure at your sporting club or sporting organisation?
- Would you feel comfortable enough to lodge a complaint with either/both the sporting club and head sporting organisation?

Education of anti-discrimination policies:

- Are you aware of any programs and resources that address discrimination in sport generally?

- Are you aware if there is any form of formal training offered on discrimination in sport by the sporting club or head sporting organisation for yourself or athletes?
- Are you aware if there is a specific staff member or volunteer responsible for increasing awareness of anti-discrimination?
- If no education exists – would you be interested in finding out more information or formal training?

Any further comments?

## APPENDIX G - Consent Form (For Athlete Participants)

[VU Letterhead]

### INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

The aim of this study is to examine diversity and inclusiveness in a community based sport club. The study involves an interview that will explore topics such as sexuality (i.e. sexual orientation), inclusiveness or discrimination as they may relate to club policies, practices and culture. While the interview may deal with potentially sensitive personal situations and feelings, participants will not be asked to disclose any names, and all discussion material will be strictly confidential. That is, all interview materials will be audio-taped and coded in such a way that names do not appear on notes, transcripts, tapes, or any other record of the interview. Participants should know that participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and that participants are free to discontinue at any time, (even after the commencement of an interview) without the need for explanation. Interview participants will be asked before the interview commences not to mention names or other identifying information about themselves or others during the interview. Participants will be informed beforehand that any sensitive or suspect information that is inadvertently disclosed during the interview process will not appear in transcripts or in any other written materials. Participants will have access to view the transcript of their interview and are permitted to veto content.

### CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, \_\_\_\_\_

of \_\_\_\_\_

certify that I am at least 18 years old\* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study entitled: *Sexual Diversity: Inclusiveness in Women's Club Level Sport*, being conducted at Victoria University by Chelsea Litchfield. I certify that the objectives and method of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the study have been fully explained to me, and that I freely consent to participation in an interview to discuss my experiences in club sport. I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way. I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:..... }

Witness other than the researcher:

Date: .....

.....}

Should you have any concerns or queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact the Student researcher, Chelsea Litchfield (Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au) or the Principal Investigator, Dr Dennis Hemphill (Tel. 03 9919 4486). If at any stage you have a concern about the conduct of the research or how you were treated, please contact the Secretary of the University Human Research Ethics Committee at Victoria University, P.O. Box 14428 Melbourne, MC 8001 (Tel. 03 9919 4710). If you have any queries about anti-discrimination issues, please contact the University's Equity and Social Justice Branch (Tel. 03 9919 4598). If participants feel that their participation in this has raised any troublesome issues for you, please feel free to contact, free of charge, Dr Harriet Speed on 03 9919 5412 who can provide counselling support.

**APPENDIX H - Consent Form (For Coach/Team Manager/Administrator Participants)**  
**[VU Letterhead]**

**INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:**

The aim of this study is to examine diversity and inclusiveness in a community based sport club. The research involves an interview, which will explore interpretations of anti-discrimination legislation, as well as perceptions of the inclusiveness of club policies, practices and culture. The interview will also explore topics such as sexuality (i.e. sexual orientation), inclusiveness and discrimination as they may relate to club policies, practices and culture. While the interview may touch on contentious issues, all discussion material will be strictly confidential. That is, all interview materials will be audio-taped and coded in such a way that your name and any other identifying information about you or your club does not appear on notes, transcripts, tapes, or any other record of the interview or publications. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and that you are free to discontinue at any time, (even after the commencement of an interview) without the need for explanation. Interview participants will be asked before the interview commences not to mention names or other identifying information about themselves or others during the interview. Participants will be informed beforehand that any sensitive or suspect information that is inadvertently disclosed during the interview process will not appear in transcripts or in any other written materials. Participants will have access to view the transcript of their interview and are permitted to veto content.

**CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT**

I, \_\_\_\_\_

of \_\_\_\_\_

certify that I am at least 18 years old\* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study entitled: *Sexual Diversity: Inclusiveness in Women's Club Level Sport*, being conducted at Victoria University by Chelsea Litchfield. I certify that the objectives and method of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the study have been fully explained to me, and that I freely consent to participation in an interview to discuss my experiences in club sport. I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way. I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed: ..... }

Witness other than the researcher:

**Date:** .....

.....}

**Should you have any concerns or queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact the Student researcher, Chelsea Litchfield (Chelsea.Litchfield@research.vu.edu.au) or the Principal Investigator, Dr Dennis Hemphill (Tel. 03 9919 4486). If at any stage you have a concern about the conduct of the research, please contact the Secretary of the University Human Research Ethics Committee at Victoria University, P.O. Box 14428 Melbourne MC, 8001 (Tel. 03 9919 4710). If you have any queries about harassment issues, please contact the University's Equity and Social Justice Branch (Tel. 03 9919 4598). If participants feel that their participation in this has raised any troublesome issues for you, please feel free to contact, free of charge, Dr Harriet Speed on 03 9919 5412 who can provide counselling support.**