

1 Running head: John Amaechi Changing the Way

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Changing the Way Sport Reporters Examine Gay Athletes

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## 1           **John Amaechi: Changing the Way Sport Reporters Examine Gay Athletes**

2           Although there are various purposes and outcomes of organized sporting  
3 participation for men in Western cultures, a consistent finding is that sport has served as a  
4 resilient social institution principally organized around the political project of defining  
5 acceptable forms of masculinity (Connell, 1990; Crosset, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994;  
6 Kimmell, 1994; Messner, 2002). Contact sports have been particularly recognized as  
7 leading markers of masculinity, where participation is made near-compulsory through  
8 masculine peer culture and institutionalized play within school systems (Messner & Sabo,  
9 1990; Pronger, 1990). Accordingly, from early youth and throughout young adulthood,  
10 boys and men are structured into a desire to be associated with hegemonic dominance by  
11 partaking in a sporting space that is used to sculpt bodies and construct masculine  
12 identities, both of which align with dominant perspectives of masculinist embodiment  
13 and expression (Anderson, 2005a; Pronger, 1990). Therefore, competitive teamsports  
14 exist as a microcosm of society's gendered values, myths, and prejudices about the  
15 variations between men and women, while also simultaneously constructing boys and  
16 men to exhibit, value, and reproduce traditional notions of masculinity (Britton &  
17 Williams, 1995; Burstyn, 1999; Daniels, 2005).

18           Accordingly, highly competitive men's teamsports have traditionally been  
19 described as organizational settings that are near-totally intolerant of homosexuality  
20 (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Schacht, 1996). Messner (1992) wrote, "The extent of  
21 homophobia in the sport world is staggering. Boys (in sport) learn early that to be gay, to  
22 be suspected of being gay, or even to be unable to prove one's heterosexual status is not  
23 acceptable" (p. 34).

1 Pronger (1990) theorized this homophobic culture prevents sporting men from  
2 openly identifying as gay, something particularly useful in a culture where sexuality also  
3 constitutes gender (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998). However, Anderson (2005a) contended  
4 matters are rapidly changing for gay men in general within U.S. culture, and particularly  
5 for gay male athletes. He found heterosexual male athletes increasingly distancing  
6 themselves from homophobia, and that openly gay athletes were usually treated well by  
7 their peers regardless of the sport they played (Anderson, 2002; 2005a; 2005b). Despite  
8 this change, perceptions remain high that the four most popular professional men's  
9 teamsports in the U.S. (baseball, basketball, football, and hockey) exhibit higher degrees  
10 of intolerance towards gays than do other sports. Those perceptions may be changing.

11 A 2006 *Sports Illustrated* poll showed 60% of National Basketball Association  
12 (NBA) players said they would be comfortable with an openly gay player on their team.  
13 That number contrasted with the 80% of National Hockey League (NHL) players who in  
14 the same poll said they would openly accept gay teammates. We theorize race to be the  
15 defining variable in the differences between the two leagues' acceptance level of gays,  
16 since 73% of the players on the 30 NBA rosters were Black in 2004 compared to just 12  
17 total Blacks who played for the 30 NHL teams in 2007 (Allen, 2008; Lapchick, 2005).

### 18 **Homophobia in Black Culture**

19 Despite decreasing cultural (Loftus, 2001) and sporting (Anderson, 2005b)  
20 homophobia, researchers have found elevated rates of homophobia within black culture  
21 (Cohen, 1999; Harper, 1996; Heckman et al., 1999; Lewis, 2003; Waldner, Sikka, &  
22 Baig, 1999), where homosexuality is often viewed as a problem for and about white men  
23 (Froyum, 2007; King, 2004). Southall, Anderson, Coleman, and Nagel (2006) found this

1 to be the case in U.S. college sport, and an informal 1999 survey by sport agent Ralph  
2 Cindrich (As cited in Anderson 2005a) supported this finding at the professional level.  
3 From the 175 first-year National Football League (NFL) players Cindrich interviewed,  
4 91.7% of white players said they felt comfortable playing with a gay teammate,  
5 compared to 60% of black players. Similarly, 52.9% of white players said they would be  
6 comfortable sharing a hotel room with an openly gay player, compared to just 29% of  
7 black players. When athletes were asked how they would react if a gay player were to  
8 sexually proposition them, 29.4% of blacks indicated they would respond with “physical  
9 assault,” compared to 5.3% of white players. Accordingly, whereas there exists a great  
10 deal of inquiry into the ways in which black athletes are culturally, economically, and  
11 structurally discriminated against in the sport-media complex, no academic literature  
12 examining black Americans as oppressors in sport could be found (Anderson, 1998).

13         There are multiple reasons why black men in U.S. society have elevated rates of  
14 homophobia. Black Americans are disproportionately represented in the lower socio-  
15 economic classes and, for an otherwise marginalized group, homophobia is a way black  
16 boys and men can raise their masculine capital by saying, ‘at least I am not gay’ (Froyum,  
17 2007). Poorer black gay athletes might also feel compelled to remain closeted, so as not  
18 to disadvantage what they believe to be their route out of poverty through athletics  
19 (Anderson 2005a). Furthermore, gay culture, gay support systems, and much of what can  
20 be described as a gay male identity, have been established in a culture that presumes  
21 whiteness and elevated class status (Lewis, 2003). Finally, many black athletes do not  
22 recognize the damage of homophobia to their own community, nor do they see the  
23 commonalities of gay and black oppression (Anderson, 1998; Harper, 1996). This

1 highlights the variance between black (racism) and gay (homophobia) sporting  
2 oppression. Racism and homophobia are similar, but also very different types of  
3 oppression. When they are combined, the collective experiences of denied citizenship are  
4 more extreme.

5 Another part of this hostility toward gays in sport may be attributable to the  
6 oppression of black males in U.S. society, which has resulted in many African American  
7 males channeling energy into participation in sport and sexual prowess (Hoberman,  
8 1997). Mainstream sport media often portray pro male athletes as exhibiting proscribed  
9 ideal masculine characteristics like aggressiveness, power, assertiveness, and  
10 heterosexuality (Connell, 1990; Messner, 2002; Trujillo, 1991). More important, these  
11 images are even more likely to be used to portray black athletes, particularly since blacks  
12 dominate the masculine-construed U.S. professional and collegiate sports of men's  
13 basketball and football (Davis & Harris, 1998; Grainger, Newman, & Andrews, 2006).  
14 This, in turn, helps reinforce hegemonic masculinity within U.S. black culture.  
15 Accordingly, despite the gains of both the civil rights movement and the progress toward  
16 gay and lesbian social inclusion, the understanding in sport remains that black athletes  
17 come in only one sexuality, and gay men in just one color.

### 18 **Hegemonic Masculinity**

19 Connell (1987; 2005) defined hegemonic masculinity as the configuration of  
20 gender practice which assures positional dominance of men who conform to accepted  
21 forms of masculinities and the subordination of women in society. Hegemonic masculine  
22 gendered practices are constantly challenged but rarely changed without the consent of  
23 the ruling group (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001). Many sport

1 media researchers (e.g., Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008; Pedersen, 2002; Vincent,  
2 2004) have used Connell's theory as a heuristic tool to analyze disparate media coverage  
3 provided to women's sports and female athletes compared to men's sports and male  
4 athletes. Often overlooked in sport media research, however, is how competitive  
5 teamsports reify masculinity with heterosexuality among men and how this feminizes  
6 homosexual men. Anderson (2002) described teamsports as arena in which "hegemonic  
7 masculinity is reproduced and defined, as an athlete represents the ideal of what it means  
8 to be a man, a definition that contrasts to what it means to be feminine and/or gay" (p.  
9 860).

10 Still, because nearly all boys are socialized into sport from youth, Pronger (1990)  
11 suggested closeted gay men might be over-represented in sport. Gay men might also be  
12 attracted to sport because it provides them with both a homoerotic arena and the ironic  
13 veneer of heterosexuality (Pronger, 1990). But while openly gay athletes exist (and are  
14 coming out in increasing numbers) at the high school and university levels of competition  
15 in U.S. sport (Anderson, 2005a), none have come out while actively playing in the four  
16 major U.S. professional men's teamsport leagues: Major League Baseball (MLB), NBA,  
17 NFL, NHL. In fact, only six have announced they were gay after their careers: (NFL)  
18 players Dave Kopay, Roy Simmons, and Esera Tualo; (MLB) athletes Billy Bean and  
19 Glen Burke; and most recently, the NBA's John Amaechi (Knapp, 2007a). Interestingly,  
20 there is no known research that examines media reaction to any of these men's outings.

### 21 **Sport, Media, and Homosexuality**

22 By most standards, John Amaechi was a mediocre professional basketball player  
23 who received little media coverage during a five-year NBA career in which he played for

1 the Cleveland Cavaliers, Orlando Magic, and Utah Jazz. After his rookie season with the  
2 Cavaliers, Amaechi's NBA career was interrupted by his two-year stint of playing  
3 professionally for teams in France, Italy, Greece, and Great Britain. After attaining his  
4 most professional success with the Magic and Jazz, Amaechi retired from professional  
5 basketball in 2003 after his NBA contract was traded from the New York Knicks to the  
6 Houston Rockets; but he was not invited to play for either team.

7         Although a largely unknown basketball player, Amaechi received worldwide  
8 media attention in 2007 after he revealed his sexual orientation as gay. It began when  
9 Amaechi's publicist, Howard Bragman, said that his client is gay and Amaechi officially  
10 came out four days later (February 11<sup>th</sup>) during an interview on the ESPN television show  
11 *Outside the Lines*. This strategic outing kicked-off a speaking tour to promote the release  
12 of his autobiography, "*Man in the Middle*."

13         It is significant to note that media attention given to Amaechi's announcement  
14 subsided significantly, that is until former Miami Heat star point guard Tim Hardaway  
15 made a series of homophobic remarks about Amaechi during a radio interview on  
16 February 14. "I hate gay people, so I let it be known," Hardaway told WAXY-AM in  
17 Miami. "I don't like gay people, and I don't like to be around gay people. I'm  
18 homophobic. I don't like it. It shouldn't be in the world or in the United States" (Banks,  
19 2007). After Hardaway's comments, several major newspaper columnists wrote about the  
20 current place and status of gays in sport.

21         Amaechi's decision to leave the closet shortly after retiring from basketball is  
22 particularly interesting for several reasons. First, he is the first former NBA player to  
23 declare he is gay. Basketball has long been considered one of the most masculine

1 teamsports in U.S. culture (Baroffio-Bora & Banet-Weiser, 2006; Rader, 2004). Thus by  
2 their mere presence, openly gay men in professional basketball challenge hegemonic  
3 masculinity (Anderson, 2002). Also, the NBA has long been dominated by African  
4 Americans (Andrews, 1999). In addition to the elevated rates of homophobia within the  
5 African-American community (for reasons which we have earlier stated) (King, 2004;  
6 Waldner et al., 1999), basketball players are deemed among the highest role models  
7 within U.S. black culture (Hoberman, 1997). This creates a form of double hegemony for  
8 black athletes; whom are expected to uphold orthodox standards of achieved variables  
9 (toughness, stoicism, and sacrifice) as well as the ascribed variable of heterosexuality.  
10 The consequences for breaking either of these orthodox conscriptions might be higher for  
11 black athletes than white.

12 Amaechi, however, also comes out in a unique point of American history.  
13 Since the early 1990s, both qualitative (Barrett & Pollack, 2005; Pascoe, 2005) and  
14 quantitative (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Loftus, 2001; Ohlander,  
15 Batalova, & Treas, 2005; Widmer, Treas, & Newcomb, 2002; Yang, 1997) studies have  
16 shown a significant decrease in cultural and institutional homophobia within North  
17 American and British society. This is something Anderson (2002; 2005a; 2005b) and  
18 others (Price & Parker, 2003; Southall et. al., 2006) also found among team sport athletes.  
19 Supporting an increase in societal acceptances of gays and lesbians, a May 2007 Gallup  
20 poll revealed an all-time high of 46% of U.S. citizens supported gay marriage. This was  
21 particularly true for younger adults (the cohort of which the vast majority of professional  
22 basketball players belong). Amongst 18 to 34-year-olds surveyed, just 23% disapproved  
23 of gay lifestyles, compared to a 51-percent disapproval rate amongst U.S. citizens 55 and



1 older (Gallup, 2007). Thus, attitudes in the U.S. towards gays are changing, and changing  
2 rapidly. It is uncertain, though, if those changes are evident in sport media coverage,  
3 since sport media are run mostly by and for men (Hardin, 2005; Kian, 2007).

4 Lapchick, Brenden, and Wright (2006) surveyed more than 300 U.S. daily  
5 newspapers, finding men comprised 95% of sport editors, 87% of assistant sport editors,  
6 93% of columnists, 93% of reporters, and 87% of copy editors/designers in sport  
7 departments. This masculinization of reporting have lead media to over-analyze the issue  
8 of lesbians in sport (Crosset, 1995; Duncan, 1993) and under-analyze gay men in sport  
9 (Knight & Giuliano, 2003; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). Still, no academic research  
10 has examined the issue of how sports reporters address gay men who come out in sport.  
11 This research seeks to examine whether the positive shift in attitudes toward gays and gay  
12 lifestyles in the broader U.S. culture has impacted the sport media complex.

### 13 **Methodology**

14 We conducted a textual analysis of newspaper articles on Amaechi and on  
15 Hardaway's comments toward Amaechi published in February, 2007. A textual analysis  
16 was selected because it is an unobtrusive and non-reactive tool used to measure  
17 communication messages (Macnamara, 2003; Sparkes, 1992). This type of methodology  
18 is however both interpretative and subjective (Gunter, 2000; Harris & Clayton, 2002).  
19 Because multiple interpretations of the same text are possible (McKee, 2001), two  
20 researchers coded themes from the articles separately in the search for narratives.  
21 Working independently, the two researchers each read and wrote notes on all of the 190  
22 articles in the population (Martin & Turner, 1986). They then compared and discussed  
23 coding of dominant themes for agreement (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 1995).

1           The Lexis Nexis Academic search engine was used to locate the 190 relevant  
2 articles in the population. In February, 2007, the Lexis Nexis Academic service available  
3 to U.S. universities listed 50 active publications as major newspapers that publish in  
4 English. A majority of the newspapers (N=30) were based in the U.S., with the remaining  
5 20 newspapers from Brazil, Canada (2), China, Great Britain (5), Ireland, Israel, Japan,  
6 Malaysia, New Zealand (4), Scotland (2), and Singapore.

7           Since Amaechi had been retired for three years and was never a star player, it was  
8 readily assumed all articles published on Amaechi during the search parameter of  
9 February 7 (the day Amaechi's publicist revealed his client was gay) through February 25  
10 were due to his going public with his sexual orientation, or in response to Hardaway's  
11 February 14<sup>th</sup> comments toward Amaechi (and all gays). Byline articles (name of  
12 author(s) included) or editorials with or without bylines were located and included for  
13 examination. Articles without bylines, such as those generated from the Associated Press  
14 and Reuters, were not included due to the likelihood of the same articles being published  
15 as news briefs by multiple newspapers in the search engine. Byline articles originating  
16 from news services and published in these papers were however included; because such  
17 byline articles are more likely to be features, columns, or substantive stories that are less  
18 likely to be mass-published like short blurbs.

19           A total of 190 byline articles, columns, or editorials on John Amaechi published  
20 over a 17-day period were collected. 87% (n=133) were published in the 30 newspapers  
21 based in the U.S., and 13% (n=24) were from other countries. *The Globe and Mail* and  
22 *Toronto Star* (two Canadian newspapers) published 67% (n=16) of the articles from non-  
23 U.S. newspapers; perhaps because the Canada-based Toronto Raptors is the only NBA

1 franchise housed outside of the United States. A total of four articles came from  
2 newspapers in Amaechi's native Great Britain, while newspapers from Australia (n=2)  
3 and New Zealand (n=2) published the remaining articles. No articles on Amaechi or  
4 Hardaway's subsequent comments were published in the remaining nine newspapers  
5 from Brazil, China, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Scotland, and Singapore.

## 6 **Results**

7 Four dominant themes emerged from our data analysis: (1) Sport reporters  
8 maintained that the locker room is still no place for gay men; (2) Sport writers  
9 commented on whether sport was less inclusive than the mainstream culture, and whether  
10 sport thus served as a social anchor on issues concerning men's homosexuality. This  
11 particularly focused on comparisons of the Black Civil Rights Movement and the  
12 integration of sport for openly gay men; (3) Sport reporters commented on whether  
13 Amaechi was a coward for not coming out while playing, and whether he was simply  
14 taking advantage of a capitalist system to promote his book; (4) Finally, reporters noted  
15 respect for who Amaechi is, and for his bravery in outing himself.

### 16 *The Locker Room Is No Place for Gay Men*

17 The most dominant narrative reinforced notions that sport, and in particular the  
18 men's teamsport locker room, will be one of the last venues to accept gay males as  
19 equals. Thus, even though no U.S. pro sport team or league explicitly denies  
20 homosexuals from rosters, it was the writers' collective opinion that the dominant culture  
21 of U.S. men's teamsports excludes openly gay male teammates. One reporter from the  
22 *San Francisco Chronicle* reflected this narrative:

1 An openly gay man can't survive in the testosterone-rich, mentally  
2 impoverished environment of a pro locker room. Football, baseball, and  
3 basketball players define themselves by the most traditional, narrow  
4 versions of masculinity. Their world is the last vast frontier of intolerance  
5 (Knapp, 2007b, p. D1).

6 Other articles conveyed writers' assumptions that any openly gay athletes in these sports  
7 would face constant physical threats from opponents and even their teammates:

8 As much as we may think society has moved on and become more tolerant  
9 of lifestyles, the male sports world of football, basketball and perhaps  
10 baseball would stop spinning [if a current athlete came out]. Those are the  
11 sports that embrace the whole macho image and strict code. ... Those are  
12 the sports that, in various ways, would make life uncomfortable for any  
13 athlete perceived as a threat, not so much on the field, but in the shower  
14 (Powell, 2008, p. A73).

15 Within narratives of articles, there were occasionally justifications given for this  
16 intolerance within male team sport lockers. Livingston (2007) suggested NBA players'  
17 religious beliefs promoted bigotry toward potential openly gay male teammates by  
18 writing, "At best, 'gay' is a pejorative term, implying weakness and not 'playing like a  
19 man.' At worst it is considered a sin. The former view probably outnumbers the latter in  
20 the NBA" (p. C1). Furthermore, just because writers indicated they believed sport was  
21 not ready for a gay athlete, they did not necessarily mean to imply that was their desire.

22 Anderson (2002) contended that alongside many forms of Christianity and the  
23 U.S. military, competitive team sports are one of the three primary institutions that

1 support and reinforce homophobia in U.S. society. However, this analysis showed this is  
2 more than just an American issue. The narrative that the locker room is hostile toward  
3 gays was also dominant in international coverage. One article (that included an in-depth  
4 interview with Amaechi) published in Britain's *The Daily Telegraph*, reiterated a  
5 common stereotype about gay male athletes. "There is also, if we are brutally honest, a  
6 sense in which some big strong men who play sports would feel their personal sexual  
7 safety invaded if a gay man also inhabited their locker room" (Mott, 2007, p. 10).

8         Conversely, there were several strong counters to the notion that teams would not  
9 accept openly gay players. In some articles, writers either contended that athletes' sexual  
10 orientation is generally unimportant to their teammates, or at least one's orientation  
11 would not matter if an openly gay male athlete was a star on the field. Burwell (2007)  
12 supported Anderson's (2005a) contention that many professional athletes already know  
13 gay teammates anyhow; and that this awareness had no negative effect on team morale.  
14 Burwell (2007) wrote, "Gay athletes may have been in the closet, but no one was dumb.  
15 It just didn't matter that much. That's how much the locker room has changed" (p. DI).

16         Still, more writers argued that gays are not only pariahs now, but that they will  
17 never be fully accepted within the men's team sport locker room. The narratives of these  
18 articles articulated that male athletes learn certain characteristics through sport at a young  
19 age. These included assertiveness, aggressiveness, courage, boasting about heterosexual  
20 conquest, and the exhibition of homophobia. Supporting this, Hughes and Coakley (1991)  
21 suggested that athletes rarely contest the sporting and cultural values taught to them by  
22 their coaches and that instead, they over conform to norms in order to win their coaches'  
23 favor and matriculate to the next level of play. Thus, sport serves as one of the primary

1 sources for homophobic attitudes because sporting men are afraid to speak against it for  
2 fear of repercussion. Anderson (2005a) suggested that these views were negated by the  
3 increased acceptance of gay men in lower levels of sport. In fact, many writers in this  
4 study thought that sport was a good place to learn tolerance.

5 *The Utility of Sport for Social Inclusion*

6 Amaechi's declaration (followed by Hardaway's homophobic diatribe) also  
7 influenced a wider debate concerning the role of sport in contemporary society and its  
8 relationship to homosexuality. Scholars have contended sport lags behind the dominant  
9 culture concerning social inclusivity toward homosexuality (Anderson, 2002; Griffin,  
10 1998; Messner, 1992). Still, several journalists in these articles maintained the acceptance  
11 of openly gay male athletes in professional teamsports would be more difficult with the  
12 mainstream media than by teammates and opponents on the field of play. "...it's clear no  
13 active player would dare come out – because the press would turn his life into a living  
14 hell. Whether his teammates would care remains to be seen. In Amaechi's case, no one is  
15 too upset" (Heisler, 2007, pp.6). A column in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* went as far as  
16 arguing that professional male teamsports would provide a more tolerant culture for  
17 openly gay male athletes than society at large does. "I just wonder if anyone really  
18 understands that the real battle for acceptance isn't inside the locker room. It's outside,  
19 where public acceptance is certain to be slow, knuckle-dragging, cruel, intolerant, and  
20 unforgiving" (Burwell, 2007, pp. D1). Mitch Albom, a best-selling novelist and  
21 syndicated sport columnist based out of the *Detroit Free Press*, wrote a column highly  
22 critical of Hardaway following his comments: "The reason locker rooms were once

1 segregated was hate, and the reason gays hide their sexuality today is hate. And hate is  
 2 the first thing for which we should show intolerance,” (Albom, 2007, p. A9).

3 International articles primarily reinforced the narrative that sport serves as a social  
 4 anchor for gay and lesbian issues. *The Daily Telegraph* is Great Britain’s most heavily-  
 5 circulated newspaper and one of its columnists cited the U.S. presidential candidacies of  
 6 Democratic senators, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, to show how far gays lag  
 7 behind women and minorities in terms of broad acceptance within U.S. society:

8 Yet in America they are talking about the possibility of a woman president  
 9 in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they are talking about a black president. A gay  
 10 president? Amaechi just laughed. So did the *San Francisco Chronicle*, a  
 11 hollow laugh, at the thought of pro sports seeing the error of its covert  
 12 homophobic ways (Mott, 2007, p.10).

13 While many authors presented a narrative of sport as being slow in accepting gays, the  
 14 majority of columnists, in both U.S. and international articles, argued sport should be  
 15 more progressive in support of gay rights, with some drawing parallels with the Civil  
 16 Rights Movement for African American integration into U.S. society. Two of these  
 17 authors used the case of Jackie Robinson (who broke the MLB color barrier in 1947) as  
 18 an impetus for the potential for sport to unify (Allen, 2007; Zirin, 2007).

19 It may come as a surprise to some readers that some of the columnists who drew  
 20 the strongest parallels between the modern-era gay rights movement and African  
 21 Americans’ historical struggle for civil rights rank among the most recognizable African-  
 22 American sport writers and newspaper columnists in the U.S. Leonard Pitts, a syndicated  
 23 news columnist based out of the *Miami Herald*, was highly critical of Hardaway’s

1 comments on Amaechi, “Like segregation before it, homophobia is still for many people,  
2 still socially respectable. So one hopes that the byproduct of Hardaway’s outburst is that  
3 it will become less so” (Pitts, 2007, pp. A7).

4 Michael Wilbon, an African-American sport columnist for *The Washington Post*  
5 who also serves as the co-host for the popular ESPN television show, *Pardon the*  
6 *Interruption*, cited the struggles of African-American coaches in sport as an analogy for  
7 the lack of acceptance of gay athletes in teamsports. Wilbon specifically pointed to the  
8 success of Black NFL head coaches, Tony Dungy of the Indianapolis Colts and Lovie  
9 Smith of the Chicago Bears, both of whom led their teams to the Super Bowl in 2006, as  
10 an example of social progress that should be emulated for gay athletes:

11 Just as it would be a relief to arrive at the place in time when the color of  
12 the coaches in the Super Bowl matters not one bit, it would be fabulous to  
13 reach the day when a male athlete in a teamsport doesn’t have to worry  
14 about the reaction of declaring his homosexuality (Wilbon, 2007, p. E01).

15 None of the 24 international articles directly mentioned the African American civil rights  
16 movement in the U.S. However, the *Sunday Mail*, a Scottish tabloid, did reference the  
17 influence of sport on social constructions of race. “Sport has been an agent for social  
18 change, particularly on matters of race. It is not as far along in matters of sexual  
19 preference” (Skolnick, 2007, p. 87). Whereas international articles were light on  
20 comparisons between the black and gay experience, they were more critical of Amaechi’s  
21 intentions.

22 *Amaechi and Capitalism*



1 The next major narrative to emerge from Amaechi's outing centered on skepticism of his  
2 motives for coming out publicly, four years after retiring from the NBA and shortly  
3 before the release of his autobiography. *The Toronto Star* implied Amaechi's revelation  
4 was in his financial interests. "Amaechi is embarking on the business of selling his story.  
5 His Valentine's Day TV appearance coincides with the release of his book" (Feschuk,  
6 2007, p. D2). Another Canadian newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, was more direct in  
7 questioning the timing of Amaechi's outing. "A look at the calendar shows the  
8 announcement will be made just days before the NBA all-star game, thereby garnering  
9 Amaechi as much publicity as possible" (Maki, 2007, p. 53).

10 The U.S. press also noted Amaechi's potential of benefitting monetarily after his  
11 announcement. "Amaechi is no hero. And he knows it. He is a gay businessman who has  
12 wisely recognized an opportunity and seems positioned to exploit a marketing niche"  
13 (Morris, 2007, p. B9). But some in the U.S. press used their strongest criticisms to  
14 question Amaechi's courage in coming out after retirement, and thus these narratives  
15 subtly called into doubt his manhood. "Bravery in this context is reserved for the first  
16 athlete to come out today and go to practice tomorrow. It's not coming out from across  
17 the pond – Amaechi lives in England – four years after retirement" (Shaw, 2007, p. D1).  
18 Morris (2007) concluded, "I see nothing heroic about Amaechi's memoirs. He is a  
19 coward. He is a coward for not 'coming out' in the locker room" (p. B9).

20 These types of personal criticisms directed at Amaechi drew the sharpest counters  
21 among the four dominant themes emerging from the data. *Newsday* columnist Johnette  
22 Howard praised the courage of any gay individual who publicly comes out:

23 Hardaway's remarks—and the widespread denunciations of them that

1 quickly followed—underscored why coming out is one of the most  
2 important things gays and lesbians have done in the past 30 years.  
3 Reasonable people can differ about their comfort level or moral views of  
4 gays. But there is no disputing this: By rejecting generations of thought  
5 about homosexuality and refusing to remain in the closet that gays have  
6 been shoved into forever, by becoming visible and acting as if being called  
7 gay is not an insult or a slur, gays who have come out in all walks of life  
8 have helped re-situate the argument (Howard, 2007, p. A91).

9 International articles also offered rebuttals to those who criticized Amaechi for  
10 not coming out during his career or announcing just before his book release.

11 The aftermath [of Amaechi's coming out] produced the usual criticism. He  
12 was a journeyman, so who cares? Why didn't he come out while he was  
13 playing, instead of waiting to cash in on a book? Well, he doesn't need the  
14 money. The biggest reason, left unsaid, is probably because of Amaechi's  
15 greatest passion—because basketball wasn't a passion. It was a means to  
16 an end (Myles, 2007, p. D5).

17 Whatever side one takes on the issue, Anderson (2005a) has theorized that whoever  
18 comes out of the closet as America's first openly gay (active) professional player will  
19 instantly be showered with lucrative book, television, and movie offers. Amaechi's  
20 increased publicity and subsequent capitalist gains (even four years after retiring) help  
21 prove the financial viability of coming out in professional sport. This counters notions  
22 gay athletes should not come out for fear of loss of sponsorship. Clearly, media exposure  
23 of Bean, Tuaolo, and now Amaechi show media are now hammering for stories of

1 athletes coming out. This not only reflects the novelty of the gay experience in sport, but  
2 it highlights that men who come out and contest hegemonic masculinity in sport are  
3 increasingly met with admiration.

#### 4 *Respect*

5 Conservative pundits and anti-gay interest groups regularly point to what they  
6 perceive as “liberal bias” on the part of mainstream U.S. media when covering political  
7 and social issues such as gay rights (Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999). Writers who  
8 expressed their personal opinions on homosexuality overwhelmingly exhibited calls for  
9 progress, equality, and acceptance for one’s sexual orientations. In contrast, no writer or  
10 columnist in any of the 190 articles questioned the morality of homosexuality or claimed  
11 gays should not be accepted in sport due to their sexual orientation. “...tolerance – the  
12 word we so often use when discussing people different from us – is too low a standard.  
13 We should be aiming for respect” (Blount, 2007, p. 1C).

14 Hardaway’s homophobic rant generated more denunciations of his views and thus  
15 more writers called for respect for gays. Howard (2007) wrote, “Support for gays is not  
16 unanimous. But it’s never been more robust. After the swift smackdown of Hardaway,  
17 straights who think like him have to feel shoved a bit further into a new sort of closet  
18 themselves” (p. A91).

19 Ironically, one of the strongest calls for the acceptance of gays in sport came from  
20 *The Daily Telegraph*, which is considered one of the more conservative newspapers in  
21 Great Britain.

22 It seems ridiculous to contemplate this being such an issue when Sir Elton

23 John is practically synonymous with the royal family in Britain and when

1 English football has tolerated French players for years. It is all about what  
2 you get used to and sport is a wonderful vehicle if it can grind out of  
3 homophobic first gear (Mott, 2007, p. 10).

4 While no newspaper narratives criticized homosexuality as a sexual orientation,  
5 some writers/columnists did mock the newsworthiness of Amaechi's  
6 announcement. It could be argued these commentaries reinforced the "Don't ask,  
7 Don't tell" policy that gay athletes at the lower level of sport help maintain  
8 (Anderson, 2005a; Hekma, 1998). This is a cultural condition largely impacted by  
9 the U.S. military's official policy toward enlisted gay and lesbian personnel of  
10 "Don't ask, Don't tell" (Britton & Williams, 1995). Supporting this notion, many  
11 individuals (who claim to have nothing against gays) 'just' do want to see or hear  
12 about gay couples or gay issues. Smith (2007) reinforced this ideology by writing  
13 on Amaechi's coming out, "Has there ever have been more fuss over a nonissue?"  
14 (p. 5E). A *Denver Post* column exhibited the "who cares" narrative about  
15 Amaechi's sexual orientation in a column mostly focusing on news that New  
16 England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady had broken up with his then-pregnant  
17 girlfriend, model Bridget Moynahan. "I would rather keep tabs on my center's  
18 rebounding average or the number of picks thrown by the quarterback than  
19 memorize the names of their sleeping partners" (Kiszla, 2007, p. D1).

20 These varied narratives all share one thing in common – they lack overt  
21 homophobia. While many of the authors articulated a fair degree of heterosexism  
22 and pessimism on the acceptance level of athletes, none of the writers for the 190  
23 newspaper articles or editorials came out and said that gays do not belong in the

1 locker room. Thus, none shared in Hardaway's feelings. For a highly  
2 masculinized profession and sexist group of mostly men (Hardin, 2005; Kian,  
3 2007), this seems to be a considerable finding; one that Nylund (2004) suggested  
4 is happening in sport radio broadcasting as well.

### 5 **Discussion**

6 By analyzing international media print coverage concerning Amaechi's coming  
7 out, and Hardaway's ensuing homophobic comments, this article highlighted the  
8 changing nature between sport, the sport media complex, and the issue of gay athleticism.  
9 This research is unique for two reasons. First, it was the first to examine media attitudes  
10 toward gay male athletes. But more important, our findings suggest that as Americans  
11 (Loftus, 2001) and U.S. athletes (Anderson, 2005b) are rapidly losing their homophobic  
12 sentiment, so are ancillary members of the institution of sport. It therefore appears to be  
13 the case that while men throughout the institution of competitive, organized teamsport  
14 were once described as being a social anchor toward gay and lesbian cultural equality  
15 (Burstyn, 1999; Pronger, 1990), increasingly this may no longer be the case. Decreasing  
16 homophobia on the part of sport media is yet another indicator of the rapidly changing  
17 zeitgeist toward homosexuality.

18 We argue that if our culture were to value homosexuality differently, a shift  
19 would likely occur in the way masculinity is carried out and valued in sport. This would  
20 explain some of the popularity of soccer star David Beckham and other 'metrosexual'  
21 athletes (Price & Parker, 2003), and this is something that Connell herself recently  
22 commented on, suggesting that the changeable notion of hegemonic masculinity means  
23 that the current archetype may at some point be replaced by a less oppressive means of

1 being masculine (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). We suggest that this is precisely the  
2 case, in that inclusive masculinity is fast becoming the norm for white, middle class men;  
3 both inside and outside of sport and that this shift is now reflected in the narratives  
4 presented by ancillary members of the sport media complex.

5 In this research, sport reporters rejected the domineering, homophobic behaviors  
6 and attitudes of orthodox masculinity, even though some attributed this attitude toward  
7 others, particularly in basketball players. Thus, we are not suggesting that male sport  
8 reporters have completely redeveloped orthodox masculinity, but instead that have made  
9 it more inclusive. Taken with accounts of athletes, who are increasingly shown to value  
10 emotional intimacy (Pringle & Markula, 2005), racial diversity (Anderson, 2008a), and  
11 homosexuality (Anderson 2005b; 2008a), they are more likely to alter the meanings  
12 associated with homophobic discourse (Wilson, 2002). Collectively, these studies lead us  
13 to conclude there is a very rapid shift in what is considered an acceptable, desirable, and  
14 even hegemonic status among teamsport athletes in America.

15 Part of this may be attributable to sport being increasingly viewed as a workplace  
16 environment. Accordingly, the often un-written, non-discrimination policies that apply to  
17 many other employers also apply to sport. But we suggest it mostly has to do with the  
18 changing culture within sport. Ethnographies of American football players (Anderson,  
19 2005b; 2008a) and even fraternity members (Anderson, 2008b) all show that an inclusive,  
20 less homophobic form of masculinity is on the rise. Therefore, this may be a case in  
21 which the dominant society's more inclusive attitudes influence sporting men's gendered  
22 accounts, instead of it being the other way around (Connell, 1987; Messner, 1992).

1 Results of this research also suggest that narratives produced by African-  
2 American sport writers are helping to reverse elevated rates of homophobia that exist  
3 within U.S. Black culture, and are often strengthened through sport (Cohen, 1999;  
4 Harper, 1996). It is significant that prominent African Americans in the sport industry are  
5 beginning to stand alongside some key black religious and political leaders (including  
6 Rev. Jesse Jackson and presidential candidate Barack Obama) in calling for an end to the  
7 elevated rates of homophobia that exist within the African-American community.

8 More central to sport's place in society, this research adds more evidence to  
9 Anderson's (2005a) contention the world of professional sport is ready for an active gay  
10 athlete to come out. In his research on openly gay athletes, Anderson (2005) noted  
11 preconceptions about what type of environments closeted gay athletes thought they  
12 would face are unrepresentative of what actually occurred after coming out. In other  
13 words, gay athletes often felt they would come out into a world of discrimination, but that  
14 did not happen once they did come out. This study leads us to believe that an active gay  
15 teamsport athlete who publicly came out would be treated well by print media.

16 Still, this does not mean we believe an openly gay athlete will come out anytime  
17 soon. There are far too many other variables at play, including gay men who matriculate  
18 through high school and universities without coming out establish a habitus of not  
19 coming out (Anderson, 2005a). Professional teamsport athletes may also fear the ensuing  
20 media attention that their coming out would gain. However, this research shows that  
21 sport, and in particular sport media, is at least growing more accepting of gays and gay  
22 lifestyles.

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