

Ethnicity and Male College Athletes' Sexual Orientation Behaviors and Attitudes

Running head: SEXUAL-ORIENTATION BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

An Investigation of Ethnicity as a Variable Related to US Male College Athletes'  
Sexual-Orientation Behaviors and Attitudes

Abstract

While most often forbidden by university policy, homophobic attitudes and intolerance of gay/lesbian athletes may still exist within intercollegiate athletic departments. Against this backdrop, this study examines attitudes toward sexual orientation from a sample of Division I & III male university athletes ( $N = 397$ ) from four universities in the Southeastern United States. The study's primary research questions are: a) Utilizing ethnicity as the independent variable, what are the sampled male athletes' attitudes toward sexual orientations? and b) Is there a relationship between male college athletes' ethnicity and their sexual-orientation attitudes? Using the frameworks of Social-Script and Critical-Race Theories, this article, discusses the results' significance for university athletic administrators, faculty, and college athletes.

Key Words: organization, social organization, sports, sexual racism, culture, diversity.

## Introduction

The benefit of diversity is espoused as an accepted core value of many colleges and universities. Through developed mission statements, and implemented programs, predominately white US colleges and universities have increasingly demonstrated an organizational endorsement of multiculturalism. For many universities increased ethnic diversity has been partially achieved through admission of minority athletes (Watford and Comeaux 2006). College sport has been viewed as a means for lower-class students from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds to gain access to a college education.

This commitment to diversity is reflected in university and athletic-department policy statements prohibiting discrimination. For example, one major United States university currently prohibits discrimination ‘...on the basis of an individual’s race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, **sexual orientation**[authors’ emphasis], gender identity or gender expression’ (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill n.d. para. 1).

Within this landscape, however, scholars have noted acceptance of sexual-orientation diversity within college athletic departments, while improving, may not be universal. Though sexual orientation is considered a protected class on college campuses, many gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) college athletes still fear being discovered or ‘outed’ (Griffin 1998; Anderson 2005a). Furthermore, as Griffin (2005) and Anderson (2005a) have noted, few college athletic departments have adopted specific sexual-orientation policy statements or developed in-house programs or workshops to discuss or address athletes’ sexual-orientation attitudes or behaviors

Most college coaches and athletic administrators are not formally educated in prejudice’s covert nature. Athletic administrators may have little inkling whether college

athletes are more or less *sexually prejudiced* (i.e. homophobic) than the general student population, or whether male athletes' attitudes are similar or different from female athletes. While some administrators' personal homophobia may keep them from being more inclusive (Anderson 2005b), others may believe prejudice against gay and lesbian athletes simply does not exist on their campus.

In addition, even if coaches or administrators are interested in being inclusive, there is little research investigating homophobia within the college-sport culture. Brown et al. (2004) noted that although researchers have examined *campus climate* related to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues (Evans 2001; Rankin 2003), few studies have assessed the athletic-culture's climate for gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) college athletes (e.g. Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morpew 2001; Gill et al. 2006). There have been even fewer studies that have investigated US college-athletes' attitudes and behaviors related to sexual orientation (Southall et al. 2004, 2006, 2009), and no studies that have examined the relationship between US college athletes' ethnicity and such attitudes.

Accordingly, utilizing Social-Script and Critical-Race Theories, this study investigated US male college-athletes' sexual-orientation attitudes and behaviors. Based upon previous findings of a significant relation between US college athletes' gender and expressed sexual prejudice (Southall et al., 2009), this study utilized ethnicity as the independent variable to look for a possible relationship between US male college athletes' ethnicity and expressed sexual prejudice.

### **Review of Literature**

North-American sport, particularly the male athletic culture, has historically been theorized as a bastion of cultural and institutional homophobia (Pronger 1990; Curry 1991; Messner 1992; Clarke 1998; Griffin 1998; Hekma 1998; Wolf-Wendel et al. 2001; Bryant 2003; Price

and Parker 2003). In 1990 Pronger noted, 'Many of the [gay] men I interviewed said they were uncomfortable with teamsports... [O]rthodox masculinity is usually an important subtext if not *the* leitmotif in teamsports' (p. 26). In 1992, Messner wrote, 'The extent of homophobia in the sports world is staggering. Boys [in sports] learn early that to be gay, to be suspected of being gay, or even to be unable to prove one's heterosexual status is not acceptable' (p. 34). Hekma (1998) noted, 'Gay men who are seen as queer and effeminate are granted no space whatsoever in what is generally considered to be a masculine preserve and a macho enterprise' (p. 2).

Male *teamsports* have often been described as a setting where hegemonic conservative masculinity is reproduced and defined, since such athletes represent the ideal in contemporary masculinity — a definition which traditionally contrasts with what it means to be gay (Brannon 1976; Curry 1991; Messner 1992; Anderson 2002; 2005a; 2005b; Connell 2005). In 2002 Wolf-Wendel et al. contended most American college teamsports athletes maintain *hypermasculine* attitudes that preclude the possibility a teammate might be gay, since homosexuality is synonymous with physical weakness and emotional frailty. Highlighting this gendered division, in 2006 and 2009 Southall et al. found a significant relationship between college athletes' gender and degree of sexual prejudice. Specifically, US male college athletes demonstrated more hostile attitudes and behaviors toward gay athletes than female college athletes.

Within this hypermasculine sport context, male college athletes believe that being gay is to simultaneously reject masculinity and be relegated as feminine and weak. This categorical sexual mythology (involving a dichotomous polarization of sexuality) forces athletes to choose between heterosexuality and homosexuality (Pronger 1990). In addition,

this bifurcation allows the majority to assume ‘their’ dominant orientation is correct, right, or normal, while the ‘other’ becomes incorrect, wrong, deviant and stigmatized.

### *Social Script Theory*

Social script theory (Gagnon and Simon 1973) allows investigation of hypermasculine expressions in specific male teamsports contexts (e.g. football, wrestling, baseball, basketball, hockey, or lacrosse), and examination of behaviors and attitudes related to sexual orientation. It suggests people use guidelines or beliefs (scripts), which they learn from an early age, to shape their experience and direct behavior (Weis 2002). Individuals and groups constantly rehearse such scripts and play them out through their behavior and actions. Rose and Frieze (1993) contend sexual scripts are internalized cognitive models used to evaluate social and sexual interactions and create individual realities.

According to Gagne and Simon (1973; 1987), differing social scripts are learned within different social locations. As Messner (1992) detailed, within the male teamsports setting, accepted scripts - including hypermasculinity, hyperheterosexuality and homophobia - are heavily peer-policed. This severe collective policing of masculine borders led Anderson (2005a) to describe male competitive teamsports athletes as members of ‘a cult of athleticism’ who “tithe” their agency and vow compliance to rigid team norms. Through near uniformity in thought and action, cult members express their reverence to orthodox masculinity ideology. Anderson (2009a, 2009b) found athletes emulating accepted social scripts are more often promoted to positions of management, helping reproduce these scripts in the next generation. In addition, such replication is complicated by many sports’ sex-segregated structures.

Largely a product of men’s preferences, men and women occupy separate sport spaces. Few other institutions so extensively naturalize such segregation. While in most

occupational settings such segregation is declining (Rotolo and Wharton, 2004), teamsports' segregation remains largely acceptable. Combined with this segregation, masculine social scripting perpetuates male teamsports' homophobic character. From an early age boys learn a hypermasculine script in which they demonstrate their manhood in athletic competition. This heterosexist ideology is rehearsed on the field, in the locker room (Curry 1991), and in associated social settings (Anderson 2009a). Collectively, sport is a near-total sex-segregated institution. Much like the military, sport uses myths of glory, patriotism, and masculine idolatry, along with corporeal discipline and rank, division, uniform, rules, and punishment structures to subordinate individual agency and construct a fortified ethos of orthodox masculinity.

These combinatory factors allow sport, as a sex-segregated institution, to develop a particularly resilient subculture, even when embedded within a larger institution (e.g. military or university settings). Sport, of course, is not alone in its segregation and sexual prejudice. Sanday (1996, 2007) suggests the masculinity exhibited in fraternities is almost monolithically based upon sexual aggression toward women, and that heterosexual masculinity in fraternities is constructed over the use of women's bodies. Wright (1996) contends [hetero]sexual aggression so permeates fraternity members' language, lifestyle, and morals, [that] fraternity houses have become a virtual breeding ground for sexism and sexual harassment. The same holds true for men's teamsports, which – just as fraternities - may often be characterized by overt sexism and elevated rates of violence against women (Kreager 2007).

Male social scripting is not the same for all ethnicities. Billston (1992) suggested black men's social scripts are tougher, more violent, and "cooler" than are white men's. This is particularly true for black men in teamsports. Within the male athletic culture, black

American male athletes constitute a subculture whose members are normally viewed as participants in highly competitive and combative team sports (e.g. American football and basketball), or individual sports that require strength and explosiveness, such as track and field, and boxing (Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers 2004). These images (of strength, speed, and muscularity) problematically naturalize black men's abilities, thus contributing to the disempowered status of many black men in American sport (Carrington and McDonald 2001) while also contributing to a hypermasculine sporting culture

Something not discussed in the sport literature, however, is the juxtaposition of stereotypes of ostensibly black and gay-white male athletes, and how such stereotypes contribute to the cultural subjugation of the gay (white or black) male athlete. In contrast to the power associated with black men's (ostensibly heterosexual) athleticism, sport participation for gay (presumptively white) male athletes has often been associated with feminized terrains like ice-skating, cheerleading and gymnastics; and other non-aggressive sports, such as swimming, distance-running, and diving (Adams 1993). Whereas black men's bodies are thought to compete by collision, gay men are thought to achieve athletic excellence through endurance and intellectual decision-making. Historically, black male athletes have been perceived as hypersexual and hypermasculinized, while simultaneously intellectually inferior (Harrison 2001). As Smith and Hattery (2006) noted, "The fusing of the African America culture with sport culture produces the explicit *hypersexualization* found in the stud image so sought after and glorified by high-profile male African American athletes" (p. 214).

More specific to our discussion – and consistent with the use of Social Script Theory – as a result of sporting-space discourses, black American males learn to portray themselves as not only hypermasculine, but also hyperheterosexual (Majors and Billson 1992; Harrison



and Harrison 2002; Azzarito and Harrison 2008). Conversely, gay white athletes have traditionally been feminized by sport (Azzarito and Harrison). Representative of this categorical exclusivity, McBride (2001) pointed out that within the view of black men as protectors, progenitors, and defenders of the race, they must be heterosexual.

As such, dominant discourses pertaining to black and gay American men in sport are similar to the perception of both in the broader culture, which has long held black and gay to be incompatible categories (Boykin 2005). The bifurcation of black and gay identities has historically been strengthened by cultural (though ostensibly with foundations in psychology) models of homosexual development, which maintain homosexuality is only ‘a problem’ for whites. Freudian and post-Freudian theorists (falsely) attributed male homosexuality to two factors: an overbearing mother and an absent father figure (Freud 1986; Spencer 1995). However, these factors have, seemingly, never applied to black men. For example, when the *Moynihan Congressional Report* (1965) attributed the deterioration of the black American family to the absence of the black American father – something even President Barack Obama has discussed – nowhere was (or is) it proclaimed these black children are more at risk of ‘becoming’ gay (United States Department of Labor 2009). Models of pathological homosexual genesis, whatever their etiology, appear to only apply to white families. Thus, despite the gains of both the civil-rights movement and progress toward gay and lesbian social inclusion, Boykin (2005) contends the predominant belief in society (and sport) remains all black men – and especially black male athletes – are heterosexual, while all gay male athletes are white.

### *Critical Race Theory*

Scholars who study race and sport have almost exclusively held women at the focal point of investigations of the intersectionality of gender and/or sexuality (see Birrell and Cole 1990;

Griffin 1998; Koivula 2001; Krane 2001; Horn 2007; Russell 2007). This article, however, seeks to expand the boundaries of the sport and intersectionality literature by examining attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual orientation among black and white male US college athletes.

Cognizant of Critical-Race-Theory (CRT) scholars' (Ladson-Billings 1996; Singer 2005) contentions that those examining race must be aware that their ontological (nature of reality) assumptions and epistemological (methods of knowing) perspectives may result from 'whiteness' being positioned as the dominant and 'correct' perspective from which to conduct such research, this study's purpose is to resist scholarship that dehumanizes or depersonalizes people or communities of color (Ladson-Billings 2000). However, consistent with one of CRT's primary tenets – that race is a crucial social construct to consider in analyzing social, political and educational issues of people in society – this study also contends that 'race matters' in examining college athletes' attitudes regarding sexual orientation. Therefore, our investigation of black and white male college athletes' behaviors and attitudes regarding sexual orientation is not intended to position white male college athletes' behaviors, attitudes or beliefs related to sexual orientation as the norm or standard upon which black male college athletes' beliefs should be judged and evaluated.

It is argued here that investigating the maintenance of black athletes' complex identities, and how these identities are affected by and simultaneously affect sporting culture, allows examination of behaviors and attitudes related to sexual orientation. Our theoretical argument is that limiting an investigation of race, sexuality and gender solely to a social constructionist perspective ignores the contextual ways in which people materially experience their identities (Hooks 1990; Collins 2000). For, as McDonald and Birrell (1999) wrote, 'ideological work... has material consequences' (p. 295).

As a result, exploring black male college athletes' attitudes toward sexual orientation is important to many constituencies, including the black community. Within the African-American culture, sport is perceived (whether or not justified) as one of America's few meritocracies. As Boykin (2005) reported, 'Sports plays a unique role in the black community. It provides a social ladder that motivates thousands of young black men' (p. 223). Within this setting, black male college athletes' attitudes toward sexual orientation may take on disproportionate significance in the black community.

Despite decreasing cultural (Loftus 2001) and sporting (Anderson, 2005b) homophobia, and consistent with the pervasive view that homosexuality is a 'problem' for and about white men (Froyum 2007), researchers have found elevated sexual prejudice within black culture (Cohen 1999; Waldner, Sikka and Baig 1999; Lewis 2003). When applied to sport, Boykin (2005) noted that black athletes' assumption of 'cool pose,' may allow them to simultaneously demonstrate their athletic prowess, heteromascularity, hypermascularity, hyperheterosexuality, while also expressing homophobic attitudes (Boykin; Azzarito & Harrison 2008).

In a 1999 survey, sport agent Ralph Cindrich found black athletes, when compared to their white counterparts, maintained elevated rates of homophobia (Anderson 2005a). Among 175 first-year National Football League (NFL) players interviewed, 92 per cent of white players were comfortable playing with a gay teammate, compared to only 60 per cent of black players. Similarly, 53 per cent of white NFL players said they would be comfortable sharing a hotel room with an openly gay player, compared to just 29 per cent of black players (Anderson 2005a). When these athletes were asked how they would react if a gay player sexually 'propositioned' them, 29 per cent of blacks indicated they would respond with 'physical assault,' compared to only 5 per cent of white players. While there exists a great

deal of inquiry into ways black athletes, through their portrayals, are culturally, economically, and structurally discriminated against in the sport-media complex (Davis 2002; Boyd 2003; Grainger, Newman and Andrews 2008) little academic literature examining black male athletes as possible oppressors in the sport terrain exists (Anderson 1998).

Athletes, as any societal sub-group, reflect the culture from which they come. Specifically, black American male athletes' attitudes may well be synonymous with reported black men's elevated rates of homophobia (Froyum 2007). There have been multiple explanations proffered for these higher levels of sexual prejudice. One justification is that with black Americans being disproportionately represented in lower socio-economic classes, sexual prejudice (e.g. 'At least I am not gay!') is a way black males can increase their 'masculine capital' (Froyum 2007). In addition, poorer black gay athletes may feel compelled to remain 'closeted,' so as to not disadvantage what they believe to be their primary route out of poverty (Anderson 2005a). Furthermore, gay culture, gay support systems, and much of what can be described as a gay-male identity, have been established in a culture that presumes whiteness and elevated class status (Lewis 2003). Finally, many black athletes may not recognize homophobia's damage within their own community, nor do they recognize the commonalities between oppression of gays and blacks.

Fueling this heterosexual masculine script, mainstream sport media often portray professional male athletes as exhibiting proscribed ideal masculine characteristics of aggressiveness, power, assertiveness, and – of course – heterosexuality (Trujillo 1991; Messner 2002; Connell 2005). More importantly, these images are more often used to portray black athletes, particularly in the masculine-construed United States professional and college sports of men's basketball and football (Grainger, Newman and Andrews 2006). This, in turn, reinforces hegemonic masculinity within US black culture. Accordingly, despite progress

toward gay and lesbian social inclusion, our understanding of the sport landscape remains twofold: black athletes come in only one sexuality, and gay men in just one color.

While Anderson's (2005a; 2005b; 2009a) findings indicate decreased homophobia levels in sport, others (Wolf-Wendel et al. 2001; Brown et al. 2004; Southall et al. 2009) have suggested less inclusive attitudes toward gay male college athletes and "social acceptance of sexual prejudice" (Gill et al. 2006, p. 562) is prevalent within the US campus environment. Wolf-Wendel, et al. concluded *heterosexist* and homophobic views are still more likely to exist in the athletic culture, and perhaps most acutely among black American male athletes.

In addition, these expressed attitudes seem to be logically inconsistent with significant 'same-sex' sexual activity among college-age males in general. There is evidence that beneath their hyperheterosexual veneer many college male athletes may engage in 'on the down low' (same-sex) sexual behaviors (Boykin 2005). As far back as 1977, Garner and Smith found 36 per cent of sampled National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division-I athletes had engaged in same-sex sexual activity (to the point of orgasm). However, they also noted informants were highly concerned with maintaining their anonymity (Garner and Smith 1977). More recently, Boykin reported instances of black college athletes who, while engaging in same-sex behaviors, did not consider 'their actions to be homosexual' (p. 225). Consistent with CRT, it seems that within the hypermasculine and hyperheterosexual college-sport landscape '...the cultural dominance of black manhood has been acknowledged and commercialized' (Boykin p. 236), to such an extent that white males are still afforded the societal luxury of sexual experimentation rarely granted to African-American youth.

In light of these findings, this research examines the extent to which Anderson's (2005b; 2009a) findings of more inclusive forms of masculinity exists among white and black

college athletes; how comfortable gay male athletes are with revealing their sexual orientation; and to what degree acceptance of diversity is present within US college athletic departments and, specifically, among US male college athletes.

## **Methods**

### *Description of the Sample*

This study was conducted at five NCAA-affiliated universities (three Division I-A, one Division I-AAA, and one Division III) located in the Southeastern United States. Data was obtained from 397 male athletes from 10 sports. Individual sport (cross country, tennis, golf, track, and swimming) athletes constituted approximately 49 per cent of the sample, with the teamsports of football, baseball, basketball and soccer comprising the remaining 52 per cent. Twenty percent ( $n =$  eighty) of the sampled athletes self-identified as ‘black or African-American alone.’ Another 243 (61 per cent) of athletes identified themselves as ‘white alone.’

### *Methods and Procedures*

The study’s purpose was to measure respondents’ self-expressed sexual orientations, sexual behaviors and attitudes toward athletes (both teammates and non-teammates) of various sexual orientations, and also investigate their responses to specific college-sport related situations. While we are aware de-constructing the conflation between athletes’ ethnicity and sport played would allow examination of cultural elements that arise in sex-segregated institutions - such as teamsports - and their relation to masculinity, gender role attitudes, homo-eroticism, and attitudes related to sexual orientation, this particular paper discusses our focused analysis of ethnicity as an independent variable within this cultural milieu.

The developed survey contained questions designed to uncover US male college athletes’ behaviors and attitudes, as well as levels of *homosociality*. The survey’s scales and

items were derived from previous campus-climate studies, as well as conversations with scholars engaged in gender or sexuality research, and piloted in a 2003-2004 study (Southall et al. 2004). In order to estimate the survey's internal consistency and reliability, parallel scales and questions were tested utilizing *Cronbach's alpha*. High internal consistency ( $\alpha = .79$ ) was found on questions designed to measure single unitary variables.

In addition to nominal descriptive data analysis involving development of frequencies based upon ethnicity - and in order to answer the research question: 'Is there a significant relationship between male athletes' ethnicity and their expressed attitudes toward sexual orientation?' - Pearson Chi-square and likelihood ratio chi-square tests were conducted. Chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests are used to test the difference in proportion in two or more independent groups of which the level of measurement for independent variable is the nominal level (Li, Pitts and Quarterman 2008). The results of these analyses are summarized in the following section.

## **Results**

### *Summary of descriptive statistics*

When sampled male athletes were asked to identify their sexual orientation, 387 self-identified as heterosexual. Six athletes, all white, listed themselves as gay males. These athletes participated in football ( $n = two$ ), baseball ( $n = two$ ), basketball ( $n = one$ ), and track and field ( $n = one$ ).

While these six white male college athletes described their sexual orientation as gay, a total of fifteen males (4 per cent), fourteen who still classified themselves as heterosexual, reported having engaged in same-sex sexual behavior. Of these fifteen males, five were black, seven white, and three of some other ethnic group. Within this sample, five of the six

athletes who self-identified as gay reported not yet having engaged in same-sex behavior. In addition, five athletes reportedly hid their sexual orientation from teammates.

Another series of questions dealt with whether or not male athletes ever displayed what they considered 'masculine' or 'hypermasculine' behaviors in order to demonstrate their sexual orientation. While no specific behaviors were identified, thirty-seven blacks and forty-six whites reported acting ultra-masculine in order to demonstrate their sexual orientation. In addition, another twenty-six blacks and 102 whites said they acted somewhat masculine to demonstrate their sexual orientation.

Respondents were also asked if they 'thought or knew' if any teammates were gay or bisexual. In addition, respondents were asked what would cause them to think a particular athlete was gay or bisexual. Finally, male athletes were specifically asked if they thought or knew any current teammates who were gay or bisexual. Table 1 summarizes the responses to these questions.

Table 1 about here.

In addition, athletes were asked how they discovered a gay/bisexual teammate's sexual orientation. Six male (one black and five white) athletes reported discovering a teammate's sexual orientation as a result of a same-sex sexual encounter. This confirms male athletes who engage in same-sex sexual behavior do not automatically assume they or their sexual partner are gay (Boykin 2005).

Athletes were also asked how they would or do treat a teammate they think or know is gay or bisexual. Approximately 66 per cent ( $n = 254$ ) of male athletes who answered the question reported they would or do accept a gay or bisexual teammate. Examining these 'accepting' athletes' ethnicities revealed this sub-set to be comprised of thirty black and 180 white athletes. However, it must be noted that 110 (28 per cent) of the sampled male athletes



still reported they would/do 'reject' a gay/bisexual teammate, and – sadly – another twenty-four (6 per cent) male athletes reported they would or do 'harass' a gay or bisexual teammate.

Further examination of these 110 rejecting male athletes reveals sixty-eight were football players. Of these rejecting/harassing football players, 40 were black and 17 white. More importantly, especially for the sample's two gay football players, these 68 rejecters constitute 57 per cent of all sampled football players. In addition, it emerged that 69 per cent of black football players and 41 per cent of white football players reported they "would/do" reject a gay/bisexual teammate. While these numbers may be viewed as discouraging, it should be noted that only two black and one white football players (only 3 per cent of black and white players) reported they "would/do" harass a gay/bisexual teammate. In addition, 28 per cent of black and 56 per cent of white football players reported they would/do accept a gay or bisexual teammate.

When compared to football, baseball has a smaller percentage of players (30 per cent) who classified themselves as harassing/rejecting teammates. Since the baseball sample was overwhelmingly white (Eighty-four of the ninety-six baseball players were white; and only one baseball player reported his ethnicity as black), investigating differences in the ethnicity of the twenty-nine rejecting/harassing players was not possible. However, it should be noted that a higher percentage of baseball players than football players – five – (6 per cent of all white baseball players) reported they would/do harass a gay/bisexual teammate.

Since many survey questions were hypothetical in nature, but asked participants about their attitudes related to sexual orientation, the researchers felt it important to develop several real-world questions that might reveal attitudes toward sexuality and/or sexual orientations. From interviews with coaches and athletes conducted as part of the initial (2003-2004) pilot study, it was discovered – as a result of budgetary considerations – many sports have athletes

share beds on road trips (e. g. traveling to away athletic contests). Therefore, several questions investigated how athletes felt about the possibility of sharing a bed with a same-sex teammate (both heterosexual and GLB). Table 2 summarizes responses to these questions based upon respondents' ethnicity.

(Insert Table 2 about here.)

A final series of questions dealt with respondents' attitudes related to 'don't ask, don't tell', whether they felt GLBs should be allowed to coach, how they felt about possibly having a GLB coach, and whether they considered themselves to be 'homophobic.'

White and black male athletes were about evenly divided when it came to their views on 'don't ask, don't tell', with 46 per cent of respondents saying they favored such a policy. Overall, 224 (56 per cent) of the male athletes felt that GLBs should be allowed to coach, but only 35 per cent of African-American male athletes, versus 62 per cent of white male college athletes, approved of GLBs being allowed to coach. Finally, when asked if they considered themselves to be homophobic, 101 respondents (35 per cent) self-identified as being homophobic. The percentage breakdown by ethnicity revealed 28 per cent of white male athletes, compared to 43 per cent of black male athletes, considered themselves to be homophobic.

### *Chi Square*

After developing initial descriptive statistics, and in order to evaluate whether there was a statistically significant relationship between identified sexual-orientation behaviors and attitudes and US male college athletes' ethnicity, chi-square analyses were conducted. The results of this analysis are highlighted in Table 3. Of the twenty-two questions for which chi-square analyses were performed, sixteen revealed significant relationships between athletes' attitudes and their ethnicity. The six items for which there was not a relationship to athletes'

ethnicity included: (a) engaging in same-sex sexual behavior, (b) how athletes thought their teammates feel about having a GLB teammate, (c) how they felt about sharing a bed with a GLB teammate, (d) how sharing a bed with a GLB teammate makes them feel about their sexuality, (e) the use of derogatory words when referring to GLBs, and (f) belief in a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy.

For all other items, the results revealed a significant relationship between athletes' ethnicity and their responses.

(Insert Table 3 about here.)

## **Discussion**

This study's results support previous research and suggest a US male college athlete's ethnicity is significantly related to his behaviors and attitudes related to sexual orientation. Our findings confirm previous research (Froyum 2007) that concluded the US black male college-sport culture is significantly different in its degree of expressed sexual prejudice, compared to the US white male college-sport culture. While it is encouraging a significant percentage (61 per cent) of heterosexual college-male athletes reported they would or do accept a gay male teammate, it should be noted only 38 per cent of black athletes, as compared to 74 per cent of white athletes, expressed such acceptance. Furthermore, while our results confirm previous reports of elevated sexual prejudice among US male college students and athletes (Pronger 1990; Curry 1991; Messner 1992; Clarke 1998; Griffin 1998; Hekma 1998; Wolf-Wendel, et al. 2001; Bryant 2003; Price and Parker 2003; Thompson and Cracco 2008), and highlight elevated homophobia among surveyed black male athletes, there is evidence that overall the US male college-sport culture may no longer be a uniform bastion of cultural and institutional homophobia. At least for sampled athletes, this research confirms Anderson's findings (2009a, 2009b) that white university athletes are becoming much more

inclusive than sport/gender literature has traditionally suggested. While the near-total institutional aspects of sport (sex-segregation, complicity to authority, and selection of those who over-conform to positions of leadership) remain (Anderson 2009b; Sanday 1996, 2007), the sporting subculture is beginning to be impacted by decreasing homophobia within the larger culture (Anderson 2009b). Social progress is always an uneven process, and this research provides evidence that one variable of influence is ethnicity.

This study's finding of elevated rates of rejection and harassment among US black male college athletes should be of particular concern to athletic department administrators and coaches. While expressed attitudes do not necessarily mean homophobic behaviors will be actualized, these findings do suggest higher levels of sexual prejudice among US black male athletes.

Moreover, within this research setting, a higher percentage of black male athletes reported adopting ultramasculine-gendered personas in order to demonstrate their heterosexuality. These findings are consistent with older social script theory and sport. It confirms previous research that within the US male college-sport sub-culture, black teamsports athletes (specifically football players) learn to portray themselves as not only hyper-masculine, but hyperheterosexual (Harrison and Harrison 2002; Boykin 2005; Azzarito and Harrison 2008). Thus, social script theory continues to be a useful lens through which to examine the degree to which hypermasculine and hyperheterosexuality behaviors and attitudes are part of the college teamsports culture. The high proportion of football and baseball players reporting they demonstrate stereotypical masculine behaviors is consistent with orthodox notions of the college-teamsports environment as a hyperheterosexual enclave (Messner 1992).

Although we do not provide data in this specific article, results suggest there is a (predictable) relationship between attitudes toward sexuality and gender among teamsports and individual sport athletes. Not surprisingly, our findings suggest college football, baseball, and (to a lesser extent) male basketball players still feel the need to overtly display their heterosexual masculinity to their peers, compared to other athletes (Southall et al. 2009). Such displays may take the form of rejecting or harassing either openly gay male athletes—including teammates – suspected of being gay.

### **Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research**

This research indicates even in a more politically and religiously conservative part of the United States Messner's (1992) reported levels and extent of male homophobia are no longer universal. Consistent with General Social Survey (GSS) trends that indicate increasing acceptance of homosexuality (National Opinion Research Center 2009), reported rejection/harassment and self-described homophobic levels among male college athletes are less than previously reported (Messner 1992). This suggests sexual prejudice, among both black and white male college athletes, may be diminishing. While it seems more black college athletes occupy the "homophobic male-athletic citadel," it may be – as Anderson (2005a, 2005b, 2009b) has reported – the 'outer walls' of masculine homophobia are at least under siege.

Since this study's sample was drawn from universities in the Southeastern United States, a geographic region noted for its religious evangelism and conservative politics (Philips 2006), the reported sexual prejudice and homophobia levels among both white and black college male athletes may result from factors other than athletic participation or ethnicity. Future research into the intersectionality of ethnicity and sport will help address these limitations. Consistent with CRT, life histories would help illuminate these issues.

Finally, the rates of homophobia we report support previous calls (Fink and Pastore 1999; Anderson 2002; Cunningham 2004; Gill et al. 2006; Southall, et al. 2006, 2009) for proactive diversity educational and training initiatives specifically targeting male college athletes and coaches within intercollegiate athletic departments. Specific to this study, it is suggested that football and baseball may be the two sports most in need of such educational and training initiatives. Without such proactive steps, this study offers evidence that – as Jacobson (2002) reported – it is likely the loneliness and fear of discovery felt by many deeply-closeted male athletes will be an unnecessary part of their college-sport experience.

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Table 1

*Orientation demonstration, and Knowledge of Sexual Orientation of Others*

Question	Response	African	White	Other
		American		
		<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	
When you travel with your	Yes	8	68	17
team, do you share a bed	No	63	167	52
with a teammate?				
Does sharing a bed with	Yes	37	37	18
teammate make you feel	No	40	198	54
uncomfortable...?				
Would your comfort level	Yes	51	180	51
change if the teammate was	No	25	59	19
GLB?				
Does possible bed sharing with	Yes	62	192	58
a GLB teammate make you	No	16	49	13
uncomfortable?				

Table 2

*Responses to Bed-Sharing Questions*

Question	Response	African American ( <i>n</i> )	White ( <i>n</i> )	Other ( <i>n</i> )
Demonstrate Orientation				
	Did not answer	15	91	19
	Act Ultra-masculine	37	46	23
	Act somewhat masculine	26	102	29
	Act ultra-feminine	2	0	2
	Act somewhat feminine	0	4	1
Think athlete				
	Did not answer	6	7	4
	Mannerisms	54	182	53
	Being a female athlete	6	9	1
	Sport in which they participate	7	31	7
	Mannerisms and sport	0	10	3
	Other	7	4	6
Think Teammate				
	Yes	39	48	18
	No	41	198	54
	Did not answer	1	0	1
Know Teammate				
	Yes	18	11	10
	No	55	230	62
	Did not answer	8	5	1



Table 3

*Chi-Square Results*

Item	Value	df	Sig.
Have you used any of the following actions in order to demonstrate your sexual orientation to your teammates?	34.134	8	.000
In what sport(s) do athletes you think are GLB participate?	1.46	32	.000
Do you know any GLB athletes here at this school?	13.661	4	.008
Do you think any of your teammates are Gay or Bisexual?	33.252	4	.000
Do you know if any of your teammates are Gay or Bisexual?	41.498	4	.000
How did you find out that such teammates were Gay or Bisexual?	68.865	12	.000
How do you treat an athlete who you know or think is GLB?	47.952	6	.000
How would you treat a teammate if you "knew" he was Gay Bisexual?	45.398	6	.000
<b>Have you engaged in same-sex sexual behavior?</b>	<b>3.799</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>.434</b>
How do you think your team members feel about GLBs in general?	22.112	4	.000
<b>How do you think your team members feel about having a Gay or Bisexual teammate?</b>	<b>7.303</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>.121</b>
When you travel with your team, do you share a bed with a teammate?	16.296	4	.003
Does sharing a bed with a teammate make you feel uncomfortable?	33.292	4	.000
<b>Would your opinion about bed-sharing change if you knew a teammate was Gay or Bisexual?</b>	<b>6.038</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>.196</b>
<b>Does the possibility of sharing a bed with a Gay or Bisexual teammate make you feel uncomfortable about your sexuality?</b>	<b>3.886</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>.422</b>
<b>In general, do you feel a GLB athlete's athletic skill contributes to their being accepted or rejected by teammates?</b>	<b>3.187</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>.527</b>
<b>Do you believe in a "Don't ask, don't tell" policy?</b>	<b>4.971</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>.290</b>
Should a GLB person be allowed to coach a college-sport team?	40.188	8	.000
Would you like to know if your coach was GLB?	13.624	4	.009
Would you mind having a GLB coach?	18.250	4	.001

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