A Scoping Review of LGBTQ+ Scholarship in Sport

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Socio-Cultural - Sexuality (Other)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Session: Socio-Cultural/Sexuality

Relevance/Significance. Sport is a site where, historically, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals have faced prejudice and discrimination (Cunningham, 2019). However, there is some of evidence of change, with a variety of sport organizations seeking to create and sustain more inclusive sport environments (e.g., Rugby Australia, 2019).

Review of Relevant Literature. Given these multiple histories and social and cultural contexts, it is fair to say that sport, sport organisations, and sexualities have a diverse and complex relationship. To illustrate, Shaw (2019) analysed the efforts of sport organisations in NZ to develop an anti-homophobia framework that was intended to follow the example set by Australia in 2014. She outlined the ‘chaotic’ nature of trying to identify and manage for inclusion when there is limited expertise, resourcing, or clarity driving such a project. What’s more, the media routinely expresses an unwillingness to focus on same-sex partners in photographs of major events (Fink et al., 2015). On the other hand, there is growing evidence that LGBTQ+ inclusiveness is associated with greater creativity, organizational attractiveness, and overall success (Cunningham, 2011a; 2011b; Cunningham & Melton, 2011, 2014; Cunningham & Nite, 2020).

Purpose and Objectives. Within this broad and complex environment, the purpose of our presentation to thoroughly explore the LGBTQ+ scholarship in sport by way of a scoping review (Pham et al., 2014). In doing so, we note emergent themes of the scholarship and trends that have developed over time.

Methodology and Data Analysis. To complete our review, we searched four databases: SPORTDiscus, ABI Inform, Business Source Ultimate, and PsycInfo. We limited the search to work published in academic journals, in English, and from 1969 to October 2020. We chose 1969 given the significance of the year in the LGBTQ+ movement. We used the following search terms: “gay,” “lesbian,” “glbt,” “homosexual,” “transgender,” “lgbt,” “lgbtq,” and “same sex,” using the “OR” designation between each. We then specified that “sport” had to be included somewhere in the publication.

Discussion/Implications/Applications. The initial search yielded 1,160 articles. After removing duplications and reviewing the abstracts for each, the total count was reduced to 260 published journal articles. We identify the authors who have contributed the most to the scholarship, trends in publishing frequency over times, and the broad disciplines where the scholarship has appeared.

Finally, based on a review of the abstract, we coded the focus of the publication. We recognize that authors might explore many topics within a single publication, but for our analyses, we coded the primary aim of the research or article. This process resulted in 27 unique codes. We then aggregated these codes into 7 broader themes: Athlete Experiences and Behaviours; Management and Advocacy; Prejudice and Discrimination; Marketing, Communications, and Consumer Behavior; Conceptual Overviews; Sport Managers, Coaches, and Parents; and Legal and Regulatory Issues.

Contribution to the body of knowledge. Our scoping review provides one of the most comprehensive analyses of LGBTQ+ scholarship in sport. We highlight gaps in research for Sport Management and identify future research possibilities.