

**When the Umbrella is Not Enough: Examining Prejudice Toward Trans Athletes**

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Introduction

Over time, research literature has indicated a cultural shift towards greater acceptance of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community. Despite these gains, however, research continues to show that LGBT individuals face stigmatization and prejudice (Herek, 2007). This is especially true in the sports context, where sex and gender norms are defined in a rigid binary system. Unfortunately, research in this context has almost exclusively focused on issues to sexual orientation minorities, largely ignoring the unique issue of gender identity minorities (see, for example, Anderson, 2002, or Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). This is especially troubling because trans individuals continue to be one of the most at-risk groups for violence and discrimination (Campus Pride, 2010). Just like those with traditional gender expressions (i.e., cissexuals, or persons whose gender identity matches their sex), trans individuals enjoy the physical and social benefits associated with sport. Unfortunately, the stigma placed on them and structural barriers to their participation make sports an especially unwelcoming space for people who identify as trans (Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012). Therefore, it is our aim in undertaking this research to begin to address the hostile climate these individuals face. We hope to better understand how trans athletes are perceived by the larger population and create a baseline for further research to build upon in this area.

Literature Review

Embedded cultural heterosexism is often cited in the LGBT literature as a cultural impetus to LGBT prejudice (see, for example, Herek, 2007; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009; Robinson, 2012; Lucas-Carr, & Krane, 2012). This construction indicates the implicit societal bias that marginalizes sexual and gender minority groups and works to the advantage of heterosexuals and people with traditional gender identities. Outside of the heteronormative construct, sexual and gender minorities often face various forms of stigma related to their out-group status (Herek, 2007). Of particular importance to this study are the constructs of institutional stigma that is presented via societal constructs (i.e., heterosexism) and through individual level manifestations (i.e., sexual prejudice). Herek (2007) discerns between three different types of individual stigma: enacted, felt, and internalized. Enacted stigma relates to explicit negative actions towards a minority group, felt sexual stigma represents the expectation of negative opinion in society, and internalized stigma is the final category in which these negative values become accepted and part of one's self-concept.

The literature surrounding LGBT issues has almost exclusively focused on LGB individuals. Robinson (2012) argues that as the LGBT community has worked to assimilate into mainstream heteronormative culture, they have further marginalized parts of their own community, such that trans people are often "double marginalized." He argues that this reinforces traditional gender roles by only emphasizing differences sexual object choice. In a similar way, research in the sport context has focused almost exclusively on sexual orientation minorities. The limited work surrounding the trans experience in sport has focused on trans individuals' perceptions of their place in sport (for example, Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012, Shang & Gill, 2012). Both Sermerjian and Cohen (2006) and Lucas-Carr and Krane (2012) found that trans individuals faced problems related to prejudice and lack of acceptance in sport; it is, therefore, constructive to look at the underlying motivations of these actions. This study will, then, look to fill the gap in this understanding by exploring the attitudes of cissexuals regarding trans participation in sport.

Consistent with the literature, we hypothesize that trans athletes will face greater prejudice in the sports context than heterosexuals, lesbians, gay men, and bisexual individuals (Hypotheses 1a-1d). Consistent with Herek's (2007, 2009) sexual stigma and sexual prejudice framework, we also expect men to express more prejudice than women (Hypothesis 2). Finally, given heterosexism's prevalence in sport, we expect sport identification to hold a positive association with trans prejudice (Hypothesis 3).

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### Method

We will collect data from 200 students enrolled in a public university in the US. As the focus is on heterosexuals' prejudice toward trans persons in sport, we will limit the sample to former and current athletes who identify as heterosexual. Participants will complete a questionnaire in which they provide their demographic information and respond to items measuring their attitudes toward trans persons, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men using the Feelings Thermometer (Herek & Capitano, 1999), in which people rate how warm (favorable) or cold (unfavorable) they feel toward different groups. They anchor will ask participants to "rate their feelings toward having a teammate who was...." Participants will also respond to items measuring their identity as a sportsperson, using a scale adapted from Randel and Jaussie (2003).

### Data Analysis

We will examine Hypotheses 1a-1d through a repeated measures analysis of variance, followed by post hoc contrasts. Hypotheses 2 and 3 will be examined through regression analysis, with participants' sex and identification serving as independent variables, and attitudes toward trans teammates serving as the dependent variable.

### Discussion

Consistent with the existing literature, we expect to find that there exists a strong embedded stigma surrounding trans athletes' participation in sport. This study will continue to build a baseline for research into the transgendered sport experience. Further, we can achieve a better understanding of the factors associated with the stigmatization and marginalization of this population in sport. This research aims to be a "starting point" measurement of attitudes regarding trans participation in sport at various levels of competition, in supposedly "inclusive" settings, and perceptions about the binary gendering practices of sport, in hopes of better understanding barriers to inclusivity, why they exist and how to remove them.