What's in a Name? Anti-Homophobia and Inclusion Policies in New Zealand Sport Organisations

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Relevance and Significance
In 2015, the Out on the Fields Report (Denison & Kitchen, 2015) presented the first international data on homophobia in sport. 73% of participants had experienced homophobic abuse, 78% felt unsafe as spectators, and in youth sport alone, 81% of gay men and 74% of lesbians under 22 years old felt that they were unable to come out in a sport setting. Similar figures were presented for the New Zealand context, with 88% of gay men and 76% of lesbians in that age group reporting being unwilling to come out in a sport environment. Clearly, homophobia in sport remains a prevalent concern, constraining the involvement of lesbian, gay, and bisexual women and men in the health, social, and community benefits of sport.

Review of Literature
Considerable research has been undertaken in the area of gay and lesbian sport participants’ and coaches’ experiences of sport (e.g. Cunningham, 2007; Krane, 2001; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009 Krane). Despite calls for research how sport administrators might influence their landscape with regard to developing anti-homophobia and inclusion policies (Griffin, 2012), there has been little movement in this area internationally.

Purpose
Inspired by the Out on the Fields Report, this research presents the findings of how six New Zealand National Sport Organisations (NSOs) are developing change policies for anti-homophobia and inclusion. New Zealand Rugby (NZR) took the lead in this New Zealand initiative. NZR facilitated a number of meetings and workshops looking at homophobia and inclusion with five other sports; Netball New Zealand (NNZ), Hockey New Zealand (HNZ), New Zealand Rugby League (NZRL), New Zealand Football (NZF), and New Zealand Cricket (NZC).

Methodology
This research is framed by critical organisational theory, which encourages organisations to reflect on their practices and cultures to strive for positive change (Alvesson, 2013). Individuals from six NSOs with responsibility for developing anti-homophobia and inclusion policies were interviewed for this research. Interviews were semi-structured, lasted between 45-60 minutes, were digitally recorded and transcribed. The data were then open coded (Ryan & Bernard, 2000), looking for similarities, differences, and overlap to develop analytical themes. These themes were: what does homophobia or inclusion mean in our organisation; engagement with youth; interaction with external support agencies; and working collectively on this project. The data were then re-analysed, using these themes as an analytical framework, searching for consistencies and inconsistencies with them within the data.

Findings
Homophobia was identified as an issue for most of the participating NSOs and a number of the NSOs are at the start of the process of developing policies in this area. Anti-homophobia policies sit within broader, overarching inclusion policies for many NSOs. The implementation of anti-homophobia and inclusion policies will be supported with education programmes. NSOs are aware they have to work alongside regional organisations and clubs and that these organisations will have their own priorities and issues of discrimination and inclusion.

Many of the respondents expressed a social identity theory understanding of sexuality (Holck, 2016). In this view, sexual identity is perceived to be fixed and a way by which people can define themselves by similarities and differences to others. This approach has some utility in terms of identifying marginalised groups with which the sport organisations want to engage. It also allows, however, for the development of ‘us’ and ‘them’, undermining the ability of some people to see similarities with the ‘other’ and the NSOs effectively distancing themselves from the groups that they are trying to engage with (Meyerson, 2000).
While some organisations had actively sought assistance from external agencies such as education, health, and law providers, many had not. Finally, all of the participants agreed on the collective approach to policy development and found it to be a positive experience, quite different to other situations in which they were encouraged to compete with other NSOs.

Contribution and Further Direction
Discrimination and inclusion practices are located in a variety of social and cultural contexts (Knights & Omanović, 2016). Unless the specific contexts of diversity and discrimination are understood, pre-established assumptions about diversity and stereotyping, rather than the needs of marginalised groups, can drive policy formation (Holck, 2016). This research is ongoing, however, at this point, the NSOs are recommended to reach out to LGB and other marginalised groups within the sport, particularly within youth sport; connect with wider LGB community and other under-represented communities; seek greater support from organisations such as Rainbow Tick, an organisation which provides advice to organisations seeking to become more inclusive; and to maintain collaborative policy development practices.