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## Perceptions of "others": The role of heterosexism in the decline of college women coaches

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PERCEPTIONS OF "OTHERS": THE ROLE OF HETEROSEXISM IN  
THE DECLINE OF COLLEGE WOMEN COACHES

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

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## Dissertation Approval

The Graduate College  
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## ABSTRACT

### **Perceptions of “Others”: The Role of Heterosexism In the Decline of College Women Coaches**

by

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Since Title IX was signed into law in 1972, opportunities for females to participate in collegiate sport have increased tremendously. But these advancements have not held true for women head coaches in collegiate sport. For female head coaches, in fact, the inverse has resulted. Whereas prior to 1972, women led most collegiate women's athletic teams, today the majority of women's collegiate athletic teams are led by men. Previous researchers have pointed to the existence of a relationship between heterosexism and the decline of women coaches, but prior to this study, little or no empirical research on lesbian head coaches' perceptions of the role of heterosexism in this decline was available.

Either currently or previously employed as head coaches at universities across the United States, eight female NCAA division one head coaches of women's sport who self-

identified as lesbian participated in in-depth interviews in order to better understand their experiences and perceptions on heterosexism and the decline of women head coaches.

Utilizing feminist standpoint theory as the conceptual framework, this research sought to understand those who have been marginalized under the patriarchal and heteronormative environment of collegiate sport. The interview questions focused on the participants' experiences with recruiting, hiring processes, career intentions, social/outside of work functions, and their perceptions of the role of heterosexism in the decline.

The participants ranged in age from 32 to 54 and as a group and have coached for an average of 15 years. A majority of the participants perceive heterosexism to play a role in the decline of female collegiate head coaches. The themes were ordered according to their prevalence and level of repetition amongst participants. They include: (1) coaches perceptions of the role of heterosexism in the decline, (2) the impact of heterosexism on lesbian coaches' upward mobility, (3) barriers for women in coaching, (4) factors contributing to lesbian coaches' decisions to be out, open, or closeted, (5) progression of general climate, (6) positive experiences for out coaches, (7) from connections to success, and (8) former coaches desire to return to coaching. Implications for research, policy, and practice are discussed in the final chapter.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

Female-athletes have made colossal strides in the past 35 years. These gains are largely attributed to Title IX<sup>1</sup>, a federal law widely known for gender equity in education, but more specifically college sport. Before Title IX was signed into law, only 16,000 female athletes participated on intercollegiate teams across the United States (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). Today, that number has increased to 180,000 female college athletes (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). But a problem exists in that these advancements have not held true for women head coaches in collegiate sport. In fact, for female head coaches, the inverse has resulted. Prior to Title IX's implementation in 1972, women led 90 percent of collegiate women's teams (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). Thirty-five years after the law was passed, the representation of women coaching collegiate women's sport is at an all-time low of 42.4 percent (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). The decline sparked this research area because the media and opponents of Title IX tend to instill in the public that this law has been disproportionately generous to women at the expense of non-revenue men's sport (Hammer, 2003). Clearly, there is a discrepancy when considering women

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<sup>1</sup> Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, P.L. 92-318, 20 U.S.C.S. section 1681 et seq was enacted June 23, 1972. "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

head coaches of collegiate sport. In this study, a primary interest was to investigate the steady decline of women head coaches in college athletics.

Cases in the recent media have rekindled mainstream discussion about the decline. In 2007, prior to her team's quest for a fourth consecutive trip to the Women's Final Four, LSU women's basketball coach Pokey Chatman resigned after another coaches' allegations of her sexual misconduct with former players. Following her resignation, LSU hastily hired a married, heterosexual male coach to replace her. In the *New York Times*, Longman (2007b) discussed how hiring a man to replace Chatman "allowed LSU to avoid and eliminate the stereotype of lesbian coaches as sexual predators" (p. 1). Across the country at California State University at Fresno, two female former head coaches recently won sex discrimination cases against the university for a combined 23 million dollars (later reduced to a combined 12.45 million dollars plus legal fees). In both cases, the coaches alleged sex and sexual orientation discrimination. When she testified at former volleyball coach Lindy Vivas' court hearing, former women's basketball coach Stacy Johnson-Klein stated, "The athletic director was hiring me as a straight female to clean up the program" (Anteola, 2007, ¶. 1).

Scholarly research points to three key themes that describe the decline of women coaching collegiate women's sport. They are homologous reproduction (Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006; Stangl & Kane, 1991), work-family conflict (Dixon & Bruening, 2007), and discrimination and stereotyping (e.g., Griffin, 1992; Kauer, 2005; Krane, 1996; Krane & Barber, 2005; NCAA, 1989). Homologous reproduction is the concept of individuals reproducing an image of themselves in the hiring process. Regarding work-family conflict, the patriarchal environment of college sport has yet to

systematically make room for women head coaches who are attempting to balance family responsibilities with coaching expectations. Finally, women coaches face discrimination and stereotyping at disproportionate levels than men due to their rejection of gender norms and the threat that this poses to male-dominance. Salary inequity between men and women is another issue that is discussed, but it is purposely not grouped with the three main themes because it affects both men and women coaching women's collegiate sport.

In terms of comprehensive research, the most fragmented of the three key reasons is the notion of discrimination and stereotyping, particularly regarding the lesbian label placed on women coaches. Much of the research on stereotypes and discrimination discusses the gender-role conflict (e.g., sport is only for males) and ramifications of the lesbian label in sport, but until now, few if any studies have examined heterosexism as it relates specifically to the decline of women in college coaching.

### Review of Literature

A comprehensive review of the literature on the decline of female head coaches revealed three primary reasons for the continuing spiral. Offered by men and women coaches through scholarly research, one rationale for this decline is the theory of homologous reproduction. Because college athletics is no different than society in its patriarchal underpinnings, scholars find that male athletic directors are reproducing themselves in hiring processes at the expense of equally qualified women (Sagas, Cunningham, and Teed, 2006). The second reason and one that is certainly related to the notion of male hegemony in sport is the work-family conflict that female head coaches encounter. Because sport was founded by and for men, women were originally factored in only as support for their husbands and sons. Women head coaches today feel the

ramifications, facing the dual expectation of not only succeeding in the sporting arena but also fulfilling their gendered responsibilities on the home front as wives, partners, and mothers. The third and main issue that this study focuses on is the role of discrimination and stereotyping in the continuous decline of women head coaches.

### *Discrimination and Stereotyping of Women Coaches*

Although discrimination and stereotyping can be depicted as distinctly different from one another, they tend to be complementary in this situation and will therefore be grouped together for the purpose of this study. Whereas the concepts of homologous reproduction and work-family conflict are concrete in offering various data sources in association with this decline, the topic of discrimination and stereotyping remains more obscure and fragmented from a research perspective, especially on the topic of heterosexism. One common underlying thread, however, among all three issues is the role of patriarchy. Women in sport face discrimination and stereotypes primarily because of the threat they pose for performing in opposition to their gender expectations. This has resulted in these women being treated differently in terms of pay equity as well as departmental support. Closely related and unfortunate byproducts of these sexist practices are homonegativism and heterosexism aimed at women coaches. Faced with being labeled as mannish or masculine and therefore lesbian, the lesbian label continues to haunt women in sport not because of any truth in accusations made about lesbians, but because of the unsubstantiated stigma that society places on individuals who do not identify as heterosexual. Though until now, few, if any scholars have looked directly at the connection between heterosexism and the decline of women head coaches, researchers have certainly pointed to this relationship in attempting to make sense of the

situation (Griffin, 1992; Kauer, 2005). While chapter two provides a more comprehensive review of pertinent research on the decline of women head coaches, the remainder of the review in this chapter focuses on discrimination and stereotypes specifically targeting sexual orientation. Because homologous reproduction and work-family conflict were not the main focus of this dissertation but remain important factors in understanding the decline of women coaches, these two topics will be discussed in depth in chapter two.

### *Sexual Orientation Discrimination and Stereotypes*

When Louisiana State University (LSU) hired a man to replace former women's basketball coach Pokey Chatman, several issues came to the forefront. The first issue was the abrupt hiring of a man in light of the continuous decline of women in collegiate coaching. The second issue raised was the double standard that exists with regard to female coaches accused of improper relations with female athletes. It can be argued that hiring Chancellor neither avoids nor eliminates, but rather denigrates a population of women and perpetuates a stereotype that has haunted women in sport since their arrival. Griffin (1992b) says, "There is no evidence that lesbians are sexual predators. In fact, statistics on sexual harassment, rape, sexual abuse, and other forms of violence and intimidation show that these offenses are overwhelmingly heterosexual male assaults against women and girls. If we need to be concerned about sexual offenses among coaches or athletes, a better case could be made that it is heterosexual men who should be watched carefully" (p. 260). Griffin's point begs the question, how can LSU be so certain that a male coach, because he is married, will not commit sexual misconduct with a student-athlete? Discussing the effect that Chatman's alleged behavior had on LSU's 2007 recruiting class, LSU's coach, Van Chancellor said, "We told them what my wife



and I stood for...that you could come here and feel comfortable” (Longman, 2007b, p. 1). It is this heteronormative climate within sport, particularly in this case Chancellor’s assumption that his heterosexual marriage gives him moral leverage over unmarried and/or perhaps lesbian coaches, which marginalizes all women in sport (Kauer, 2005). Thus, both the double standard and the hiring of a male to avoid stereotypes disenfranchise women and lesbians and allow men to “maintain the power, resources, and status in the sport arena” (Kauer, 2005, p. 9). Griffin (1992b) says, “looking at the increase in the number of men coaching women’s teams over the last 10 years, it is clear how male coaches have benefited from sexism and homophobia in women’s sport” (p. 257). The LSU case is a clear example.

In another incident concerning women coaches and sexual orientation discrimination, 14-year veteran women’s volleyball coach, Lindy Vivas, was recently awarded \$5.85 million (later reduced to \$4.52 million and \$660,000 in legal fees) after her contract was not renewed by California State University, Fresno (Lipka, 2007). Although university officials claimed that the non-renewal resulted from non-competitive scheduling, her failure to secure post-season wins, and poor attendance at competitions, Vivas claimed and subsequently convinced the judge that the university’s actions were a direct result of perceptions about her sexual orientation and in retaliation for her advocacy efforts regarding gender equity (Lipka, 2007). While on the witness stand at Vivas’ trial, former Fresno women’s basketball coach Johnson-Klein recalled a conversation with the athletic director while she was settling in as a new coach. In her testimony, she recalled the athletic director telling her not to bother asking Vivas or Margie Wright (the softball coach) about the adjustment because “they’re lesbian and

they don't have children. So they won't have any knowledge of that...and...they are not going to be around much longer" (Anteola, 2007, ¶. 2). Wright, who is the NCAA's all-time leader in victories for the sport of softball, recently reached a \$605,000 settlement with the university in exchange for withdrawing her complaint accusing the university of retaliation for raising concerns about gender inequities and other employment issues (KSEE News, 2008). These cases demonstrate the fine line walked by women coaches who stand up for themselves as individuals and for women's rights in the sporting arena.

### *Manifestations of Heterosexism and Homonegativism*

Although Griffin (1992b) attributes homophobia as a cause for the decline of women in intercollegiate coaching, the terms heterosexism and/or homonegativism were considered more appropriate for the purposes of this phenomenon because these terms encompass more than just one's irrational fear of homosexuals. Two manifestations of heterosexism and homonegativism then, according to Griffin (1992b) and evident in the recent LSU case are (1) attacks on lesbians in sport; and (2) a preference for male coaches. Attacks on lesbians in sport are most obvious in the hiring and recruiting process. "At some schools, a new coach's heterosexual credentials are scrutinized as carefully as her professional qualifications (Griffin, 1992b, p. 255). Despite labor laws forbidding such practices in the hiring process, this is certainly an advantage in which male coaching candidates do not face.

On the recruiting end, Griffin (1992b) considers negative recruiting to be "the most self-serving of all the attacks on lesbians in sport" (p. 256). This tactic is another weapon, used by both male and female coaches, that puts non-married female coaches at an unfair disadvantage in the recruiting process. On negative recruiting, University of

Texas head women's basketball coach Gail Goesten Kors said, "I think that there are coaches who may try to use this against any female coaches who are not married and just make innuendo, to put fear in some player's minds or parents' minds," (Longman, 2007a, p. D1). Another manifestation of heterosexism and homonegativism is the preference for male coaches. One study offered credence to this assertion when female coaches revealed that "it is essential to hire a male assistant coach to lend a heterosexual persona to a women's team" (Griffin, 1992b, p. 257). Results from Griffin's study also revealed that women, both married and single, are perceived to leave the coaching profession because of stress associated with the lesbian labels and stereotypes (Griffin, 1992b). These issues will be discussed in chapter two. But even with the existing literature, more research is needed that considers the role of heterosexism in the decline of college women head coaches. Until this study, the decline has not been explored in depth from the standpoint of lesbian head coaches themselves.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guides this research is standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004). A byproduct of feminist inquiry, standpoint theory provides an approach to research that seeks to understand, through their own words, subjects who have faced marginalization and/or oppression (Krane, 2001) in a particular situation (e.g., women college coaches). Embracing the understanding that there is no single, objective truth, and that experiences around race, class, gender, and sexual orientation frame one's social existence (Allen & Barber, 1992; Krane, 2001), standpoint theorists affirm that individuals on the margins can depict their lived experiences through a more holistic lens (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). In other words, standpoint theory provides a structure for the

researcher to examine a social phenomenon through the words of the oppressed (Krane, 2001). Because the personal experiences of current and former college women head coaches were sought in an attempt to make meaning of the continuous decline, standpoint theory is an appropriate guide for this research.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the decline of women coaching collegiate sport by exploring lesbian head coaches' perceptions of the role, if any, that heterosexism plays in the decline. Previous researchers have pointed to the existence of a relationship between heterosexism and the decline of women head coaches, but until now, few, if any studies, have actually looked at the decline from the perspective of female head coaches who identify as lesbian.

### Research Questions

The research questions were: (1) What are the perceptions of the role, if any, of workplace heterosexism in the decline of women in intercollegiate coaching? (2) What additional findings will emerge while investigating coaches' perceptions of the decline? Areas of inquiry that the questions focused on were the head coaches' experiences with recruiting, work social functions, hiring processes, and finally their career intentions. For the current head coaches, the questions on career intentions focused on future intentions. For the former coaches, the questions in this section focused on reasons for their departure and the desire, if any, to return to coaching. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) offers a comprehensive list of interview questions.

## Research Design

The research design was qualitative, but more specifically an interview strategy known as the in-depth, or the long interview, was employed. Because little was known about the role of heterosexism in the decline of women in intercollegiate coaching aside from well-supported postulations, a qualitative approach to inquiry was particularly valuable for this undertaking. It is appropriate to use an in-depth interview method when the researcher is seeking to uncover information on a deeper level than would be revealed in surveys, informal interviewing, or focus groups (Johnson, 2002). In-depth interviews tend to elicit personal information, including but not limited to participants' identity, lived experiences, values, and perspective (Johnson, 2002).

Feminist research, but more specifically for the purposes of this study, a standpoint approach to inquiry (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004), asserts that women's lived experiences are pivotal in the discovery of knowledge. Because it is believed that research must seek to engage those on margins as well as in the mainstream, participants in this study met one of two criteria: (1) current National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I female head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual; and/or (2) former NCAA Division I female head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual.

To locate these individuals, a form of purposeful sampling known as snowball sampling was employed. As Kvale (1996) notes, snowball sampling is a strategy in which the researcher introduces oneself to or perhaps previously knows one or several suitable informants. These individuals then inform others with similar characteristics about the study and solicit their participation. Such alternative sampling techniques tend to be utilized when researchers are sampling statistical minorities (Rankin, 2003).

Evidence points to the value of both telephone and face-to-face interviewing. Distance between the participants and the researcher was considered in selecting which interview method to use, as was the comfort level of participants due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Whether telephone interviewing, face-to-face interviewing, or both, Miller (2005) privileges neither strategy over the other and considers both to be sufficient approaches. Once the data was collected and transcribed, a traditional qualitative data analysis approach was utilized. More specifically domain analyses were constructed to illustrate emerging themes.

### Definitions

For this study, definitions of relevant terms are provided below.

*Bisexual:* A person who has the ability to be physically, spiritually, intellectually, and romantically attracted to or committed to another individual, regardless of sex or gender.

*Closet:* A variety of behaviors associated with hiding one's sexual orientation. A gay, lesbian, or bisexual person who does not disclose his or her sexual orientation is closeted or "in the closet."

*Coming out:* A variety of behaviors or assertions that informs individuals that one is gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). Also referred to as "out."

*Disclosure:* Communication or lack of communication to coworkers about one's sexual orientation (Flojo, 2005).

*Domestic partner:* Two individuals not related by blood who have an intimate and committed relationship and are jointly responsible for basic living expenses.

*Head coach:* "In most hierarchical sport structures, the head coach is the leader or individual in charge of a group of athletes and is considered the person who has the most

power in decision making, playing time, and team administrative duties” (Kauer, 2005, p. 11).

*Heteronormativity*: “Refers to the practice of organizing patterns of thought, basic awareness, and raw beliefs around the presumption of universal heterosexual desire, behavior, and identity. Heteronormativity acknowledges no variations, no exceptions, no resistance, and no dissent: it becomes the way the world is perceived” (Kauer, 2005, p. 11).

*Heterosexism*: “An ideological system that denies, denigrates, or stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community” (Smith & Ingram, 2004, p. 57).

*Homologous reproduction*: A process whereby dominants reproduce themselves based on social and/or physical characteristics (Stangl & Kane, 1991). Often referred to as the good ole’ boys network.

*Homophobia*: The irrational fear and/or intolerance of homosexuality (Rotella & Murray, 1991).

*Homosexual*: A person who is physically, spiritually, intellectually, and romantically attracted to or committed to someone of the same sex. This term will be used interchangeably with gay or lesbian.

*Heterosexual*: A person who is physically, spiritually, intellectually, and romantically attracted to or committed to someone of the opposite sex.

*Homonegativism*: “Purposeful endorsement of negative stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against non-heterosexuals” (Krane, Surface, & Alexander, 2005, p. 328).

*Intercollegiate athletics:* Varsity athletic competition that exists between teams comprised of students attending and representing institutions of higher education. The terms *athletics* and *sport* are used interchangeably.

*Internalized homophobia:* A display of negative attitudes toward homosexuality in other individuals and toward one's own homosexuality (Shidlo, 1994).

*Lesbian:* A woman who is physically, spiritually, romantically, intellectually, and emotionally attracted to or committed to another woman. This word will be used interchangeably with the term *gay*.

*Marginalized:* to be 'considered other'. Those who are marginalized begin to feel as if they do not matter (Krane, 2001; Schlossberg, 1989).

*Negative recruiting:* "Occurs when coaches try to persuade a potential recruit to choose their school by making disparaging comments about another school that the recruit might be considering" (Griffin, 1998, p.82).

*Open:* A variety of subtle behaviors that signal to individuals that one is gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

*Oppression:* "A system of social inequality through which one group is positioned to dominate and benefit from the exploitation and subordination of another" (Johnson, 1997).

*Patriarchy:* An imposed belief in male supremacy and control (Pharr, 1998).

*Queer:* A term "used to encompass all variations in sexual desire, activity, and identity that are not straight" or heterosexual (Rocco & Gallagher, 2006, p. 30).

*Sexual orientation:* "Generally defined as an individual's enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and relational attraction to someone else. (Human Rights Campaign, 2007, p. 11)



*Transgender*: Applies to “individuals whose gender expression or gender identity transgresses socially prescribed gender roles or expectations” (ADL, 2005, p. 20).

*Workplace discrimination*: “Unfair and negative treatment of workers or job applicants based on personal attributes that are irrelevant to job performance.” (Chung, 2001, p. 34).

*Work-family conflict*: “A type of interrole conflict wherein at least some work and family responsibilities are not compatible and have resultant effects on each domain” (Dixon and Bruening, 2007, p. 380).

### Delimitations

This study was delimited to eight current and former NCAA Division I head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual and are not legally married by federal standards. In addition, despite researchers identifying that homophobia, heterosexism, and homonegativism exist in college sport, this research mostly focused on heterosexism in order to maintain the practicality of the study.

### Limitations

Because the study was qualitative, the findings cannot be generalized to all unmarried collegiate coaches who identify as non-heterosexual. However, the findings contribute to the current literature on heterosexism in college sport. Also, although the interview questions were framed to address multiple issues that these coaches may face or have faced, other complexities in their experiences may not be accounted for.

### Significance of the Study

The results of this study have implications for college researchers, organizations, athletic administrators, coaches, and even student-athletes. Particular areas in college sport that might be influenced by the findings include human resources, search committee

processes, retention efforts, and diversity and inclusion entities. Although sexual orientation is by no means a new issue in sport, there is a deficiency in efforts to understand the complexity of lesbians in athletics (Krane & Barber, 2005). Few studies (Ianotta & Kane, 2002; Kauer, 2005; Krane & Barber, 2005) have explored the issues of homophobia, homonegativism, and/or heterosexism in college sport from the standpoint of lesbian coaches. Until now, few, if any, are known to have asked lesbian coaches their perception of the role of heterosexism in the continuous decline of college women head coaches.

### Summary

From an organizational perspective, it is clear how a work environment colored by heterosexism can negatively employees who do not identify as heterosexual (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). But all women in sport are affected by the image of female athletes and coaches as “masculine, butch, or lesbian” (Krane, Surface, & Alexander, 2005, p.327). Coping with heterosexism and homonegativism is exhausting and distracting both for student-athletes and coaches (Griffin, 1998; Krane, 1995; Krane & Barber, 2005; Krane, Surface, & Alexander, 2005). Thus, it made sense to delve further into this issue to see whether or not coaches perceived there to be a relationship between heterosexism and the decline of women head coaches.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

There are three key reasons cited for the decline of female college head coaches. But unlike homologous reproduction and work-family conflict, issues that tend to unite women coaches in a quest for change, discrimination and stereotyping of women coaches, particularly with regards to the notorious lesbian label, has divided and even paralyzed the women's coaching community. Thus, the issue of sexual orientation discrimination and stereotyping of female college coaches will be explored further.

#### Literature Review

This literature review is divided into five sections: The Decline of Women in Coaching; Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace; Sexual Orientation Issues in Higher Education; Attitudes toward Homosexuality in College Athletics; and finally, the Theoretical Framework. The decline of women in coaching section details literature that focuses on different reasons for the decline. This section is imperative because it set the stage for the study's inquiry into whether or not coaches see a relationship between heterosexism and the decline of women in coaching. The second section offers a more general overview of how sexual orientation issues in the workplace affect employees. The third section is a description of how sexual orientation issues have

evolved in higher education, from student expulsion to activism, marginalization of faculty to curriculum development, and finally policy struggles, implementation, and their affect on individuals. The fourth section details literature on how homosexuality has been and continues to be depicted in the college athletics environment by student-athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators. This section primarily focuses on how homophobia, homonegativism, and heterosexism are manifested and perpetuated in college sport. But it also reveals a scarcity of research from gay and lesbian perspectives in athletics. Using standpoint theory, the fifth and final section describes the theoretical insights and framework that guided this study.

#### The Decline of Women in Coaching

The number of females participating in collegiate sport is an all-time high of 180,000, compared to just 16,000 in 1970 (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). In addition, while institutions of higher education sponsored an average of 2.5 women's teams in 1970, today the average number of women's teams per school is 8.45 (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). The total number of women's teams in intercollegiate sport is at an all-time high of 8,702 (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). Despite the significant rise in participation opportunities for women in college sport, the inverse is present for female head coaches. In 1972, the year that Title IX was enacted, female head coaches led 90 percent of collegiate women's teams (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). Today's representation of female head coaches is at an all time low of 42.4 percent for women's sport and 17.7 percent for all sports, including men and women's teams (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). In other words, 82.3 percent of all college teams are lead by male coaches. Broken down by each NCAA division for women's sport, female coaches lead 43.9 percent of Division I teams,

36.2 percent of Division II teams, and 44.4 percent of Division III teams (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). In fact, of the 25 NCAA sanctioned sports, in only seven are there more female head coaches than male head coaches. Those sports include basketball (60.8% female head coaches in 2006 compared to 79.4% female head coaches in 1978), field hockey (94.2% female head coaches in 2006 compared to 99.1% female head coaches in 1978), lacrosse (82.5% female head coaches in 2006 compared to 90.7% female head coaches in 1978), riding/equestrian (90% female head coaches in 2006 compared to 75% female head coaches in 2006), softball (61.3% female head coaches in 2006 compared to 83.5% female head coaches in 1978), synchronized swimming (100% female head coaches in 2006 compared to 85% female head coaches in 1978), and volleyball (53.5% female head coaches in 2006 compared to 86.6% female head coaches in 1978) (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). Researchers took note of the dwindling numbers more than 20 years ago in a report titled, *Status of Women in Athletics: Changes and Causes* (Carpenter & Acosta, 1985). These findings sparked an influx of research trying to make sense of this decline.

R. Vivian Acosta and Linda Jean Carpenter (1985) are the pioneers who originally published the data on the decline of women head coaches in college athletics. In an effort to begin making sense of the decline, Carpenter and Acosta (1985) sought input from 500 men and women college athletic administrators across the United States to understand their perceptions on this phenomenon. Of the 307 respondents, they found that men and women emphasized different reasons for the decline. Women felt that the most significant reason for the decline was “the success of the old boys’ club”, whereas men perceived the most important reason to be “the lack of qualified women coaches and

administrators” (p. 35). Since these results were initially published, scholars have examined these and other areas that focus on the decline of women head coaches. One area, homologous reproduction, will be discussed next.

### *Homologous Reproduction*

Homologous reproduction is the idea that the dominant group within an organization will attempt to strategically guard their power and privilege by reproducing an image of themselves (Kanter, 1977). Sagas, Cunningham, and Teed (2006) state, “homologous reproduction is at least one major underlying variable that contributes to the continued under-representation of female coaches” (p. 503). They determined this in their quantitative analysis of secondary data from the 2002-2003 Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA). More specifically, they used the data to establish a relationship between the head coaches’ gender and the gender make-up of assistant coaches in four separate team sport across NCAA Divisions I, II, and III (n = 2,964). But how did the decline begin if women once occupied 90 percent of head coaching positions for women’s sport? Shouldn’t the theory of homologous reproduction have worked in their favor and resulted in women replicating themselves? The reality is that when women occupied a significant majority of head coaching positions in 1972, men and women’s collegiate sport were under separate governing bodies - the men under the NCAA and the women under the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). Referred to as merger by some and as a takeover by women’s sport advocates, many AIAW members lost control and influence over policies and decisions affecting women’s sport upon the merger (Lovett & Lowry, 1991). Thus, when women, who held the majority of the positions prior to and just after Title IX left coaching, those vacancies were not filled

with other women (Stangl & Kane, 1991). They determined this to be largely due to the fact that following the merger, most athletic directors were (and still are) men and they simply reproduced themselves in the hiring process. This statement is confirmed by their quantitative study results from a random sample of 937 public high schools listed in the annual directories of the Ohio High School Athletic Association for the school years 1974-75, 1982-83, and 1988-89. For all three time periods, Stangl and Kane (1991) found a positive correlation between the sex of the athletic director and the sex of the head coach, indicating a relationship between the sex of the dominant group and the sex of the subordinate group in the hiring process.

The NCAA has paid close attention to the theory of homologous reproduction since Acosta and Carpenter released the earliest of their findings in 1985. Consistent with Acosta and Carpenter's (1985) results, the NCAA's mixed-method survey of 286 women athletic administrators across all NCAA divisions in the United States revealed that the prevalence of men in athletics was directly responsible for the decline of women in both administrative and head coaching positions within college sport (NCAA, 1989). When asked their thoughts on the decline, the most common response either directly stated the "old boys' network" or somehow alluded to it (p. 16). But women are not the only population to offer homologous reproduction as a reason for the decline. Utilizing a sample of coaches in attendance at a high school coaching convention in Texas, Lowery, Lovett, and Lopiano (1991) compared the responses of male (200) and female (258) coaches regarding problems or sources of dissatisfaction in their coaching responsibilities. In this mixed-method study, the authors found that both the women and

the men participants saw the “old boys club” as successful in “keeping the women out and the men in the hiring process” (p. 235).

If the “old boys club” has been successful in hiring men as head coaches in women’s athletics, then the antithesis of their success is the failure or lack of an “old girls club” or “women’s network”. The first issue here is that there are very few female athletic directors, both at the interscholastic and intercollegiate levels (Stangl & Kane, 1991). Lowery, Lovett, and Lopiano (1991) believe that the issue is not so much the success of the male network, but rather the lack of a comparable female network or the inability of women to gain access into the male network.

Striving to explore gender and power relations in the work environment for former female head coaches and administrators, researchers noted the impact, but also lack thereof, that the women’s athletic league had on female coaches’ and administrators’ personal and professional experiences. Studying 11 women across North America (four American and seven Canadian) who had left collegiate coaching or administration, Inglis, Danylchuck, and Pastore (2000) found in their qualitative inquiry that the women’s network was not strong enough to sustain their desire to remain in their positions. Lowry and Lovett (1997) reported similar results in their study to determine reasons women left coaching. When asked to rank the reasons for their departure, 53 percent of the 929 respondents, women across the United States who had left interscholastic and intercollegiate coaching, cited “lack of support due to absence of good old girls club” (p. 43).

Regardless of whether the decline of women head coaches is due to the success of the old boys club or the failure or lack of an old girls club, research supports the theory of



homologous reproduction as one explanation for the decline of women head coaches in college sport (Acosta & Carpenter, 1985; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000; Lowry & Lovett, 1997; Lowery, Lovett, & Lopiano, 1991; NCAA, 1989; Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006; Stangl & Kane, 1991). The research presented in this section suggests the need for women in sport to organize around ways to motivate and sustain women's desires to enter and/or remain in the field of collegiate coaching. In the next section, the issue of work-family conflict for women head coaches will be discussed.

### *Work-Family Conflict*

Inglis, Danylchuk, and Pastore (1996) state that "when good communication, clearly defined job responsibilities, employer sensitivity, satisfactory interactions with supervisors, and supervisory skills are evident, the ability to manage one's time and balance work and family life are easier to accomplish" (p. 241). But unfortunately, research on work-family conflict issues for women in coaching communicates a different scenario. Early and present day inquiries into the decline of women head coaches reveal work-family conflict concerns as a persistent reason why women leave coaching or choose not to pursue the profession at all.

Quantitative data collected from 256 present and 105 former female interscholastic coaches in Wisconsin revealed that women left coaching due to perceived time and role conflicts with their individual lives (Hart, Hasbrook, & Mathes, 1986). Whereas women in coaching consistently note time constraints as a reason for dissatisfaction or departure from coaching, the role conflict issue raised by the researchers is discussed in the *discrimination and stereotyping* section.

Of the 1,599 female student-athletes surveyed by the NCAA (1989), only 5.3 percent said that they intended to seek a position in college athletics immediately after their graduation. They were satisfied with their athletic experience, but pursuing the field beyond their student-athlete experience was not a consideration. Of those who felt this way, 65.2 percent were seeking a traditional nine to five job upon graduation. Typical comments included, "I want a job where I can have a social life; I do not want a job that requires me to work on almost all weekends and also requires a lot of traveling beyond home; I am excited about having a normal schedule..." (p. 3). Results from the NCAA (1989) survey of female coaches (n = 531) at the time, however, revealed that these coaches would choose to coach again if presented with the opportunity (NCAA, 1989). They felt this way despite the fact that 93.9 percent said that coaching was an "infringement on family affairs" (p. 34). This study demonstrates several concerns. The first issue is that a significant majority of the women coaches who were surveyed reported a conflict between work and family life. Although this does not appear to affect their own employment decisions, the largest pool of future candidates, the student-athletes, have taken notice and are consequently choosing not to consider coaching as a career.

Researchers continue to pay close attention to the work-family conflict concern, attempting to make sense of women's role in the patriarchal atmosphere of sport. Studies have evolved from looking at this issue from an individual level (Lowry & Lovett, 1997; Lowery, Lovett, & Lopiano, 1991; Weiss & Stevens, 1993) to more recent research that focuses on the organizational-structure and sociocultural-level factors (Dixon & Bruening, 2007) affecting women coaches. In their most recent study, utilizing multiple focus

groups totaling 41 NCAA Division I female head coaches with children, Dixon and Bruening (2007) provide information concerning why women may choose or choose not to coach, why they remain in or decide to depart from coaching, and the impact that these decisions have on the next generation of females in sport. Their individual level results sparked the question, "Why are family sacrifices more common and why does that seem to be accepted as status quo among the coaching profession?" (p. 391). Regarding the organizational structure itself, they found that women would change the amount of time spent traveling and in the office if provided the opportunity. Sociocultural factors that the head coaches expressed concerns about were the male-dominated workplace environment, home responsibilities, and the social expectations of them as mothers. Ultimately, Dixon and Bruening's (2007) analysis exposed the role that sociocultural factors (e.g., gender expectations, cultural norms) play in shaping and confining individual factors (e.g., values, family structure, gender), specifically women coaches, in the context of work-family conflict. More specifically, women coaches appear to be more subjected to a dilemma concerning their work and home responsibilities than perhaps their male coaching counterparts. This work family incongruence for women coaches seems to result in a more favorable coaching-life expectancy for male coaches.

### *Discrimination and Stereotyping*

One of the more divisive issues that researchers have focused on concerning women in sport is discrimination and stereotyping. As previously noted, these issues are discussed together, and not separately, because of the complementary role they play in the marginalization of women in sport. But whereas work-family conflict and homologous reproduction have been researched intensively in direct relation to the

decline of women head coaches, the issue of discrimination and stereotyping remains more fragmented. Most of the discrimination and stereotyping of women in sport is due to society's expectations of women, particularly the threat that a woman poses when she performs outside of her gender expectation.

The NCAA (1989) study appears to be the first to establish quantitative data regarding women's feelings on sex-role discrimination and stereotyping in college athletics. When student-athletes ( $n = 1,577$ ) across the United States were asked about their awareness of any stereotyping or fallacies that might present barriers for women in athletic-related careers, nearly fifty percent of the student-athletes referred to the lesbian stereotype (NCAA, 1989). Of those who believed there to be an image problem for women in athletics, 45.8 % explicitly pointed to the lesbian stereotype of women in sport. Only 19.7 %, however, said that unfavorable stereotyping would influence their decision to choose a career outside of college athletics. Despite such sentiment, in the open-ended response section for the stereotyping issue, most of the student athletes' perpetuated the lesbian stereotype. For example, typical comments from student-athletes included, "Problems? Dykes. Dyke coaches recruit dyke players, it seems to be true, not a misconception; I actually would like to have a career in intercollegiate athletics, but one of the main reasons is because of what people think of the 'stereotypical' woman coach; The negative image of women in an intercollegiate career scares me. I've met too many lesbians in my college career. I don't want to have that image!" (p. 6). Other stereotypes reported by the student-athletes included that women in sport were considered too masculine, too fragile, not skilled enough, and too emotional (NCAA, 1989). Although the lesbian label was by far the most referenced stereotype or misconception that the

student-athletes considered as a barrier to recruiting and retaining women in the sport profession, they were more at ease with their own image than they were with the perceived image of women in coaching. Perhaps this is one reason that they are content with their image and experiences as student-athletes, but have little to no desire to enter the coaching profession.

The survey responses from female athletic-administrators and coaches revealed data consistent with that of the female student-athletes. More specifically, more than half of the athletic administrators in the study said that their sport involvement often led others to assume that they are lesbians. Of the coaches surveyed, 81.5 % identified stereotypes as a negative influence on their decision to coach. They specifically discussed homosexuality as a concern in the open-ended response section, with 50.9 % of the respondents directly addressing the issue of sexual orientation. Once again, however, some coaches perpetuated the stereotypes. One coach said, "The most widely known stereotype is that women in this field are lesbians. Try to weed out masculine women to try to change the mentality of women in athletics" (NCAA, 1989, p. 41). For female athletes and coaches who make such statements, it is the charge of being too masculine – as expressed through the charge of being lesbian, which threatens their gender identity.

The impact of homophobia, heterosexism, and homonegativism on women in sport is addressed more thoroughly in a latter section, however, another issue with regard to stereotyping and discrimination that researchers note is sex-role stereotyping. Sex-role stereotyping differs from sexual orientation bias or perceptions in that sex-role stereotyping specifically focuses on gender and gender expectations.

In examining the validity of sex-biased presumptions that discredit female coaches, Hasbrook, Hart, Mathes, and True (1990) determined the possibility of a relationship between “the status of a coaching position (i.e., major revenue producing sport vs. minor revenue producing sport) and the degree to which sex bias in hiring coaches occurs (p. 265). This potential relationship was uncovered from results of a quantitative statewide study of 256 female and 296 male interscholastic coaches in Missouri and 2,719 male and 1449 female interscholastic coaches nationwide.

The women administrators (14.8 %) in the NCAA (1989) study perceived masculine stereotypes to be a barrier in their work. One administrator said, “Aggressive women in administration are viewed as less feminine, whereas men are seen as ‘go getters’ or achievers” (p. 22). Others found that women coaches expressed perceived sex-role conflicts as reasons for leaving the field (e.g., Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 1996; Lowery, Lovett, & Lopiano, 1991; Sweeney, 2004). In a quantitative study of 147 male and female coaches representing six women’s sports across six elite NCAA Division I conferences, Sweeney (2004) found female coaches to be more attached to their gender role expectations of getting married/having a partner than male coaches surveyed.

### *Salary Inequities*

Although not one of the three most-noted issues pertaining to the decline of women head coaches, but perhaps the most identifiable and numerically justified reason that women are leaving the field of college coaching, is inequitable financial compensation. But for the same reason, men are not taking the lower paying coaching jobs (for women’s sport) either. It is important to mention this because in general, salary inequities between men and women’s sport remain an issue in college athletics. In the

NCAA (1989) study, student-athletes, coaches, and administrators identified inadequate salaries as a barrier to entry and retention in the field. In fact, coaches (96.7 percent) in the NCAA study categorized “inadequate salary relative to time commitment involved” as the top factor negatively affecting their choice to coach college sport. A close second was “inadequate salary in general” (p. 35). Subsequent research has revealed quite poignantly that salary deficiencies, particularly in conjunction with the other issues presented, are contributing to the attrition of women coaches in college sport (Knoppers, Meyer, Ewing, & Forest., 1991; Lowry & Lovett, 1997; Lovett, Lowry, & Lopiano, 1991). Knoppers et al. (1991) examined results from a quantitative survey in which 947 coaches (808 women, 639 men) across NCAA Division I sport responded to questions in two categories: (1) opportunity and (2) work behaviors. Financial opportunity was analyzed in the context of work behaviors (e.g., aspirations, satisfaction, and work exit). Overall, they found that women were significantly more likely to exit coaching than men, citing conditions of low pay, the desire for more challenge, returning to school, non-sport career opportunities, too much time spent recruiting, and student-athletes with difficult personalities. Low pay, however, was the greatest point of contention for both men and women coaches in this study. Asking respondents to rank their reasons for leaving the coaching profession, Lowry and Lovett (1997) found that “salaries and other rewards inadequate” were indicated by 50.38 percent of the former coaches in the study (p.43). This was the 7<sup>th</sup> most common reason for leaving, behind time-demands (69.86%), other professional opportunities (62.97%), heavy work-load (59.42%), lack of support due to no women’s network (53.07%), lack of institutional and administrative support (50.70%), and covert discrimination (50.7%). In their study on perceived problems and sources of

dissatisfaction for coaches of female sport, Lovett, Lowry, & Lopiano (1991) found that both the male and female respondents considered the number one source of dissatisfaction to be their salaries in comparison to coaches of male sport.

Unlike the three main issues in this section (homologous reproduction, work-family conflict, and discrimination & stereotypes), salary inequities for coaches of women's sport negatively affect both men and women. It is important to mention the salary issue for coaches of women's sport as a concern with regard to the decline, but critical to remember that this issue affects both male and female coaches (not just women), especially those who lead non-revenue generating sports.

### *Summary*

Previous research suggests that multiple factors, either independently or in association with one another, are influencing women's decisions to either never enter or leave the profession of college head coaching altogether. The theory of homologous reproduction, work-family conflict, sex-role conflict, and salary inequities have been directly linked by numerous researchers to the decline of women head coaches in higher education. The NCAA (1989) study specifically attributed the issue of sexual orientation stereotyping to the decline of women head coaches. Since then, most research on sexual orientation issues in college sport has only focused on examples of homophobia, heterosexism, and homonegativism in college athletics. There is limited research examining the issue of heterosexism in college athletics in relation to the decline of women coaches. The next section will explore and provide current empirical research and literature on workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation.



## Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace

### *Introduction*

Discrimination in the workplace is not a new phenomenon. Legal decisions and new legislation continue to play a significant role in the changing workforce. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the most recent comprehensive law to prevent discrimination in this country; however sexual orientation is not protected as a class under this statute. One result of sexual orientation being excluded from this law is that “the value of diversity to virtually all organizations was originally conceived without reference to sexual orientation...it stopped at race, gender, national origin, and ethnicity” (Hill, 2006, p. 9). More recent activism for gay and lesbian rights, however, has triggered some states and local jurisdictions to legally protect non-heterosexual individuals from employment discrimination.

### *Status of Sexual Orientation in the Workplace*

When the majority of individuals who do not identify as heterosexual arrive at their workplace, there is no guarantee that they will be protected on the basis of their sexual orientation. Unlike most minorities in this country, if their rights are infringed upon and they believe it is because of their sexual orientation, no federal law provides them with the opportunity to oppose such treatment through administrative or judicial processes (Badgett, 1996).

Despite the absence of federal protection in employment for non-heterosexual individuals, 27 states and Washington D.C. have outlawed discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation (Human Rights Campaign, 2007). Institutions of higher education have also taken a step toward publicly stating the value that all employees,

regardless of sexual orientation, bring to the college campus. Of the institutions that made up the *US News and World Report's* Top 125 Colleges and Universities, 90 percent of them prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Human Rights Campaign, 2007). All of the colleges and universities in the *US News and World Report's* Top Ten list sexual orientation as a protected class and in addition offer health benefits for employee's domestic partners (Human Rights Campaign, 2007). Efforts such as these send a signal to gay and lesbian employees that they are valued not only for their talents, but also for their differences.

#### *Workplace Discrimination*

Discrimination in the workplace has evolved into a major topic in the increasingly growing literature surrounding vocational issues for individuals who do not identify as heterosexual (e.g., Chung, 2001; Croteau, 1996; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996; Griffin, 1992b). Despite more recent attempts to protect individuals in employment from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, quantitative findings from a laboratory based résumé study of 89 undergraduate students at a small, private, Southwestern university reveal that discrimination against gay men and lesbians in hiring remains a prevalent practice (Griffith & Quiñones, 2001). Furthermore, Waldo's (1999) quantitative study of 287 participants in two different locations (one mid-sized Northeastern city and a small midwestern city) affirms that a relationship exists between heterosexism and decreased job satisfaction. The same study showed a positive relationship between disclosure and job anxiety.

For lesbians more specifically, discrimination in the work environment and homophobic sentiment poses threats in terms of "employment status and income,

limitations in job mobility, constricted peer and supervisory relationships, potential for termination, and a hostile workplace climate” (Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996, p. 229). In a quantitative study of 123 employed lesbians across the United States, Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger (1996) found no relationship between disclosure and job stress, coping, or occupational satisfaction. They did find, however, that occupational climate influenced job stress and coping, and therefore influenced work satisfaction. Chung (2001) says that contextually, negative workplace experiences play a significant factor in the career development and decisions for individuals do not identify as heterosexual. Consequently, in a qualitative study of ten lesbian women from a Midwestern city on the effects of their lesbian identity on their career path, Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, and Ketzenberger (1996) concluded that many women feel compelled to remain in the closet due to the impact that discrimination might have on their careers. Each of these three studies of lesbian populations in the workplace reveals a relationship between work environment and anxiety, stress, and/or career intentions. Parallels should therefore be considered with regard to lesbian head coaches.

The literature reveals that individuals who do not identify as heterosexual face a dilemma when deciding whether or not to disclose their sexual orientation at work (e.g., Boatwright et al., 1996; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Griffith and Hebl (2002) found a positive relationship between sexual orientation disclosure and satisfaction in their quantitative study of 220 gay men and 159 lesbians in Houston, Texas. But similar to Waldo’s (1999) and Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger’s (1996) study, they also found that disclosure was related to job anxiety. In a separate nationwide quantitative study of 188 same-sex couples, Rostosky and Riggle (2002) found a positive

relationship between the existence of a workplace non-discrimination policy and both less internalized homophobia and the degree to which an individual was out at their place of employment. These studies reveal both the positive and negative consequences of employee disclosure.

Those who identify as heterosexual may question why this issue even needs to be discussed at all. The reality is that heterosexuals often unintentionally and without consequence reveal their sexual orientation daily during simple non-work related break room or casual conversations. Therefore, employees who do not identify as heterosexual are consciously faced with a dilemma during those seemingly innocent break room discussions: to disclose or not to disclose their sexual orientation. Rocco and Gallagher (2006) discuss how “for every new introduction or encounter, a decision is made about how much to disclose, when to disclose, and what the consequences are if the decision to disclose was ill advised or the wrong decision” (p. 32). Essentially, Griffith and Hebl (2002) assert that non-heterosexual employees face problems regardless of whether or not they choose to disclose. Consequences of disclosure might include the increased likelihood for targeted discrimination, job termination, verbal attacks or threats of physical harm (Rostosky & Riggle, 2000). Alternatively, those who feel compelled to keep their sexual orientation hidden expend energy that could go towards their work and career development (e.g., Rocco & Gallagher, 2006; Rostosky & Riggle, 2000). These remarks demonstrate that regardless of whether these individuals are “out” or “in the closet” at work, they are more than likely affected in one way or another.

### *The Influence of Non-Discrimination Policies*

A key factor in whether or not individuals who do not identify as heterosexual feel safe coming out at work is the existence or non-existence of a workplace non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation. Muñoz and Thomas (2006) state “because there is no specific federal protection against discrimination toward sexual minorities, statements of non-discrimination are usually the only indication that discriminatory behaviors will not be tolerated within an organization” (p. 92). In their quantitative study of 97 gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, results showed that negative psychological health outcomes were related to workplace heterosexism and non-affirmative social encounters. Smith and Ingram (1995) insist “organizational level policies such as domestic partner benefits and employment non-discrimination clauses that include sexual orientation show respect for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) employees” (p. 65). Rostosky and Riggle (2002) assert that such policies send the message to non-heterosexual employees that they are valued and that heterosexism will not be tolerated. Not surprisingly, LGB workers who feel safer are more likely to speak their truth in these contexts (Rostosky & Riggle, 2002).

Employees are more likely to remain working for companies that send the message and consistently demonstrate that discrimination will not be condoned in any form (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). Thus, workers who do not identify as heterosexual and feel safe disclosing their sexual orientation are likely to be more satisfied with their work environment and therefore more committed to their job (Croteau & Lark, 1995; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1995; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995).

### *Consequences of a Heterosexist Environment*

Whether or not they intend to, organizations that do not include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies open the door for an unwelcoming and sometimes hostile climate for employees who do not identify as heterosexual. Often in the form of anti-gay jokes and comments, non-heterosexual professionals are faced with the dilemma of how to respond and if they should even respond at all (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). Usually a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation is necessary for individuals to address these issues (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995).

Across all organizations including higher education, one consequence of an unwelcoming environment toward non-heterosexual employees is that these individuals often choose to conceal their sexual identity due to fears associated with harassment or exclusion, poor performance reviews, less merit recommendations or promotions, movement to undesirable jobs, and even employment termination (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). In a mixed-method study of 203 lesbians in New York City, Levine and Leonard (1984) found that 59 % of the women in their sample were satisfied with the decision not to disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace because they felt that it avoided problems. Although such reasons may justify why one might choose to remain in the closet, there are both individual and organizational costs associated with an employee's decision to remain closeted.

At the individual level, "the energy it takes to hide is immense" (Powers, 1996, p.83). Boatwright et al. (1996) found that lesbian women who chose not to disclose their sexual orientation often felt guilty or troubled by the realization of their own internalized homophobia. Their findings support the earlier contributions of Griffin (1992a), Hall

(1986), and Woods and Harbeck (1992). For their study of gay and lesbian Harvard Business School Alumni, Friskopp and Silverstein (1995) surveyed 67 individuals across the United States and abroad and they interviewed more than 100 individuals in the United States on their occupational experiences. In doing so, they found that nearly all of those they interviewed suffered from being in the closet at work, although many noted that they would be more inclined to come out if they could be assured that it would not hurt their careers.

At the organizational level, Powers (1996) encourages individuals to ask themselves, "How inclined would you be to go out of your way to ensure an organization's success when that organization excludes you, for any reason?" (p. 82). Accordingly, organizations tend to suffer when employees who do not identify as heterosexual confine themselves to the closet. "Excluding people forces them to expend their energies on non-work related items, such as finding ways to network, and supporting and protecting themselves from abuse and discrimination (Powers, 1996, p. 81). As a result, energy that could and should be utilized toward work productivity is often exerted elsewhere and therefore the organization is not maximizing productivity.

### *Summary*

Research findings demonstrate that individuals who do not identify as heterosexual and feel safe disclosing their identity in the work environment are more likely to be satisfied and productive, and therefore they are more prone to remain loyal to their workplace (Croteau & Lark, 1995; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1995; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Consequently, a work environment in which heterosexism is ubiquitous can negatively effect these

employees, diminishing their efficiency (Smith & Ingram, 2004) and increasing the likelihood that they will expend energy on networking and potentially seeking an alternative job (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). These findings are certainly transferable to the college sport environment and provided impetus to explore the workplace climate for head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual. Whereas the previous literature focused on sexual orientation issues in the general work environment, the next section of this literature review will center on the environment for lesbian and gay individuals in higher education.

### Sexual Orientation Issues in Higher Education

This section provides a framework for understanding the significance of this topic by first presenting a historical overview of the gay and lesbian experience in higher education. The first subsection offers a history of the gay and lesbian student experience in higher education. The literature presented on this experience spans from the 1920's, when students who were found guilty of homosexuality were expelled, to the formation and empowerment of gay and lesbian focused student organizations. The proceeding subsections include literature on the gay and lesbian faculty experience, institutional change around gay and lesbian issues, and finally current issues concerning the gay and lesbian experience in higher education. Although this section is more generally focused on higher education, the experiences of both students and faculty offer a background for understanding today's climate for gay and lesbian individuals in college sport.

#### *Gay and Lesbian Student Experience - Background and History*

Archives dating back to 1920 set the stage for tracing the history of the gay and lesbian college student experience. Harvard University's Secret Court was implemented



in 1920 to “purge Harvard of homosexuals” (Wright, 2005, p. 64). Records reveal that the court’s primary motivation for convicting student offenders was that “homosexuality was a terrible wrong and a sin beyond redemption. Anyone who could engage in sex with his own gender, even once, was a permanent threat to decent people and had to be banished” (Wright, 2005, epilogue). This language implies an assumption and worldview that homosexuality is equated with a specific sexual act and consequently denies these persons’ existence in any other capacity. Harvard’s administrators felt that by enacting this Secret Court and punishing the perpetrators, they would be “protecting the idealized man” that the university was committed to producing (Wright, 2005, p. 123).

Although Harvard’s Secret Court was in session for less than a month, the consequences of its decisions lasted much longer. It destroyed careers, led to suicides, and left a permanent stain on Harvard’s past (Wright, 2005). When asked about the Secret Court, former Harvard President Lawrence Summers said:

These reports of events long ago are extremely disturbing. They are a part of our past that we have rightly left behind. I want to express our deep regret for the way this situation was handled. As well as for the anguish the students and their families must have experienced eight decades ago... the affair was abhorrent and an affront to the values of our university...I ask myself repeatedly...Are we administrators doing anything now that will look as bad in eighty years?”  
(Wright, 2005, epilogue)

### *Pre-Stonewall Era*

Aside from Harvard’s Secret Court, historical documentation of the lesbian and gay college student experience remained virtually lifeless until the late 1960’s. Prior to the late 1960’s and reminiscent of Harvard’s 1920’s, college students who socialized with homosexuals or were suspected of being homosexual were investigated, disciplined,

charged with indecency, and even expelled (Dilley, 2002). For this reason, there were very few college-based gay and lesbian focused student organizations.

Records indicate that the first Student Homophile League (SHL) was formed at Columbia University in 1967, followed soon after by student organizations at the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Oregon, Yale University, The University of Kansas, the University of Southern California, Pennsylvania State University, and New York University (Dilley, 2002). Although programming spanned from support groups to student protests, there is no record as to whether or not these organizations were officially recognized by their respective universities. Regardless of their institutional standing, however, these groups were not slow to involve themselves in community issues. The SHL at Columbia University's first major decision was to issue a "thirteen-point declaration of principles which asserted the fundamental human right of every homosexual to develop and achieve his full potential and dignity as a human being" (Kaiser, 1997, p. 146).

#### *A Turning Point – The Stonewall Riots of 1969*

Consistent with other gay and lesbian activists, students' activist efforts did not gain much attention until the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Considered the beginning of the gay liberation movement, the Stonewall Riots were sparked when police raided a gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York known as the Stonewall Inn (Armstrong & Craig, 2006). Unlike previous raids on gay bars and events, patrons fought back this time, resulting in the famous riots. The riots initiated "a turning point in the history of gay life in the United States" (Armstrong & Craig, 2006, p. 724). While the Stonewall Riots took

place outside of the college walls, this event sparked what many gay and lesbian activists today consider to be the turning point in their history, including on the college campus.

*The Rise and Recognition of Gay and Lesbian Student Groups*

The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) at the University of Kansas was one of the pioneering student organizations to focus on sexual orientation issues. These students recognized that they were different than their heterosexual peers, but only in their inclination to date individuals of the same sex. While their dating partners portrayed them as different than the general campus community, they were similar to the heterosexual students in that they worked, went to class, formed a close group of friends, and engaged in campus organizational life (Dilley, 2002). Despite such commonalities, college administrators often noted the illegal nature of homosexuality in denying formal campus recognition to gay and lesbian focused student organizations (Dilley, 2002). Some student leaders, however, took note and even action on these inequities. In 1971 at the University of Kansas, student senate leaders went so far as to allocate funds to assist the Lawrence GLF in a lawsuit against their university (Dilley, 2002), a demonstration of solidarity amongst students of all sexual orientations. Although the students at the University of Kansas lost their lawsuit and subsequent appeal, a landmark victory for the plight of campus-based gay and lesbian student organizations was on the horizon at the University of Missouri. In 1977, the courts agreed that denying formal campus recognition to Missouri's *Gay Lib* organization was in violation of the students' 1<sup>st</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> amendment rights to free association and equal protection (Dilley, 2002). This case was historic in that it marked the beginning of college campuses recognizing gay and lesbian identified student organizations.

## *The Gay and Lesbian Faculty Experience*

Gay and lesbian faculty and staff were and still are by no means exempt from opposition to their identity and existence on campus. This section presents personal accounts from gay and lesbian professors, beginning in the early 1960s. McNaron (1997) authored a book titled, *Poisoned ivy: Lesbian and gay academics confronting homophobia*. At the beginning of her book, she noted:

In 1964, when I began to work at the University of Minnesota, there simply were no publicly defined lesbian or gay faculty... When I asked the other new woman, also unmarried, to have lunch with me at the faculty dining club, she refused, saying, Oh, I don't want to be seen at lunch with another single woman; I'm hoping to find a husband. (p. 2)

Aside from McNaron's individual recollection, literature on the experience of gay and lesbians in the professorate was sparse until Louie Crew's study in 1978. Crew surveyed 893 Chairs of English Departments to assess "hostility versus acceptance of gays by their chairs" (McNaron, 1997, p. 9). With 214 responses, Crew found that nearly one in four departmental chairs was hostile, approximately one-third was undecided, and less than half were considerably accepting of gays and lesbians in their respective departments (McNaron, 1997).

In Garber's, *Tilting the tower*, Evelyn Beck (1994) recalls back to when she first accepted a position at the University of Maryland at College Park as the director of Women's Studies. Beck describes how upon accepting the position, she made the decision to go back into the closet for the program's welfare after having been out and involved at her previous institution (p. 227). She had taught lesbian studies courses at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, but chose to remain hidden as a lesbian director on Maryland's campus, so as not to jeopardize the newly formed women's studies program

there. In her sixth year as the director, she came out to the women's studies steering committee. When she stepped down in 1992 after serving as the director for 10 years, she said that the newly appointed department chair was "warned by a woman administrator to stay away from me, no given reason" (Beck, 1994, p. 230).

Mary Klages (1994), a current professor of English at the University of Colorado at Boulder, recalls choosing her dissertation topic in the late 1980s and purposely avoiding any area of study that was blatantly lesbian-oriented, despite much of her academic work focusing on lesbian scholarship. Similarly, John D'Emilio completed his dissertation in 1974 on a gay student organization (McLemee, 2003). In response to his dissertation topic, he recalls a senior faculty member saying to him, "Do you know what this will mean for your career" (McLemee, 2003). D'Emilio is now a professor of history and gender and women's studies at the University of Illinois-Chicago. Another professor of 27-years at a midwestern university said, "Initially I avoided doing any research that involved lesbian issues – partially because I'd be doing database searches and using interlibrary loan and that meant the staff who worked for me might know I was a lesbian..." (McNaron, 1997, p. 103).

An extensively published science professor who became only the fourth woman to be awarded tenure at an all-male private college told McNaron (1997), "I publish under two names – one for my regular science work and one for writing on gay/lesbian subjects. I do that because I'd lose my grant funding for my scientific research if my sexual identity was known" (p. 103). Another 15-year communications professor said, "Being a lesbian has taken away job opportunities for me – has led to my not receiving

tenure at one institution and has curtailed my research in that I have been hesitant to publish anything feminist – let alone lesbian” (McNaron, 1997, p. 103).

This homophobic sentiment in academe remains today. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently devoted 56 pages to the subject of diversity in higher education. In the article that focused on lesbian and gay issues on campus, a professor from the University of Iowa stated that research on gay issues remains problematic, elaborating that often, “people who study gay topics are not finding employment” (Bollag, 2007, p. B11). These accounts reveal that the true essence of academic freedom was and still is lost with regard to gay and lesbian focused research. These examples of fear concerning one’s identity exposure and research on certain topics has unfortunately led many professors to remain in the closet or to retreat back into the closet as a sacrifice for personal promotion and/or departmental well-being.

#### *The Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Studies*

In 1986, Yale University created what is known to be the first lesbian and gay studies center and the City University of New York followed suit in 1990 with the opening of its own center for lesbian and gay studies (Minton, 1992). While these two centers focused specifically on research, efforts to change the face of the curriculum were sprouting on the other side of the country. The City College of San Francisco (CCSF) made history in 1988 when it became the first American institution of higher education to create a Gay and Lesbian Studies Department (Minton, 1992). While CCSF was the first higher education institution in the United States to establish its own gay and lesbian studies department intended for coursework, documents indicate that its first gay-themed course was taught as early as 1972 (Minton, 1992). But even earlier than that, Evelyn

Beck taught classes in lesbian studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison (Beck, 1994). According to Indiana University's gender studies website (2006), today there are more than 20 queer studies programs across the country.

Although not until the latter portion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this section shows that many institutions of higher education have hurdled the obstacles to change regarding gay and lesbian issues in higher education. The implementation of gay and lesbian studies departments was a pivotal moment that modeled the true meaning of academic freedom and currently demonstrates promise for future efforts to integrate sexual orientation and gender studies into the curriculum. The addition of these departments remains highly controversial yet also incredibly empowering to both students and faculty.

#### *Current Issues in Higher Education*

This final section offers an overview of the current state of lesbian and gay issues in higher education. Still today, many college administrators remain hesitant to move toward inclusive practices concerning the gay and lesbian population and even more so in college sport. This portion of the literature review will briefly touch on the most recent battle over domestic partner benefits in higher education and the current climate on campus surrounding gay and lesbian concerns. Such decisions impact not only individuals, but also the institution because policies, practices, and benefits packages are often looked to when employees, including coaches, are deciding whether or not to join or leave a particular institution.

#### *The Struggle for Domestic Partner Benefits*

Domestic partner benefits have been the most recent struggle for equality for gay and lesbian employees on college and university campuses. In 1993, the University of

Iowa became the first public institution of higher education to offer health and other benefits to same-sex partners of its employees (Wilson, 2003). Several years later, the issue came before the University of California (UC) Board of Regents. Governor Wilson, who was the President of the Board at the time, argued that granting these benefits (while not including unmarried opposite-sex partners) would cost too much, demoralize the institution of marriage, and would influence lawsuits from unmarried heterosexual couples. Despite his arguments, in 1997 the UC Board of Regents voted to provide health benefits to its employees' same-sex partners (UC Davis, 2005).

Today, the list of agencies that include domestic partners in their health benefit plans includes nearly 300 colleges and universities and 11 state governments (McQuillan, 2005). In addition, of the 62 members of the Association of American Universities, 46 offer same-sex partner benefits (Wilson, 2005). Despite the rapid rise in the number of American colleges and universities offering domestic partner benefits, this practice remains a highly controversial and politically charged issue. For example, approximately 30 same-sex partners of Miami University employees are signed up under the institution's domestic partner benefits plan (Schmidt, 2005). In December 2005, an Ohio lawmaker filed a lawsuit against Miami University stating that the University's domestic partner benefits plan is in violation of the state's constitutional ban on civil unions (Schmidt, 2005). In 2006, a state representative in Florida announced a bill to prevent state universities and community colleges from utilizing money from taxpayers to fund domestic partner benefits after the University of Florida began offering such benefits (Byrnes, 2006). Today, domestic partner benefits are seen as an important factor in recruiting and retaining faculty and staff (Bollag, 2007). This point is illustrated by the



recent resignation of a leading University of Wisconsin researcher to accept a position at the University of Pennsylvania (Bollag, 2007). After bringing in \$3.5 million in research grants over his six-year tenure at Wisconsin, the professor noted the fact that the University of Pennsylvania offered domestic partner benefits and the University of Wisconsin did not as the deal clincher (Bollag, 2007). Like their colleagues across institutions of higher education, coaches with domestic partners are often limited geographically to institutions that offer domestic partner benefits; but that's if they even feel comfortable disclosing this information. These are several examples of the struggles across the nation surrounding domestic partner benefits. As it was alluded to in the section titled, "Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace," issues such as domestic partner benefits also affect the campus climate. The final section of this portion of the literature review highlights recent research on the campus climate around sexual orientation.

### *Campus Climate Research Results*

Despite evidence that progress continues concerning sexual orientation issues in higher education, a recent multi-campus study demonstrates that anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) sentiment remains a point of contention across college campuses. In 2003, the Campus Project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) published results from a quantitative survey that was created to learn about the campus climate for LGBT members of college communities. With 1,669 student participants from 14 institutions across the United States, results indicated that more than one-third of the undergraduate respondents experienced harassment in the last year and more than half hid their identity to avoid feeling threatened (Rankin, 2003). Forty-one

percent of the respondents said that their institution was not addressing issues concerning sexual orientation and 43 percent of the respondents deemed the campus climate to be homophobic (Rankin, 2003). These results are in light of the fact that the author of this project considered the participating universities to be among the gay-friendliest campuses across the United States.

A study of job experiences of LGB college student affairs professionals across the United States revealed that of 174 respondents, 61 percent (106) described personal experiences of homophobic discrimination (Croteau & Lark, 1995). Conversely, the researchers revealed a positive relationship between LGB support in the workplace and job satisfaction (Croteau & Lark, 1995). This mixed-method study is important because it offers data on the role that a supportive climate plays in the satisfaction of workers on campus who do not identify as heterosexual.

In summary, the research presented explains recent efforts and data concerning the climate for members of the campus community who do not identify as heterosexual. While domestic partner benefits are becoming more common, recent political efforts demonstrate the continued complications surrounding this initiative. One consequence of this backlash is that individuals' careers in higher education are sidelined or complicated, including those of college head coaches. College executives across the country command environments in which academic freedom and intellectual discourse around issues of sexual orientation are said to be valued. Despite the evidence of progress, it is important to honor a history of painful struggles that gay and lesbian students, faculty members, and staff on the college campus have had to endure as a result of homophobia, heterosexism

and homonegativism. In the next section of this literature review, research is offered on the climate around sexual orientation specifically in college athletics.

#### Attitudes Toward Homosexuality in College Athletics

Despite more progressive efforts toward inclusivity across institutions of higher education, Jacobson (2002) considers athletic departments to be the most homophobic environment on the college campus. Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morpew (2001) said, “The extent to which those in athletics openly express hostility to gay men and lesbians seems above and beyond that found on other parts of campus” (p.466). In an article titled, *Homophobia, the World of Sport, and Sport Psychology Consulting*, Rotella and Murray (1991) stated that both athletes and coaches are tremendously homophobic and heterosexist, with the mere mention of the subject often resulting in strong emotions and apprehension. Although there was no indication of a specific number of participants in their study, Rotella and Murray’s (1991) conclusions derived from an analysis of direct quotes from coaches, parents, sport psychologists, and student-athletes. A more general example of such responses is highlighted in Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, and Schultz’s (2006) study of attitudes and sexual prejudice in sport and physical activity. From a quantitative survey of 150 exercise and sport science (ESS) students in a “Fitness for Life” course, as well as 14 ESS interns, 14 ESS student-teachers, and 27 students who were members of the campus LGB pride groups, there were significant results from the sample of the 150 students in the “Fitness for Life” class. For the study, the Kinsey Scale was utilized to determine the sexual orientation of all participants. This scale uses a rating continuum from zero to six for respondents to indicate their sexual identity, with zero indicating an exclusively heterosexual identity and six indicating an exclusively

homosexual identity. In the results from the sample of 150 ESS students, Gill et al. (2006) shared that on the Kinsey Scale question, a number of respondents circled the “zero” multiple times in addition to noting, unsolicited, that they were “definitely, exclusively” heterosexual (559). The respondents took no such action for any other demographic question. The results reflected an attitude toward gay men and lesbians significantly lower than the other seven inquired populations. More specifically, males expressed the most negative attitudes toward gay men. These findings are consistent with previous research (Kimmel, 2007; Sandler, 2008; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001).

#### *Different Assumptions for Males and Females in Sport*

In this section, specific examples of homophobia in sport will be offered in order to facilitate a framework for where, how, and finally why these perceptions are fostered. Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morpew (2001) conducted comparative qualitative case studies of five NCAA Division I institutions across the United States. From formal interviews and focus groups totaling 35 to 65 individuals per campus, they found that men and women responded differently when asked about homosexuality in athletics. Men were more likely to share whether or not they would feel comfortable with a gay team member. Female coaches and student-athletes, however, were well aware of the stereotypes attributed to them as women in athletics and were more likely to address those stereotypes directly. More specifically, all female athletes must address the lesbian issue, even those in socially accepted sports such as gymnastics, swimming, and tennis (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983). Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morpew (2001) shared how homonegativism directly affected one athletic director’s decision to add a women’s

swimming team. When faced with adding another sport to meet the terms of Title IX, “he chose swimming over softball because they did not want to bring a lot of those [lesbian] people” (p.468). Referring to homosexuality, a male football coach in their study said, “I think a goodly portion of those kinds of things get weeded out...in high school...I just don’t think you get to be a junior or senior in high school and a good athlete with that kind of outward orientation” (p. 486). This comment supports research on the relationship between masculinity and homophobia (Kimmel, 1994; Pharr, 1988). Another male coach said, “I don’t think we’ve really had that problem, but we don’t bring it up” (Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001, p.468). Former Rice University head football coach Ken Hatfield said that if a player came out as gay, he would ask the student-athlete, “What happened? What changed since we recruited you? When did this come about” (Jacobson, 2002, p. 33)? A female basketball coach said, “We’ve been lucky, lesbianism hasn’t come here. I’ve heard about it. I really don’t know how I would handle it to be honest with you” (Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, p. 469). These responses indicate that whether or not administrators are consciously aware of it, athletic departments are fostering an unwelcoming environment for those who identify across the LGB spectrum or are even questioning their sexual orientation.

#### *Student-Athletes: Females Assumed to be Lesbians*

Because they are a microcosm of a social institution that stigmatizes any sexual orientation that is not strictly heterosexual, student-athletes as a population tend to portray heterosexist and homonegative sentiments. When asked about the issue of homosexuality, one male football player stated, “Myself, I can communicate with a gay person but I am not for communicating with them every day and letting them touch me. I

don't want to talk about their sexual tendencies...that is their problem" (Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001, p. 469). Comments such as this expose the misconceptions and assumptions about student-athletes who do not identify as heterosexual. A female student-athlete said that when she was being recruited by her coach, "the coach made it clear that there were no lesbians on the team" (Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001, p. 469). In a qualitative study on stereotypes with 15 female student-athletes from two Midwestern Division I universities, Kauer and Krane (2006) found that the most common stereotype women encountered was the lesbian label. One heterosexual basketball player in their sample noted the following: "One night, I was at a club and a [male basketball player] came up to me, and he was like, 'aren't you guys like all gay, why are you guys dancing, shouldn't you be home'" (p. 46)? A softball player in their study suggested that if she turned down an interested male, then she was automatically assumed to be gay. Furthermore, two student-athletes in the study implied that having short hair only escalated lesbian assumptions. Another softball player in the study, a bisexual, said, "If someone is rude to us and we make a comment back, the first thing out of their mouths is, 'oh you stupid dyke'..." (p. 46).

Rotella and Murray (1991) reported one female basketball player's homonegative encounter:

My collegiate basketball team was labeled as gay. I heard stories about this assumption before I decided to attend this college but never gave it much thought. While attending the college, I practiced at a local gym filled with guys. I was asked by one of these guys if I played basketball for this particular college. I said, 'yes,' and he responded with, 'And you like guys?' I said yes again and he replied, 'I thought everyone there was gay.' (p. 358)

Regardless of sexual orientation, the homonegative assumptions imparted on these women cause frustration and harm for all involved. A heterosexual basketball player said,

“...it kinda hurt my feelings in a way because I don’t want people to think I’m gay when I’m not” (Kauer & Krane, 2006, p. 49). A basketball player who is gay said she tried to hide her sexual identity from homonegative teammates. She said, “I tried to get them to perceive me as being normal and not that [being gay] isn’t normal, but...” (p. 49). A gay softball player said, “...If someone were to ask me if I have a boyfriend, I’ll tell them ‘no, I don’t have time’” (Kauer & Krane, 2006, p. 49). These accounts demonstrate the predominant assumption of homosexuality for female student-athletes and the challenges associated with having to prove that they are heterosexual, even when they are not.

Despite the presented climate for student-athletes who are not heterosexual, the NCAA is beginning to pay attention to this issue. It lists sexual orientation in its principle of non-discrimination (NCAA, 2007a), and a panel titled “Time out! A conversation about including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender student-athletes” was recently attended by 250 people at the 2007 NCAA convention (Rybka, 2007). The panel addressed why now is the time to begin discussions about sexual orientation in sport in addition to offering suggestions on how to initiate conversation. Furthermore, the current NCAA self-study instrument requires that member institutions address educational and support programs around sexual orientation for NCAA certification (NCAA, 2006). One way that select institutions have initiated support programs is through the conception of gay-straight athlete alliances. More specifically, the University of Massachusetts athletic department sponsors a gay-straight athlete alliance (GSAA) and a student organization called Penn’s Athletes and Allies Tackling Homophobia and Heterosexism (PATH) is supported by the University of Pennsylvania’s LGBT center (Woog, 2007). But missing

from these initiatives are conversations around sexual orientation issues between and amongst collegiate coaches.

*Coaches: Heterosexism and Homonegativism in Recruiting and Job Searches*

Kauer (2005) considers the lesbian label, heteronormativity, and heterosexism to be large contributors to the significant drop in women head coaches of intercollegiate sport. Though the manifestations of these assertions are both overt and covert, researchers note that such inferences are most evident for women coaches when they are recruiting student-athletes to their institution and during job searches (Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997).

Griffin (1998) says that although the NCAA prohibits negative recruiting, coaches often use it as a strategy to lure student-athletes to attend their institution. Wellman and Blinde (1997) consider negative recruiting to be relatively widespread and almost all of the 10 NCAA Division I coaches in their qualitative study spoke about the issue “in a tone of disgust”. The NCAA, in fact, recently brought its concerns about negative recruiting to those affected most. At the end of 2006, approximately 30 coaches, athletic administrators, and student-athletes joined together for a think tank sponsored by the NCAA and the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR). The main topic of conversation centered on strategies to deter negative recruiting and discriminatory behavior in women’s collegiate sport (McKindra, 2006). This initiative was groundbreaking in that the NCAA joined forces with an outside interest group to begin dialogues around the effects of sexual orientation discrimination and stereotypes on the college athletic environment.



In Krane and Barber's (2005) study of soccer, basketball, softball, tennis, and volleyball coaches across the United States titled, *Identity Tensions in Lesbian Intercollegiate Coaches*, all 13 coaches (11 from Division I institutions) in their study discussed the issue of negative recruiting without being prompted. Wellman and Blinde (1997) found themselves in the same situation when eight of the ten coaches in their sample initiated conversations about negative recruiting. In both studies, the major theme in conversations about recruiting was the prevalence of the "lesbian label" (Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). Coaches noted questions about lesbians on their teams and on teams at other universities, the slandering of rival coaches that may or may not be lesbians (Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997), inquiries into the sexual orientation or marital status of the coaches, and questions about the ways that coaches handle lesbian-related issues (Wellman & Blinde, 1997). Wellman and Blinde (1997) offer this example of one coach's perception of slander during the recruitment process:

I know that some coaches will try to tell kids or will just flat tell kids, hey you know you really don't want to go over there. The life-style of those coaches isn't something you're gonna like. The life-style of the majority of their players isn't something you're gonna want to be a part of. (¶. 5).

Krane and Barber (2005) indicate that the goal of negative recruiting is to strategically use negative cultural perceptions and stereotypes about lesbians to take advantage of parents' and student-athletes' fears, with the underlying intent being to discourage them from selecting rival institutions. Such tactics are extremely selfish, unethical and only perpetuate the hostile climate for lesbians in intercollegiate athletics.

Negative recruiting is just one manifestation of heterosexism and homonegativism that permeates in college sport. Another area where women coaches face the

consequences of negative stereotyping is during the job search process, both as search committee members and as job seekers. Women coaches spoke openly about the affects of the “lesbian label” in their own job searches and when serving on search committees for coaches (Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). One coach said, “When I was single you know, I made sure I didn’t have the look [lesbian]...Now that I’m married...I don’t feel that I have to worry about that” (Wellman & Blinde, 1997, ¶. 5). This remark offers an example of how all women coaches, even those who are heterosexually identified, are influenced by the lesbian label. Three of the coaches in Wellman and Blinde’s (1997) study indicated that their marital status was an issue during their own job searches. Coaches also commented that athletic departments headed by men and male coaches were particularly opposed to hiring lesbian coaches. Despite the coaches’ observations and remarks, one coach reluctantly shared how heterosexism and homonegativism persisted in her own selection of a male coach. She said, “The guy that I hired also is a family man and I like that about him...down deep I don’t, I want to say that that isn’t the reason [for hiring] but kind of it is because I like...what he stands for” (Wellman & Blinde, 1997, ¶. 6). Another coach in the study recounted conversations she had engaged in with other male coaches, stating, “I was told by particular male coaches in [region of the country] [clears throat] that they would hire, I am trying to think of the four letters, the four B’s that the person had to love: basketball, books, burgers, and boys. And that’s the exact quote” (Wellman & Blinde, 1997, ¶. 6). Such covert requirements are not isolated to this study. Although she never publicly acknowledged the allegations, former Penn State University women’s basketball coach Rene Portland allegedly did not allow, “alcohol, drugs, or lesbians” on her team (Griffin, 1998, p.46). Portland recently

resigned from Penn State after settling a lawsuit (although the terms and conditions of the settlement were undisclosed) filed by the NCLR on behalf of a former Penn State student-athlete whom Portland kicked off the team. Krane and Barber (2005) noted that several coaches in their study “voiced being privy to hiring practices overtly discriminating against women perceived as lesbian” and that they too were asked about their personal lives during their own interviews (p.72). One coach spoke about her experience on a search committee in which she recalled:

There’ve been some comments made about hiring a female soccer coach and making sure she’s on the right side of the fence so to speak...I heard that they told the associate AD to make sure that this person is feminine and doesn’t look macho ‘cause they don’t want the wrong impression.’ And to make sure they do their homework when checking around on references. (Krane & Barber, 2005, p. 72)

These accounts unearth the some of covert perpetuations of heterosexism and homonegativism that exist today in college athletics. While lesbians and unmarried women are the undeserving targets of such practices, when left undetected or not discussed, it continues to be condoned and sustained, ultimately affecting all women in sport.

#### *Why Homophobia Persists in College Athletics*

Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morpew (2001) offer four hypotheses for what they consider to be homophobic sentiment in college athletics. First, they believe that athletics is no different than society in its unresolved comfort level with homosexuality. A current example of such sentiment is the upcoming presidential elections and American citizens’ concern about each candidate’s stance on preserving the institution of marriage. Secondly, Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morpew (2001) posit that athletics personnel have less exposure to different sexual orientations than to other forms of difference. They

imply that athletic individuals with diverse sexual orientations, however, face more skepticism than those from under-represented racial and socioeconomic upbringings. Thirdly, lesbians, athletically talented women, and gay men threaten male dominance (Griffin, 1992; Pharr, 1998). Lastly, they hypothesize that student-athletes' identity development is hindered in an effort to maintain conformity concerning team regulations. While Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morpew's (2001) discussion applies specifically to college student-athletes, but it is believed that these attributions are transferable to coaches and administrators as well. A number of researchers point to the connection between sexism and gender identity as the root of homophobia and homonegativism (e.g., Griffin, 1992; Kimmel, 1994; Pharr, 1998; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001). More specific is the notion that homosexuality on all fronts is a threat to male dominance. The next section of this literature review describes the theoretical framework that is believed to be most suitable to understanding workplace experiences of lesbian college coaches.

### Theoretical Framework

Standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004), which derives from feminism, offers an appropriate framework for unearthing the individual workplace experiences of lesbian college coaches and it served as the theoretical framework for this research. Although Krane (2001) offers rationale for integrating both standpoint and queer perspectives in her research on heterosexism and homonegativism in sport, queer theory and standpoint theory are often seen as oppositional. Considering this, standpoint research was considered to be the most appropriate framework for this study. Despite the

decision to forego queer theory in favor of standpoint theory, queer insights into the research will be offered before delving deeper into standpoint theory.

### *Queer Insights*

Before standpoint theory is elaborated upon, queer theory will be discussed in addition to the decision to forego this approach to inquiry for the purposes of this research. Queer theory provides a vehicle for researchers to deconstruct *the system* through which “heterosexuality becomes normalized as natural” (Britzman, 1995, p. 153). In education specifically, Capper (1999) says that the significance of studying queerness “has less to do with numbers and more to do with what such study can reveal about the ‘normal’ state of affairs in schools, which affects all people” (p. 5). Rather than focusing on how individuals have deviated from the norm, queer theorists look at an extensive range of social issues from different perspectives in order to situate knowledge. Arguing that adopting a homosexual identity only strengthens heterosexual dominance, queer theorists subscribe to the notion that resistance to these binaries altogether, by everyone, will lead to the displacement of all labeling along the sexual continuum (Namaste, 1994). Queer theory can certainly offer theoretical insight into the role of heterosexism in the decline of women head coaches, particularly concerning how sexuality and gender constitute each other within a heteronormative society. One factor, however, in the decision to forego queer theory in favor of standpoint theory was that as detailed above, queer theory analyzes and addresses heterosexism much differently than standpoint theory. Because heterosexism in college sport was explored from the *standpoint* of lesbian head coaches, standpoint theory was naturally a more congruent framework for this inquiry.

### *Feminist Inquiry*

Standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004) derives from feminist scholarship. Campbell and Wasco (2002) indicate that epistemologically, feminist social science justifies the significance of women's lived experience in the discovery of knowledge. Though higher education professionals tend to think of the profession as more progressive than society at large, the phenomenon of woman as "other" holds true in this setting as well and perhaps even more so in college athletics. Thus, a feminist lens provides an important framework for this research in that it promotes a critical analysis of "the social construction of gender and its consequences" through the experiences of the head coaches in this study (Krane, 2001, p. 402). Essentially, a feminist epistemology accepts the coaches' frame of reference, or standpoint, "as legitimate sources of knowledge" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 778).

### *Standpoint Theory*

Standpoint theory is an epistemological theory of knowledge which asserts that the way individuals come to know the world has a lot to do with their standpoint (Harding, 1991). Standpoint theory necessitates that because people have particular collective experiences (e.g., lesbian head coaches), these experiences shape their knowledge – especially in power relationships. Nielson (1990) says that the main point of standpoint epistemology is that there are, in fact, epistemological consequences and implications in one's daily life. Therefore, under a heteronormative collegiate sport environment, lesbian coaches (the subordinate group) are in a position of navigating their environment much differently than heterosexual coaches and administrators (the dominant group).

Recognizing that in power relationships, the subordinate groups' experiences are more than likely invisible to the dominant group, standpoint theory offers a mechanism to examine social realities from the perception of those who are "marginalized and oppressed" (Krane, 2001, p. 403). Standpoint theory works from the ontological supposition that a single, objective truth does not exist and that "class, race, gender, and sexual orientation structure a person's understanding of reality" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p.781). Therefore, standpoint theorists seek individuals and groups that are on society's margins and actively engage them in describing the experiences and interpretations of their social existence (Allen & Barber, 1992; Krane, 2001). Nielson (1990) says that "these individuals have the potential for a more complete view of social reality than others" as a result of their disadvantaged situation (p. 10). On a basic level, standpoint theory, implies that "women have a distinct standpoint because of the power differential between females and males in our society" (Krane, 2001, p. 403). For example, unlike males who may only understand the male experience, women coaches, as a result of their exposure to the male dominated culture of sport, have a broader understanding and therefore appreciation of gendered experiences in athletics, including their own. Annas (1978) refers to this awareness as double vision.

For this particular study, however, the study participants were asked to reflect not only on how their gender, but more specifically on how their sexual orientation has shaped their experiences in college sport. Thus, Harding (1991) asks, "Shouldn't there be a distinctive lesbian epistemological standpoint" (p. 249)? Because all of the participants, whether publicly or privately, were required to personally identify as lesbian to meet the

study parameters, a specific lesbian standpoint was privileged in the interview questions and subsequent data gathering.

### *Lesbian Standpoint Theory*

Women have a unique standpoint in sport because they exist and perform in the shadows of men. Furthermore, Krane (2001) says “if all women are considered other in sport, then lesbians have an even greater propensity to be considered other” (p. 403). What lesbians can reveal from their own standpoint are the struggles they face that are virtually invisible from the heterosexual perspective (Harding, 1991). For this reason, it is important that research not only examine women’s gendered experiences as coaches, but more specifically for this study, as lesbians. “Examining sport from the perspective of lesbians allows researchers to uncover things previously invisible and unnoticed” (Harding, in Krane, 2001, p. 403). Sykes (1996) says, “A unique lesbian experience develops over time” and that “being a lesbian necessarily gives rise to a different perspective” (p. 461). These assertions reveal that a platform exists for the exploration of lesbian head coaches’ experiences within a heterosexist framework. From a lesbian perspective, one notices the connection between male dominance and the subjugation of “deviant” sexualities” (Harding, 1991, p. 261). But in a twist of irony, by the virtue of their positions in sport, lesbians are inevitably part of the mainstream athletic environment. Because of their lesbian identity, they will have certain experiences that are uniquely different than those of their heterosexual colleagues. This perspective as “outsiders-within” provides lesbian coaches with a distinctive standpoint, one that differs significantly from the dominant group (Harding, 1991, p. 265; Krane, 2001). Because their lesbian identity situates them as outsiders-within, a different paradigm than for



heterosexual or married women in sport, a lesbian standpoint allowed the head coaches in this study to observe situations through a lens that Krane (2001) describes as being colored by heterosexism.

### Summary

In this section, an introduction and background information on standpoint theory, and the theoretical framework that guided this research was provided. Because a number of scholars have approached research on homophobia and/or heterosexism from a queer theoretical lens, this study delineates queer theory and elaborates on why this approach was surpassed in favor of standpoint theory. It is also important to note that standpoint theory derives originates from feminist philosophy (Harding, 1991).

The research presented to this point makes apparent the need to study the role of heterosexism in the decline of collegiate women head coaches. Drawing from a sample of self-identified current and former collegiate lesbian coaches, the research questions were: (1) What are perceptions of the role, if any, of workplace heterosexism in the decline of women in intercollegiate coaching? (2) What additional findings will emerge while investigating coaches' perceptions of the decline? The next chapter will describe the research methods that examined these questions.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

#### Introduction

“How is it possible to construct a community based on difference if we do not enable those who are different to speak?”

*(Tierney, 1993)*

Scholars surmise a connection between heterosexism and the decline of college women head coaches (e.g., Griffin, 1992; Kauer, 2005). But until this research, few if any studies have specifically addressed these assertions through deliberate conversations with lesbian head coaches. Therefore, the research questions were: (1) What are perceptions of the role, if any, of workplace heterosexism in the decline of women in intercollegiate coaching? (2) What additional findings will emerge while investigating coaches' perceptions of the decline?

The lived workplace experiences of current and former NCAA Division I head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual were examined. Reinharz (1992) says, “for a woman to be understood in a social research project, it may be necessary for her to be interviewed by a woman” (p. 23). Consistent with Reinharz's assertion, for a female coach who does not identify as heterosexual to be fully understood in a social research project, it may be necessary for her to be interviewed by another woman who is not

heterosexual. The methodological strategy that was utilized is known as in-depth, or long interviewing (Johnson, 2002; McCracken, 1998).

This chapter entails a description of the qualitative methods that were employed for this study. The research design, participant selection, interview strategy, data collection procedures, analysis, credibility and trustworthiness of findings, and ethical considerations are discussed.

### Research Design

Qualitative research is particularly valuable when there is limited knowledge about a specific population or topic under consideration (Lonberg & Phillips, 1996). Hill (2006) says, “sexual minorities constitute one of the largest, but least studied minority groups in the workforce, including the area of education” (p. 9). Literature about lesbian coaches themselves is quite limited (Griffin, 1992; Griffin, 1998; Kauer, 2005; Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). McCracken (1988) says, “Without a qualitative understanding of how culture mediates human action, we can only know what numbers tell us. Thus, in-depth interviews were favored in order to portray, through their own words, the workplace experiences of current and former college head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual.

When a researcher is seeking in-depth answers that are often not readily articulated or when questions might stimulate emotional responses to a particular phenomenon, Johnson (2002) considers in-depth interviews to be the best approach to inquiry. A researcher using in-depth interviewing commonly seeks “...deeper information and knowledge than is sought in surveys, informal interviewing, or focus groups, for example. This information usually concerns very personal matters, such as an

individual's self, lived experiences, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective" (Johnson, 2002, p. 104). These very issues were explored with the head coaches in this study. Because McCracken (1988) refers to in-depth interviews as "long interviews", these terms shall be used interchangeably depending on the citation. The long qualitative interview "is useful because it can help us to situate these numbers in their fuller social and cultural context" (p. 9). In-depth interviewing differs from other forms of qualitative interviewing in the attentiveness to the interviewer's self (Johnson, 2002). The interviewer must offer some form of self-disclosure and reciprocal cooperation in order to maximize the interviewees' willingness to share her experiences (Johnson, 2002). This guidance assisted with eliciting valuable information from the participants. Of the long interview, McCracken (1988) says that it not only "gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" but he also considers it to be "one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory" (p. 9). But for women more specifically, interviewing is also congruous with women's desires to remove control tactics in favor of "developing a sense of connectedness with people" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 20).

### Participant Selection

Selecting in-depth, or long interview participants, according to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), is "based on an iterative process referred to as purposeful sampling that seeks to maximize the depth and richness of the data to address the research question" (p. 317). Purposeful sampling is unique in that participants are intentionally selected for the study (Creswell, 2005). Because this research sought to make meaning of

these coaches' experiences in the college sport environment, the participant selection was limited to eight NCAA Division I current and former women head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) affirm that interviewees that are "experienced and knowledgeable" about the area of interest add credibility to one's study (p. 64). To find lesbian head coaches, a sampling strategy known as snowball sampling was instituted. Snowballing, according to Kvale (1996), involves knowing or acquainting oneself with relevant informants who then tell others with similar characteristics about the study. Because of the divisive nature of heterosexism in college sport, many women coaches are out only to those they feel safe disclosing their lesbian identity to. Thus, snowballing was most appropriate to reach the participant population for this study.

In addition, research suggests that the participant sample should be relatively homogeneous and "share critical similarities related to the research question" in an effort to unearth shared experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.317). Accordingly, participants in this study fell into one of two criteria: current NCAA Division I female head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual; or former NCAA Division I female head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual. Initially, two head coaches with whom the researcher was personally connected to were asked to participate, in addition to being asked to identify other relevant informants. Furthermore, professors with access to relevant organization list-servs were also solicited and successfully identified potential study participants through this avenue. Once identified, all potential participants were screened to see that they were willing to participate and fell within the parameters of the

study. Eleven individuals expressed an interest in the study, with eight following through with the interviews.

#### Interview Sites

The participants in this study represented universities in the northeast, northwest, south, mid-Atlantic, southwest, and midwestern regions of the United States. Because seven of the eight interview participants resided beyond driving distance from the researcher, one interview was conducted in person and the remaining seven were conducted via telephone. The lone in-person interview was conducted at the participant's office.

#### Interview Strategy

Each participant was interviewed once; with follow up questions and clarifications conducted with seven of the eight coaches an individual basis. This multiple interview format not only inherently "characterizes much feminist research" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 36), but it is also considered "likely to be more accurate than single interviews because of the opportunity to ask additional questions and to get corrective feedback on previously obtained information" (p. 37).

As discussed previously, the interview location was determined by two factors: the distance between the researcher and the participants, and each participant's preference. Seven of the interviews were conducted via telephone and one was conducted face-to-face. But regardless of the location or communication method between each participant the researcher, both positives and negatives of each strategy shall be discussed.

Telephone interviewing opens accessibility to potential interviewees “who are reluctant to participate in a face-to-face interview or from groups who are otherwise difficult to access in person (Tausig & Freeman, 1988, p. 420). Participants who unveil emotionally painful experiences might prefer the relative anonymity that the telephone interview provides compared to the face-to face interview (Fenig & Levav, 1993). Each participant’s preference, along with the distance between the interviewee and the researcher, contributed to the specific interview method chosen. Regarding accessibility, another consideration for telephone interviews is that it is cost-effective, particularly when study participants are located across the country from the researcher (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). One final benefit of telephone interviewing is that it allowed the researcher to take notes without distracting the participants (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Creswell (1998) says that although the researcher is unable to see the participant’s non-verbal communication in a telephone interview, this format is appropriate when physical access to the participant is limited.

On face-to-face interviews, Opdenaker (2006) indicates that one advantage for the researcher is that she has the capacity to obtain social indicators from participants such as voice, tone, and body language. Such articulations are particularly relevant in a study such as this where questions may elicit emotional pain from the participants. The researcher’s ability to visually depict participants’ experiences and feelings complement and in fact add to the richness and depth of the participants’ responses. But whereas telephone interviews provide the opportunity for the researcher to take notes without distracting the participant, note taking during face-to-face interviews might distract the interviewee (Miller, 1995). Thus, note taking was not incorporated during the face-to-

face interview. With pros and cons described for both telephone and face-to-face interviews, Miller (1995) believes neither strategy to be better or worse and both to be suitable approaches to inquiry.

#### Data Collection Procedures

A consent letter (see Appendix B) was emailed to each participant before to the interview to ensure confidentiality and address concerns that the participants had prior to and throughout the interview process and overall study. Whether the study participants were interviewed via telephone or face-to-face, they were each asked to read the consent form and then verbally waive the documentation of consent prior to beginning the formal interview. A waiver of participants' documentation of consent was incorporated to protect the research subjects' privacy due to the sensitive nature of the topic. With permission, all interviews were recorded digitally and personally transcribed by the researcher. In accordance with the institution's policy, all records are kept in a locked cabinet on campus.

Although set questions are sometimes considered to be discretionary in qualitative inquiry, McCracken (1988) says, "for the purposes of the long qualitative interview, it is indispensable" (p. 24). Predetermined interview questions, according to McCracken (1988), ensure that the interview questions are consistent for each participant. Despite the set interview questions (see Appendix C), "...the opportunity for exploratory, unstructured responses remains" (McCracken, 1998, p. 25). All of the interview questions proved to be effective and additional questions were added in accordance with the flow of each interview. This strategy aligns with Di-Cicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) in their assertion that if questions are ineffective or not eliciting the necessary information, they



may be eliminated in favor of new ones. While no questions were eliminated during the interview, follow-up questions were effectively added. Most importantly, the interview format was tailored “to allow respondents to tell their own story on their own terms” (McCracken, 1998, p. 34). This approach is consistent with feminist methods in research and more specifically, standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004).

For the seven telephone interviews, memos were written both during and directly following the interview. For both the face-to-face and telephone interviews, notes were taken after the interview session to document the participants’ body language (if face-to-face), and/or voice and tone (in both face-to-face and telephone interviews). A journal was also kept in order to reflect on the interviews throughout the research process.

#### Instrumentation

The interview questions (see appendix A) were conceived with attentiveness to the literature review. They were field tested prior to the initial interview. The first set of questions considered demographics such as the participants’ age, religion, years coaching, sexual orientation, and race. Each question was situated in standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004), allowing marginalized perspectives, or observations from the outsider-within, to emerge. More specifically, The *Social/Outside of Work Functions* questions were developed from the research on disclosure in work environments (e.g., Boatwright et al, 1996; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). The *Recruiting* section was critical in order to further develop the understanding of coaches’ experiences, or lack thereof, with sexual orientation issues while recruiting (e.g., Krane & Barber, 2005; McKindra, 2006; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). The *Hiring Process/es* section sought to elicit coaches’ encounters with heterosexism in the hiring

process, including experiences in their personal job searches as well as while serving on search committees (Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). These questions allowed for an understanding of current practices in hiring and whether or not the coaches feel or felt safe during these processes. The *Career Intentions* questions aimed to provide data to support or counter assertions of a relationship between heterosexism and the decline of collegiate women head coaches (Griffin, 1998; Kauer, 2005). This section offered participants an opportunity to share what role, if any, they have seen heterosexism play in their own job searches. The questions on workplace heterosexism in the athletic department were sparked by the NCAA (1989) results. The follow-up questions on inclusive practices derive from the Human Rights Campaign (2007) report as well as research on inclusive practices in higher education settings (Muñoz & Thomas, 2006; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Finally the last set of questions under *Career Intentions* speaks directly to the decline of collegiate women head coaches (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006).

### Analysis

Domain analyses (see Appendix C) were incorporated in order to capture the lived experiences of the head coaches. Domain analyses were important to this study because it allowed the researcher to sort through the content and organize it into themes and common threads. Spradley (1980) says that domains do not just appear from one's field notes; rather they are embedded in the data. Therefore, the researcher's job is to "search through the description for cover terms, included terms, and semantic relationships," (Spradley, 1980, p. 92-93). A domain analysis offers a tool to assist in pulling together a list of every potential domain in the field notes. Through this method of analysis, the

participants' stories came together in a methodical manner, enabling the true and untold essence of their coaching experiences to be shared.

### Credibility/Validity of Findings

In qualitative research, validating findings “means that the researcher determines the accuracy or credibility of the findings through strategies such as member checking and triangulation,” (Creswell, 2005, p. 600). This dissertation was overseen and evaluated by a committee, which consisted of four graduate faculty members. Each committee member evaluated and offered suggestions throughout the research process, including the completed project. Furthermore, the committee chair thoroughly critiqued drafts prior to the final project being disseminated to the committee members.

Member checking is a strategy that was used to determine the accuracy of the findings. According to Creswell (2005), “member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account” (p. 254). Once the data were analyzed, several of the participants were asked to consider whether the depiction was exhaustive and prudent, if the themes were accurate, and if the analysis was trustworthy (Creswell, 2005). Furthermore, seven of the eight participants were consulted for clarification questions based on the transcriptions and analysis.

### Ethical Considerations

Even with considerations such as member checking, all research has the tendency to encounter ethical dilemmas. But qualitative research is particularly susceptible, especially research that chooses to “to enter the lives of others – especially those in vulnerable situations and at pivotal points of time” (Clark & Sharf, 2007, p. 399). Add

the feminist component of interview research, in which participants are encouraged to share information never revealed before, and issues of trust and susceptibility come to the forefront (Kirsch, 1999). Because it is considered an honor to interview the head coaches in this context, every aspect of this research process was treated with the utmost respect, dignity, and gratitude.

To account for any ethical concerns, prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in UNLV's Office for the Protection of Human Subjects. The IRB seeks to ensure that risks to the research participant are minimal and either equal to or outweighed by the benefits. To ensure participant protection, the informed consent letter was read by each participant, after which their decision to proceed with the interview was strictly voluntary. All participants, as recommended by the IRB, waived any documentation of their consent.

Kirsch (1999) emphasizes the importance of feminist researchers "situating ourselves in our work and acknowledging our limited perspectives" in order to "reveal to readers how our research agenda, political commitments, and personal motivations shape our observations in the field, the conclusions we draw, and the research reports we write" (p.14). This kind of awareness is a critical component of conducting ethical research (Kirsch, 1999). A self-reflexive practice was employed throughout the research process, not only for the researcher to remain conscious of internal biases, but more importantly to ensure that it was the participants' voices that emerged (Clark & Sharf, 2007).

Lastly, participants' confidentiality was assured, meaning that they would not be distinctively identified either in conversation or in the study (Creswell, 2005). To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned individual numbers. This was especially

important considering the divisiveness of the topic and the susceptibility of these individuals if their accounts were to be traced.

### Summary

For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted in an effort to unearth the lived workplace experiences of eight current and former NCAA Division I women collegiate head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual. Purposeful sampling, but more specifically, snowballing, was an effective method for gathering the study participants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Once the interviews were transcribed, domain analyses were the primary method of analysis. Finally, ethical considerations such as informed consent, waived documentation of consent, confidentiality, and reflexivity, were deliberately considered throughout the research process (Clark & Sharf, 2007; Creswell, 2005; Kirsch, 1999).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

Scholars (e.g., Griffin, 1992; Kauer, 2005) have pointed to a relationship between heterosexism and the decline of collegiate women head coaches. The purpose of this study was to investigate the decline by interviewing current and former NCAA Division I women head coaches' perceptions of the role that heterosexism plays in this decline. More specifically, this study explored the decline through the voices of current and former women head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual. Using feminist standpoint theory as a lens for analysis, this research sought to portray perceptions of this decline through the words of eight head coaches who whether living as closeted, open, or out their collegiate sport environment, have been marginalized at some point, in some capacity, by heterosexism. Through their stories, there was a desire to understand how these eight women have or have not been affected by heterosexism in the male dominated world of collegiate sport.

The first section of this chapter is a collective portrait of the participants. The second section is a presentation of the findings and themes from the research questions. The themes were ordered intentionally; first answering the primary research question

followed by their prevalence and level of repetition amongst the participant's. The third section is a summary of the findings and themes.

### Collective Portrait

Ranging in age from 32 to 54, all of the women in this study are Caucasian. Given that 89.6 % of head coaches at NCAA Division I institutions are Caucasian (NCAA, 2007b), the representation of Caucasian coaches in this study was anticipated. The average age of the participants is 46, with four coaches either 45-years-old or younger and four coaches' older than 50-years old. In the sample, one of the head coaches is legally married to her wife and two of the coaches have been partnered for more than 23 years. Additionally, two of the participants are parents. One is a parent through marriage and the other through the legal adoption of her now ex-partner's baby upon childbirth. The other participants have been in long-term relationships previously but did not mention being in a serious relationship at the time of the interviews.

Athletically, these eight current and former head coaches have coached for an average of 15 years and they represent the northeast, northwest, south, mid-Atlantic, southwest, and midwestern regions of the United States. Of the four who left collegiate coaching, it has been an average of seven years since their departure. The participants have combined for 38 conference titles, 39 *NCAA tournament* appearances, 10 *NCAA Elite Eight* appearances, 2 *NCAA Final Four* appearances, 1 *NCAA Final* appearance, and 2 *National Championships*. Table 1 describes the participants and their self-identified sexual orientation.

## Presentation of Findings and Themes

The term “theme” is used to depict the main topics or issues that emerged from the data. These themes are ordered first by answering the initial research question. The subsequent themes are ordered according to their prevalence amongst the participants

Table 1

### Participants

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#### Current Head Coaches

Identifier	Sport	Race	Sexual Orientation
Coach #1	Soccer	White	Lesbian/Gay
Coach #2	Soccer	White	Lesbian
Coach # 3	Field Hockey	White	Lesbian
Coach #4	Softball	White	Gay/Homosexual

#### Former Head Coaches

Identifier	Sport	Race	
Coach #5	Softball	White	Gay
Coach #6	Softball	White	Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual
Coach # 7	Softball	White	Gay
Coach #8	Volleyball	White	Lesbian

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(most prevalent to least prevalent). Because the final theme only addresses the former coaches' intentions, it was positioned as the last theme. The themes include: (1) Coaches perceptions of the role of heterosexism in the decline, (2) the impact of heterosexism on lesbian coaches' upward mobility, (3) barriers for women in coaching, (4) factors contributing to lesbian coaches' decisions to be out, open, or closeted, (5) progression of general climate, (6) positive experiences for out coaches, (7) from connections to success, and (8) former coaches desire to return. Each theme and sub- theme is discussed in a logical sequence, beginning with the main theme: coaches' perceptions of the role of heterosexism in the decline. Subsequent themes are ordered according to prevalence amongst the coaches, from most to least prevalent.

#### Coaches Perceptions of the Role of Heterosexism in the Decline

Both Griffin (1992) and Kauer (2005) suggest a connection between heterosexism and the decline of collegiate women head coaches. Kauer (2005), in fact, considers heterosexism to be a significant contributor to the decline of women head coaches of collegiate sport. However, until now in scholarly research, collegiate head coaches have not collectively discussed their perceptions of the role that heterosexism plays in the decline. Sub-themes for head coaches' perceptions of the role of heterosexism in the decline include: *preference for male coaches*, *preference for married women coaches*, and despite participants' reliable anecdotal evidence, that *heterosexism is difficult to prove*. On the role of heterosexism in the decline, coach # 4 said:

I think it does play a role and I think it is hard to prove because people won't say it... I think that male [collegiate] athletic directors don't want to deal with women that might be gay. I think they are uncomfortable with women that are gay. I think they are more comfortable with men and I think they also think that men won't do anything with Title IX and [gender] equity.

Coach #4 also articulated her recollection of how heterosexism has caused coaches to be fired. She said:

I think it has caused some to get fired. And again, maybe not necessarily for that particular thing but I think that's a reason that a lot of women won't fight getting fired because they don't want to bring that out or have that brought out, so I think it definitely has been a factor in people not getting hired or people being let go quicker than for example other people might be let go... And then another coach was very openly gay and got let go when she wasn't winning. But the school didn't really support the program. So it was kind of like, they weren't supporting the program but they expected the coach to win. But yet when the coach was openly gay they found a reason to move her into something else. Like okay you are out of coaching now you are going to direct this lesbian center on campus. Stuff like that. That it's hard to say that they were let go because they were gay but you kind of figure yes, that's true. That's why they were let go.

Coach #6 stated:

I think [heterosexism] probably plays a significant role. Because again if it is that kind of environment and someone is in a committed serious relationship or even trying to be...it could be a real obstacle...Just being in that kind of environment. I know at times I almost felt like I was living a double life. And that can wear on you after a while... I think that probably more often to leave than to not consider [coaching]... especially maybe, as you get older, you want to settle down, you want to have a family...and not have to feel like you are behind closed doors all the time....I think a lot of people would leave for that reason.

Coach # 5 believes that heterosexism plays a role in the decline, but contrary to what coach #6 said, coach #5 says that if those who control the hiring decisions are homophobic or operate under heterosexist principles, then presumed lesbian coaches would not even be considered for an open coaching position. She articulated:

You just are not going to get hired by somebody [homophobic]. Somebody that's got a homophobic view is never going to hire a gay person so you are not even going to get through the door... You just would never even get an interview. I think it holds a greater role than some people think. But you just can't prove it.

Coach #5 did however share an example of a university Vice President covertly alluding to this issue during a job search when she previously worked at a university in the

northeast. In this situation, however, the person leading the search was gay (although in the closet) and it was therefore a non-issue. She said:

I was in my mid 20s and we were hiring a basketball coach at the time and my boss told me that the Vice President of [a university in the South] told our assistant athletic director at the time, that you didn't have to worry about that coach because you know, she's not that kind. And you knew exactly what they meant....

In this particular situation, the Vice President from the university in the south employed heterosexist principles in assuming that the chair of this particular search would be concerned about hiring a single female.

Coach #7 shared her personal beliefs on hiring practices at her former institution that were and in her opinion still are impacted by heterosexism. Although the athletic director who hired her is no longer at her former institution, she said:

...The current AD at [university in the mid-Atlantic], I believe would never have hired me because I don't think it's a coincidence that he has not hired, ever in his life, a homosexual coach, and he has hired softball twice...there is definitely a perception in that department that he is homophobic because one of his first hires, and this person doesn't remember it but I do, supposedly he went to a different coach and said, "see what you can find out about her." Now that person doesn't acknowledge that now, doesn't remember it...but I clearly remember it. And I can remember when he was hiring basketball a couple of coaches ago, it's when it confirmed it for me...he was always fair to us who he inherited. But we were also very successful. But in my heart of hearts, I believe he wouldn't have hired any one of us. Do I know that? No...

She also spoke about how she was personally affected, in her opinion, by the athletic director's heterosexism. On recently applying for an administrative position after she retired as the all-time winning coach at her former university, Coach #7 said,

I applied for an associate [athletic director] job, he wouldn't even interview me because "I didn't have the right experience"...I am trying to be as objective about it as possible. Because some of it is just who he is. So it's hard to measure which part of it was about my sexuality. You know. But I will always believe that that was some part of it.

Soon after she retired from coaching, Coach #7 was hired as an associate athletic director at the Division III level and she remains in that role today. Coach # 8, however, was the first coach to mention why heterosexism would impact whom the athletic director hires as a head coach. Coach #8's words align with Coaches #5 and #7 in that she believes that if you are a woman and your sexual orientation is presumed to be anything but heterosexual, your chances of being hired at the NCAA Division I level are diminished. She said:

I think heterosexism plays a huge role in why we are finding diminishing numbers of women coaching women in sport... I think athletic directors in general are driven by the need to win... The way Division I athletics has progressed, you either win or you are out of a job too. So that necessarily implies you have to hire coaches that can win. Which necessarily implies you have to hire coaches that can recruit. Which necessarily implies that you have to appeal to the parents and to the student-athletes. So that rolls all the way down where I do think there is a clear heterosexist framework because athletic directors are afraid to hire any [female] who isn't married.

On the role of heterosexism in the decline of collegiate women head coaches, 6 of the 8 coaches believe that it plays a role, including all four former coaches. The two participants who felt differently about this were coaches # 2 and #3. Several factors might play a role in their views. First, both are the only two coaches in the study who are 100% out in their work environments. Their experiences as out head coaches are vastly different than the other six coaches who feel that heterosexism does play a role in the decline. Another factor to consider is that of all eight coaches in the study, coach #2 has been a head coach for the least amount of years. In addition, of all the coaches, she appears to exude the most positive outlook on life and life circumstances in general. She did, however, speak about a number of discriminatory experiences that she has recently encountered in her current position, but stated:

I think overall I don't know I would totally pin it on heterosexism...If I am upset with things I deal with here, I would move on, but I wouldn't move out of the profession...I would make my life better somewhere else and try to move on in that sense, where I felt more respected.

Coach # 3 also leaned toward skepticism around the issue of heterosexism. She said:

I wouldn't want to put more weight on the fact that people are getting out of coaching. I would hope that people are not getting out of coaching because of their [sexual orientation]. I would hope that is not a factor in their decision.

Factors that might be influencing coach # 3's optimism are that she lives in one of two states that legally allow same-sex marriage and she elicits nothing but positive experiences at her institution as an openly gay coach who is legally married to a woman. Her son (through her marriage) will be attending college next year and is going to receive the same benefits from her current institution that children of heterosexual couples receive, including tuition remission or a tuition voucher at another institution of his choice. She also indicated that she believes her sport, field hockey, may be more enlightened than other sports. Even though coaches #2 and #3 reveal more optimistic perceptions, six of the eight coaches do in fact offer clear examples describing their perceptions of the role of heterosexism in the decline of collegiate women coaches.

#### *Sub-theme 1: Preference for Male Coaches*

Griffin (1992b) notes that one of the manifestations of homophobia is that female head coaches will hire a male assistant coach to "promote a heterosexy image" (p.253). In the study, coach #1 indicated that this influenced her decision to hire a male coach previously, but that she now just wants the best staff, regardless of a potential assistant coaches' gender. Other coaches in the study believe that the relationship between the preference for male coaches and the decline should certainly be given attention. These accounts add to Wellman and Blinde's (1997) study in which they found a link between

heterosexism and homonegativism in female coaches' decisions to hire male assistant coaches. Reflecting on her previous decision to hire a male coach, coach #1 said:

Well I am already a gay coach. I think it would be really hard to have three female, gay women, working. I think that a lot of parents would like to see maybe a male on staff, which, before I was like, okay I want a male on staff...this is going to be really bad, but you know, I'm like I need a beautiful guy in here to help me recruit. And just a good-looking guy...so all the girls will like him. And then we've talked about well [female assistants], you know, do you think she is too gay? Does she perceive as being too gay to hire and those are horrible comments, but I think people really do think about that and think about that perception.

Coach # 1 elaborated:

You know, before, I liked having a guy on staff, as far as the assistant coach. And the main reason why was so he could deal with the parents and talk to the dads and talk to the moms and like, he was in a relationship, he had just gotten married, so I liked that, I liked having that on staff so he could talk to the parents...he was good at, just talking about what it's like to live here, his fiancée at the time, I don't know I just feel like it was good for the parents, it was good to have that person that they knew that maybe he could provide a good role model as well, some of the parents like that...Yeah. I liked having that on staff.

The following brief dialogue ensued:

**Interviewer:** When you say having "that", is that a "heterosexual guy" on staff?

**Coach #1:** Yeah. Umhmm. Yeah. But I can't say that to my boss (laughs).

Towards the end of this particular conversation, coach #1, who just finished her third season as a head coach and has three consecutive conference championships, did say that she no longer would consider the perception of an all female staff when hiring and that she now understands why a former head coach that she worked under believes in hiring and promoting women coaches. At the time of the interview, coach #1 was in the process of hiring a second assistant and said that she now just wants the best staff possible, regardless of how they are perceived.

Coach #4 added:

I think you have some female coaches who hire men because they want to show that they are not gay or that they don't have problems with men. I think that partly is one factor that is contributing to [the decline] because a lot of female coaches are hiring the men, although another a part of it is male athletic directors hiring men... So I think that is part of when you are looking at that whole homophobic situation... and it's a snowball effect. If you hire good male assistants then they go on and become the head coaches. So I think that's why you're starting to see a lot of male head coaches because schools like [a university in the south], or [a university in the great plains], they would hire male assistants and now those men are all head coaches. So it just kind of keeps compounding and that's the problem. I really think that it's a women's sport. No male has played college softball. Women should promote women and women should hire women and women should be mentors to females that want to go into coaching.

Coach #5 said, "...I've heard coaches talk. [They'd say] I hired a guy because I felt I couldn't recruit if I didn't and a lot of it was about the gay stuff." Stories from these coaches bring forth several issues. First, these coaches add to Wellman and Blinde's (1997) findings by revealing stories of women head coaches hiring men to promote a heterosexy image (Griffin, 1992) in order to attract prospective student-athletes to their university. But Coach # 4 disclosed an added layer to this phenomenon of hiring male coaches in that she believes there to be a greater likelihood that male coaches, once hired and promoted, are more likely than women to hire male assistants, thus decreasing opportunities for the hiring and promotion of women coaches in collegiate sport.

Coach #3 however, had not heard of women head coaches hiring men to promote a heterosexy image. Although she does not see this as an issue in field hockey, she too could see this happening in other sports. She said:

I haven't heard of that but I wouldn't be surprised, particularly in basketball just because it is so cut throat. I do not think that is an issue in our sport. The guys that are hired in our sport really technically and tactically they bring a lot to the programs. I definitely could see that happen in basketball but I think it's going to

happen less and less as these generations are growing up with Ellen  
Degenerous...

For the participants in this study, including coach #3, these stories offer clear examples of how the preference for male coaches to promote a heterosex image could result in fewer opportunities for qualified women who aspire to coach in collegiate sport.

*Sub-theme 2: Preference for Married Women Coaches*

Three of the four former coaches shared either examples of or reasons why college athletic directors or those in charge of hiring a head coach would or do prefer to hire a married woman to a single woman. This relates directly to both heterosexism and homonegativism. Examples from the coaches in this study are consistent with Krane and Barber's (2005) notation of hiring practices that discriminate against coaches' perceived to be lesbian. Coach # 5 stated:

I know for a fact that when the [university in the South] job opened up, they were not going to hire a single female. Because a good friend of mine is friends with the women's athletic director down there... When the [university in the South] job opened, they basically said they were not hiring a single female. They just were not going to hire a single female. You could be gay or not, they weren't hiring you. [Another university in the South], same thing. If you look at some of the jobs in certain areas that opened...if you look at the county, the hiring practices. I know women who applied for that [university in the South] job who were so significantly more qualified than that first guy that got it. So, it's a hard question to ask because they just wouldn't call you.

Coach #6 said, "Married male versus single female I think right away that [the married male is] going to get the job, no doubt in my mind. I think that is still where we are."

Coach # 6 also discussed the idea of returning to a coaching position she previously held in a military environment. She added, "People have said to me that you would never get hired there because you are a single woman and they just won't hire single women anymore." Because of her exposure to homophobia, heterosexism, and homonegativism



in collegiate sport, coach #6 added, "...maybe this is my own issue, but [I am] always conscious that I am a single female [when job searching]. Are they thinking that? Are they going to ask? Are they going to assume? Are they going to make their own judgments just without asking?"

These examples expose not only feelings, but also true stories of qualified single coaches either not being considered or being told that they would not be a candidate for a collegiate head coaching position. It is also important to note that aside from the military environment which at the time was, and still is under the *don't ask don't tell* policy, the other two institutions that were mentioned in this section are located in the south, and more specifically in the same athletic conference.

### *Sub-theme 3: Heterosexism is Difficult to Prove*

The previous accounts unearth covert and therefore largely unpunished perpetuations of heterosexism in collegiate sport. While lesbians and unmarried women may be targeted under such practices, when left undetected or not discussed, these practices continue to be condoned and sustained, ultimately affecting all women in sport (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983). Although the coaches in this study offer insight into how heterosexism contributes to the decline of college women head coaches, three coaches in the study stated, unsolicited, that a cause/effect relationship is also difficult to prove. Coach # 4 stated, "I think it does play a role and I think it is hard to prove because people won't say it. But I've seen male coaches hired that have far less qualifications than female coaches.... that in itself speaks volumes..." Coach #5 added:

...I think it holds a greater role than some people think. But you just can't prove it. ...Just because you can't prove it, it is something that is very hard to prove, I really just don't think it should be minimized. I think anybody that would have to

live like that, for two years, or just a year, would find it very restrictive...and very difficult on their relationship.

Coach #7 discussed how she openly shared with her athletic director at the time she retired from coaching that she wanted to pursue a career in collegiate athletic administration at her then institution and she suspects that her rejection had at least something to do with her perceived sexual orientation. She said:

The athletic director knew I wanted to get into administration and he wouldn't offer [an administrative position] to me.... I had been very successful. Now again, was that because he didn't want somebody who challenged him? Or was that because of my sexuality? I will never know.

Coach # 7 also added, "But in my heart of hearts, I believe [the current athletic director] wouldn't have hired any one of us [women who are gay]. Do I know that? No." In all three accounts under this sub-theme, each coach offers evidence of heterosexism as it is defined, but each also stipulates clearly that these claims are difficult to prove, adding a layer of complexity to this issue.

#### The Impact of Heterosexism on Lesbian Coaches' Upward Mobility

Individuals in the collegiate coaching profession go where the jobs are available (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). But Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger (1996) found that homophobic sentiment could limit job mobility for lesbians. Thus, whereas job opportunities are limited for all coaches because there is only a certain amount of positions available across the country, heterosexism in collegiate sport limits head coaching opportunities to an even greater degree for lesbian coaches. Sub-themes for the impact of heterosexism on lesbian coaches' upward mobility include: that these coaches have (1) *location restrictions* based on the desire to live in a location where they would feel comfortable being visible with their female partner. Yet because of the emphasis on

winning at the NCAA Division I level, the participants also stress the importance of working at a university where they are provided with the necessary (2) *resources to succeed*. Thus, unlike their heterosexual counterparts, lesbian coaches not only want to work at an institution where they can be successful, but they also rank high the importance of the socio-political climate of the surrounding area and how that will impact their comfort level. Coach # 4 shared:

...One time I was trying to hire an assistant and she had a partner who had a pretty good job so we were trying to look for a job for the partner because she couldn't move unless the partner could get a job. Well that's something you can't bring up. Whereas I think, when you are looking at a heterosexual coach, they have no problem saying well my wife needs a job. But I don't know anybody that's gay that could really say that. The only reason somebody could say that to me was because they knew I was gay. But I think that is something that is definitely held against [us]. I guess it's a disadvantage. Either hiring or getting a gay coach to move because nobody says, "well, do you have a partner who needs a job? We'll find her a job." Whereas with the men, they'll say, "well what does your wife do? Does she need a job?" That becomes like a negotiating point I think for male coaches but I think female coaches can't do that with their partner and I think that creates some, I guess lack of movement among some female coaches who are gay because their partners can't move and keep their careers going.

Coach #5 discussed the impact of heterosexism on a coach in the southwest's decision to leave coaching altogether after she left her former position. She said:

I know for a fact [one person] did not want to leave coaching but she couldn't leave the state because her partner couldn't leave her position. So she had to get out. There are just decisions like that that you make so it looks like you left but the ways the laws are you are not safe in some states, you cannot get benefits, all of that stuff that plays an important role.

In each of these examples, the coaches reveal factors that those operating under a heterosexist framework may never think of when it comes to why a successful or desired coach may choose not to pursue work in a particular location. In both states that these coaches referred to, sexual orientation is not a protected class under employment practices.

### *Sub-theme 1: Location Restrictions*

The coaches in this population discussed candidly the importance of being comfortable in their work location. Coach #1 has been very successful in her current position and thus has received numerous calls for open positions. She said:

A lot of places have even come up: [a university in the heartland], [a university in the northeast], [a university in the midwest], all these places have come up in the last year and basically my first question is: Can I live there being gay? Not to them, but to myself. Can I live in the community and be happy with my surroundings? And that's my first question...

After recently returning from an interview at a university in the midwest, she said:

...That was one of the biggest draws for me. I've heard it is a very liberal town. Very open, it's a good university. So those are what I am looking for. To have that athletic department that is open, that will accept you and accept your partner or whatever it may be and not have to tiptoe around it...I definitely look at it through a gay lens... I don't want to go somewhere where I have to hide, where I have to pretend. Where I have to go to a restaurant and have people look at me...

Coach #2 is in her first head-coaching job and it is located in a rural and religiously conservative town. Although she discussed that these considerations did not play a role in her decision accept her current position, she reflected:

I feel like I need that support from my community. Like I feel like I have been on an island out here as far as trying to, just live my life for what it is but at the same time just trying to get back to a place where life is just more diverse. I just miss that diversity. It would make it a more comfortable environment. It's been fine but its taken work. It has taken being very conscious of my surroundings... I am not going to lie I look at the NCAA website all the time. I am waiting for something closer to home. I just want to go back that direction someday. You know, just find something that is a little more 2008...

When asked about how important her comfort level as a gay woman was in whether or not to accept a previous job offer, coach #5 said:

Oh that was a huge factor. Any place I went to it was one of the first things. Can I live here and be comfortable [as a gay woman]? And when I am not working, be with my partner. Listen I never would feel like I could hold hands. I never felt that comfortable. But can I go out to dinner with the same woman and people see me every time with the same person and can I live here? Or is it a big enough area that the chances of me running into people are slim to none.

In this situation, coach #5 negotiates whether the city itself would be comfortable to live in with a female partner, or if not, are the surrounding areas livable in the sense that she would have enough privacy to be herself when not working. Reflecting on her former position in the military environment, coach # 6 shared:

I would have never gone to another school where I would have felt like I would have lost my job if I came out or if people saw me with my partner or my girlfriend. I would have never gone to another place like that... In terms of that mentality at [Military environment], it was just a turnoff. I think it's one of the big reasons why I didn't stay there very long. Just constantly feeling uncomfortable, unwelcome.

The coaches in this study reveal that the climate of the surrounding area is important due to their specific circumstances, but it is not the only factor in Division I coaching because of the high stakes placed on winning. When asked to rank order what factors took preference over others when deciding to take or turn down a job, coach #5 said:

If I could be comfortable in my own skin, meaning my sexuality and the person I was with. So the gay thing was number one. Two would be the job. Did the job have the resources? Would I have the money to win, stadium, stuff like that. And three would probably be if I could go hiking. But the first thing is could I live there comfortably if I had a partner."

These comments lead to the second sub-theme that the coaches consider when seeking either past, current or future positions, the success factor.

#### *Sub-theme 2: Resources to Succeed*

Although systematically NCAA Division I men's collegiate sport is funded at a higher rate than their female counterparts (Suggs, 2001), women's collegiate sport is receiving more funding today than ever before and this is largely attributed to Title IX.

For example, several of the softball coaches in this study had multi-million dollar softball stadiums built during their tenure as head coaches and this not uncommon among major athletic universities. Thus, the coaches in this study expressed the importance of resources when considering career moves. When asked what factors take preference over others in job searches, Coach #1 said:

Can I be successful? You are a coach, you want to win, it's a competitive job, you can't go in there and fail. But at the end of the day, I will be picky. ...There are other factors, they all kind of balance each other.

Coach #6 said:

At that time, definitely salary because mine was so low at that time. That was definitely a reason why I was looking at other jobs. The ability for the program to be successful. And then third I would say the environment...Having what I consider to be a healthy environment, when people...don't feel like they have explain themselves or be concerned about losing their jobs because they are worried about their [sexual] orientation.

Coaches #3, #4 and #7 did not have much to add in terms of job mobility because they are or were settled, content and successful in their positions (at the time of the interviews they had coached for a combined 78 years, each at the same institution). Thus, they discussed how once they settled into their positions, that they had no desire to look elsewhere. They also began coaching at a time when salaries and financial support were limited, therefore they built their programs and have or had a loyalty to their respective institution. In addition, coach # 3 is legally married to her wife in the state she resides, coach # 4 has always lived and coached in her current location, and coach # 7 had no desire when she retired to coach at a different institution after a long, successful career at her former university.

Although location restrictions due to comfort level under heteronormativity and resources to succeed appear to be the main factors affecting these coaches' job mobility,

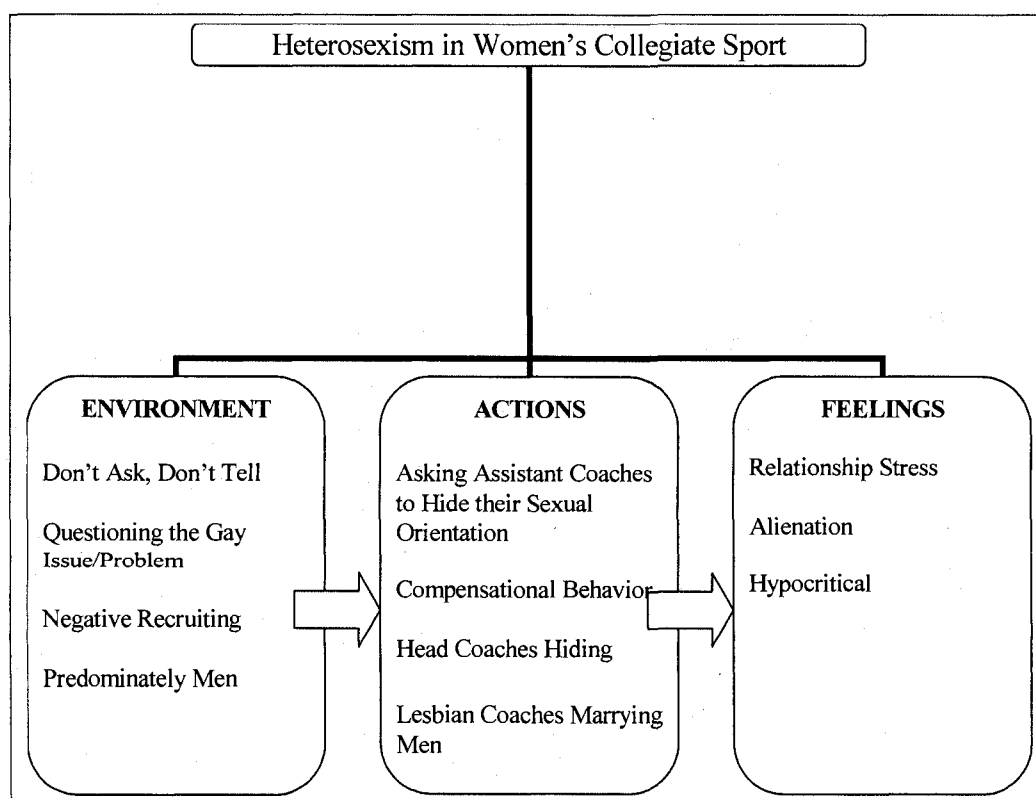
they did individually express other considerations including immediate and extended family, weather, and overall quality of life such as availability for outdoor activities as factors they considered. Most important with this population is that unlike heterosexual coaches, lesbian coaches have to consider (privately) whether or not they will feel comfortable residing in certain locations in addition to the other factors that coaches consider when negotiating positions. Once at a certain point in the job search process, heterosexual coaching candidates usually feel comfortable asking those conducting the search about concerns that may be unique to them (such as religious accommodations, school systems for children, job opportunities for spouses). Lesbian coaches, however, can not always be sure that they have this option when it comes to negotiating job opportunities for their partner or considering whether it is a safe environment to live openly with their female partner.

### Barriers for Women in Coaching

This study also suggested four institutional influences that created barriers to the coaches' success. The first barrier, heterosexism, applies to the lesbian coaches in this study and possibly to single and some married female coaches as well. But all women coaches in general are forced to reckon with the other three barriers: sexism, recruiting, and time demands. Because heterosexist behaviors uniquely affect this study population, it will be discussed first and in the most detail. The additional barriers reveal that most, if not all female NCAA Division I coaches face sexism, recruiting concerns, and rigorous time demands, but the coaches in this study have an additional layer of stress in heterosexism.

Heterosexism is manifested in different ways in the collegiate athletic environment. The results of this study demonstrate that this systemic and often condoned environment resulted in responsive behaviors from the coaches, which in turn has an impact on their particular feelings. A conceptual framework (see figure 1) reveals a cause/effect relationship between the heterosexist environment and lesbian coaches' reactive behaviors and feelings. Under the heterosexist environment, first general examples will be discussed. Next, more- specific sub-themes such as *don't ask, don't tell* practices, *questioning the 'gay issue/problem'*, *negative recruiting*, and *predominately men* will be addressed.

Figure 1. Conceptualizing the impact of heterosexism in collegiate sport on lesbian coaches





### *Sub-theme 1: Environment*

Research reveals that one's occupational climate influences job satisfaction and more specifically that poor workplace experiences significantly affect the career development and decisions for individuals who do identify as heterosexual (Driscoll, Kelly, & Fassinger, 1996; Chung, 2001). While negative workplace experiences affect individuals across the LGB spectrum in the general work environment, scholars and mainstream media outlets consider athletic departments to be the most homophobic place on the college campus (Jacobson, 2002; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001). As coach #5 stated, "You have to understand. Athletics is the last bastion of conservatism [on campus]. You can be on the most conservative campus and you walk in the athletic department and it just doesn't co-op the whole atmosphere of the campus." Seven of the eight head coaches discussed examples of heterosexist practices being employed in their current or former work environments. Coach # 2 shared:

The only other thing that I can think of that stood out that has bothered me and it's such a stupid little thing, the phone list that goes around. And I probably should step up and say something but...it has your name, office number, cell phone and all that, then on the far right column it says "spouses name." And to me it's like I can't get married so I don't have a spouse....[My former partner], we were together seven years. Obviously that is my partner, you know. I would have put her down, but I don't have a spouse. You know what I am saying, just things like that. That's probably one that stands out...It's just one of those things when [I] open the excel sheet and I'm like, well I guess I won't put anybody in there because I don't have a spouse...And I just clicked it off, like whatever...

Coach #3 shared a past experience that affected her 20 years ago when she was less open about her sexual orientation than she is today. She said:

...The person I hired, probably 20 years ago as an assistant, she was recently married and I remember her making a comment to me. I was in a relationship. Not married but fully into the relationship and I remember her saying to me at one point because coaching can take a lot of hours and a lot of demand on you and she was trying to ask for more time off and she said..."I am married, I have a life you know." And I

remember at that point being like, and I am not? I don't have a life? That may be one of the few times I can really say that I got so angry. She just couldn't understand that what she had just said to me was so insulting or that her free time was any different than my free time, more valued because she was married and mine was less valued because I was not married...

Coach # 6 reflected on her experiences with heterosexism when she worked in the military environment. She recalled:

All the social events, that was all awkward. You know, very family oriented, but who they considered...your husband, wife, children, very military obviously. Not very open...You know they, to them everyone is straight and that's it. Anyone that is not, there is something wrong with them.

Coach # 8 shared:

...It came up often times. What's a woman like you doing without a man? Why aren't you married? Or are you married? Do you have a boyfriend. I would just be kind of coy. I would say, "well I don't have a husband." And they would say, "well why not..." I would say, "I'm too busy". We'd laugh and joke. Occasionally people would ask me out and I would say, "this really isn't a good time, I would use recruiting and traveling 50 or 60,000 miles a year as an excuse, or I would say I am married to my job." I would say whatever I felt. I'd size the person up and see just what would get them off my back. Typically that worked. It seemed to work in those types of functions. I would just say, "you're silly, or I'm not your type." I did what most of us do when we are trying to get rid of someone and we don't want to spend time with.

Although each of these are individual experiences in different athletic departments across the United States, coach # 4 not only discussed personal experiences at her institution but also a recent NCAA clarification distributed to each coach at her university.

We just got a [compliance] clarification on this. If you are married, and I was thinking about how to write the NCAA. I think if you go out to eat dinner and you are married, I think your spouse can go with you. But if you are not married, your significant other cannot go with. And that's an NCAA interpretation. So I am about to write [the NCAA] and say okay that makes no sense because if it is a recruiting advantage, you shouldn't just give it to the married coaches. And if it is not a recruiting advantage, why are we preventing people from going...Right now, your partner can't mingle with your recruits... It is heterosexist because first of all, is it going to benefit me to take my partner on a recruiting deal.... Is that really considered a benefit...So why are you going to penalize somebody? If they've got the guts to do that, let them do it...

In this scenario, coach # 4 reveals that heterosexism is not only operating in individual athletic departments but also by the governing body itself, the NCAA. This interpretation leaves lesbian coaches with no option but to obey or their program and institution will be penalized.

*Don't Ask, Don't Tell*

Six of the eight coaches indicated that some type of don't ask don't tell climate was or is operating in their university's athletic department. These findings are consistent with Kauer's (2005) research results in which two of the eight college coaches interviewed discussed the "open secret" or "don't ask, don't tell" climate for lesbians in sport. Coach # 4 shared, "I think the biggest thing is that you're just not overt about anything and you're just not open about it." Coach # 5 said:

It was sort of like don't ask don't tell. So it wasn't like they knew, but they wouldn't go after you. People watched what they said, but you are sort of expected not to flaunt it. And by flaunt it, just meaning not being inappropriate, but announcing that you are gay.

Coach # 7 shared:

I really didn't come out to any one who was straight. On the other hand, people knew I owned a home with a woman; I didn't hide that. I didn't come out to my [student-athletes] but my partner came to my games. But I also wouldn't run over and hug her after a big win. It was fine. But some of it was self-imposed to be honest with you.

Coach # 8 said, "The proverbial closet is probably very accurate. You had a self- selected group of friends you trusted. And you knew who not to trust. So typically we gravitated towards those folks who were most like ourselves..." Interestingly, each of the former head coaches except coach #6 mentioned, unsolicited, a "don't ask don't tell" environment. Because coach #6 previously coached in a military environment, she

actually worked under a written and signed into law “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy in which she could be fired for displaying openly in any way that she was a lesbian. Thus, she was completely closeted when she worked at that particular institution. But when she took a coaching position at a university in the northeast, this was not an issue for her. Two of the three former coaches who co-opted the “don’t ask, don’t tell” climate worked at universities that provide health benefits to domestic partners. This brings up two issues. First, it supports the previously discussed notion that athletic departments are more conservative than other parts of the campus. Secondly, as coach # 5 stated, “even if they offer partner benefits, you cannot go for them or you are very very reluctant to go for them unless you come out. And a lot of coaches won’t come out.” Griffin (1992) notes that one manifestation of homophobia in women’s sport is silence. This “don’t ask, don’t tell” climate in women’s collegiate sport is certainly evidence that the pact of silence between and amongst five of the eight coaches in this study remains in tact.

#### *Questioning the “Gay Issue/Problem”*

Five of the eight coaches in this study recollect hearing about or being asked directly by prospective student-athletes parents during the recruiting process if there was a “gay issue” or “gay problem” on their team or if they themselves were married. These findings are consistent with two studies where coaches discussed being questioned about lesbians on their own teams and how they handle lesbian-related issues, lesbians on other college teams, or simply fielding direct questions about their own sexual orientation or marital status (Wellman & Blinde, 1997; Krane & Barber, 2005). The following dialogue depicts this:

**Coach #4:** And I’ve had, again, parents ask if I’m married or do I have any kids and you know I just answer the questions. I just say, “no I’m not married and I

have 18 kids. I don't have any children of my own." Or I say, "hey I have a dog and that's all I need."

**Interviewer:** So how many times over the years have you been asked by parents if you are married?

**Coach # 4:** Maybe 10 or so. During recruiting. You know when you are out eating dinner with them and you are just chit chatting...

**Interviewer:** And you would never say, "no, I have a partner," or anything like that.

**Coach # 4:** No I would not.

**Interviewer:** And was that for professional purposes?

**Coach # 4:** Yeah, definitely. And again I just don't think it's appropriate whether it's right or wrong. If I was married obviously I would say, "yes, I'm married." Again I think it is a little bit taboo and it's still not something in [this part of the country] you want to blatantly blow your horn about.

Coach # 5 shared:

...I had been asked specifically on more than one occasion, "do you have a gay problem on your team?" So that of course is awkward because of course, I could say that you've just insulted me because I am gay...It's awkward. I am trying to recruit this kid and I've got the parents asking me if I've got a gay problem. And you really just want to scream at them but you can't because you want their student athlete to come [to your university]...

Coach # 7 recalled:

I can remember being an assistant coach at [a university in the mid-Atlantic]...and through [my former institution], somebody said, I have a niece, I hear she is a great softball player...and [the niece] is looking at schools and her mother, may she rest in peace, says she was concerned about [a university in the mid-Atlantic] because she heard a lot of them were lesbians. Now I didn't know anything about [her daughter] at that moment...and I was sort of taken back. And I said, "well, I am not sure if that's true or not. I'm sure there are gay people on the team, just like there are gay people on any other team, and on any other walk of life, but I'm sure if there are, it will be okay for [your daughter] if that's where she chose to go." And her mom dropped it, and I dropped it.

These head coaches reveal through their stories that not only will prospective student-athletes' parents ask them these questions, but that when they do, it puts the

coaches in a compromising position in which they feel they must avoid responding with the complete truth. Interestingly, coach # 2 and coach # 3, the two coaches in this study who are out, have never been asked these questions by parents or by prospective student-athletes. While it was mostly the student-athletes' parents who asked these questions, only coach # 5 was ever asked (in a roundabout way) if she was gay by a prospective student-athlete and this was nearly 15 years ago.

### *Negative Recruiting*

Krane and Barber (2005) indicate that negative recruiting is a tactic in which coaches will strategically, and in poor taste, use negative perceptions and stereotypes about lesbians in an attempt to discourage prospective student-athletes from selecting a rival college or university. It can take place in other forms as well, but for the purpose of this study it will be discussed in the context of heterosexism. Griffin (1998) commented on the NCAA's prohibition against negative recruiting. To demonstrate its commitment to understanding and eliminating such practices, the NCAA is continuously dialoguing with interested groups both inside and outside of the organization on methods to deter such practices in women's collegiate sport (McKindra, 2006).

The coaches in this study discuss that with today's high stakes, recruiting has taken a nasty turn and some coaches continue to resort to poor ethics in order to lure a student-athlete to commit to their university. Five of the eight coaches discussed how these scenarios have taken place against them or other lesbian coaches. These responses are consistent with Wellman and Blinde's (1997) study in which all 13 coaches discussed the issue of negative recruiting without being prompted.

Coach #5 shared the following example of when she was negatively recruited against: "I was recruiting against [a coach at a university in the south], and [the prospective student-athlete's] father said, "[the coach in the south] brought us into his home with his wife and just said, 'we have family values here.'" In another example, Coach #5 said:

I had a bad experience with one coach [in the mid-Atlantic region] who I knew for a long time, who I considered a friend. But when it came to a recruit, this guy who I had known forever, who I had considered a friend, brought up the family values thing.

Coach # 8, a former volleyball coach at a university in the mid-west, shared:

I actually was recruited negatively against I know for certain by another conference assistant coach who told a recruit, "well you know she is not married." And without saying specifically about me being gay, [the recruit] said to me that [the assistant coach] said, "She's not married. Our institution, of course we are all married, we all have children, we all have family values." So without saying what I was or wasn't, [the assistant coach] was able to put a cloud on me and therefore my program.

Coach # 4 said that while she has not heard of negative recruiting used specifically against her, that this doesn't mean it has not happened. But she certainly is not oblivious to it and believes that it spans across sports other than softball, particularly mentioning women's basketball. She said:

I have heard of other coaches and other sports... say that it is something that's used against them... And I think more in women's basketball... Some of my basketball people said that some of the male coaches would go to gay bars and try to see which coaches were coming out of the gay bars at these recruiting tournaments. You know to try and figure out who was gay and not gay... you have a lot of basketball coaches that are married that are gay you know and then they get divorced. It's harder probably in those high profile sports... And then I've heard a lot of softball coaches that are married. They don't really blast the gay people or the gay coaches but they say that they have a family atmosphere to try to insinuate that they're a male/female kind of team. It's kind of sometimes an insinuation. ...

In each of these coaches' stories, other coaches specifically mention the notion of "family values" as a negative recruiting tactic. In addition, every coach referred to as

having negatively recruited happened to be a male. Although coach # 5 has been out of coaching for three years now and despite the NCAA's recent attention to this issue, she still believes that these tactics are far from over, stating:

I think it got better for a while. And I think now it's going to get tight again. And you know, I am out of it. I think the bomb is going to fall...because the money is getting really good and the stakes are getting really high. Softball coaches are starting to get like basketball coaches. You don't win and you are gone. And I think when people are in a position like that, they will use any arsenal. So I will be curious to see...But now, sport has gotten to a point where people are getting fired if they don't win. And if they don't win, and it's about recruiting, I could see people throwing that out there a little bit. "

Though coach # 5 referred to softball only, coach # 8, a former volleyball coach, confirmed that negative recruiting against lesbian coaches persists in other sports as well. She said:

I don't think anybody has any idea how difficult recruiting is today. It is extraordinarily competitive and I really do believe people will almost resort to anything to gain an advantage. If trying to point out someone's sexual orientation is felt to be advantageous, they will do it.

### *Predominately Men*

Consistent with previous literature (e.g., Gill et. al, 2006, Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001, Kimmel, 2007, Sandler, 2008) the coaches in this study discussed how men tend to demonstrate heterosexism, homophobia, and homonegativism more so than women. Because collegiate sport is a male domain, for male athletes and some male coaches, their levels of heterosexism, homophobia and homonegativism are elevated as a way to recover from male bonding on the terrain of sport. For male coaches and administrators who work with women's sport, their heterosexism and homonegativism is a response to women's entry into and success on what has been traditionally deemed a male terrain. Coach # 1 shared, "...the guys staff will use the word fag sometimes and it



catches me off guard, I'm like, just don't, you know, say that, or I try to say that was really derogatory or I just try to educate them..." Coach # 1 also shared how she does not feel comfortable in her current environment because of comments that she has heard around the department. She said:

I don't feel comfortable around [my athletic director]. I don't feel comfortable around [the associate athletic director]. Just events that have played out in the last year...Comments that I've heard, you know [the athletic director] not liking women's sports. Or just not liking [the women's basketball coach] because of her sexuality. So those play a factor to me going okay, I want out. I don't want to be here because I don't think I am accepted here.

Coach # 4 added:

I think there is homophobia. And I'm not sure if it's as much on the women's side as it is on the men's side quite frankly. I think people, I really think kind of expect females in athletics to be gay so they've kind of accepted it almost. At least it seems like that to me. Because I don't think anybody is surprised if a female coach is gay anymore. But I think a male coach that's gay. Our coach, you know he is gay, a little stereotypically gay, you can kind of tell he's gay. But I think there's other coaches that are gay that really hide it because they are either macho, they're built, they're married, they're whatever. I think there's a lot of homophobia in the male coaches. Obviously I don't know a lot of them. It just seems like there's none that are out or indicating they are gay. So I think it's more an issue in the male coaching side.

On negative recruiting, coach # 6 said:

I wasn't ever aware of any negative recruiting as far as people saying things about me...More a couple of times, just really very similar instances where coaches said things about...actually strictly female coaches, and in each instance they were male coaches. Yeah I never really heard any of the female coaches really saying it...in each instance it was a male coach.

Coach # 8 added:

There were other coaches that we were all very weary of because we knew that they were negative recruiters and by and large they were men. I don't know that I was ever negatively recruited against in volleyball by a woman coach but I am certain it happened.

Coach # 6 also spoke about her experience working with the men's teams in the military environment:

...At [the military environment], I was an administrator also so I was around the football team a lot and would also be around the basketball team often, lacrosse, hockey...I was always around the hockey team at [the military environment], you know those 4 sports in particular you would hear that kind of language all the time...

While the above accounts are just a few of the more concrete examples of men exhibiting homophobia, coach # 7 still believes that her sexual orientation played a role in the male athletic director not hiring her for several administrative positions. Similarly, coach # 5 spoke about homophobia she encountered when she previously worked as a strength coach for male athletes at a university in the northeast.

Each of these examples, *don't ask, don't tell; questioning the gay issue/problem; negative recruiting; and male heterosexism, homophobia, and homonegativism* are noteworthy instances of how the heterosexist environment operates systematically in collegiate sport. As a result of this persistent environment, all of the coaches in this study, to some degree, currently employ or have at some point in their careers employed particular *actions* in order to cope under this environment. These coping mechanisms will be discussed next.

#### *Sub-theme 2: Actions*

The coaches in this study, to different degrees, expressed how they themselves or other coaches employ or have employed specific coping mechanisms in order to survive and in most cases thrive professionally under the heterosexist environment of collegiate sport. Four particular behaviors that came up repeatedly were: (1) as assistant coaches, their boss (who each time happened to be a lesbian) asked them to conceal their sexual

orientation from student-athletes and their parents; (2) the ways in which these coaches compensate in their work environment for being gay under heteronormative standards, or (3) the ways these coaches strategically hide their own relationships in their work environment, and (4) although these coaches themselves have not gotten married (except coach # 3 who is married to a woman), they discuss how other lesbian coaches have married men as a career advancement tactic.

#### *Asking Assistant Coaches to Hide*

Prior to their current appointments as head coaches, the two soccer coaches (coaches # 1 and 2) expressed how their supervisors (both lesbians also), asked them to be covert about their sexual orientation around the student-athletes and the student-athletes parents. Each of these requests was within the last ten years. This again speaks to Griffin's (1992) notion of silence around lesbian related issues in women's sport.

Coach # 1 shared:

I remember one time [at my former institution] I was dating someone and I brought her to an event and I think [the head coach]...said she was too gay to come to the event and it was my first year working [there] so it caught me off guard. Now [that coach] is completely openly gay and out, but at the time she wasn't, so she didn't want to be perceived as having a gay coach or assistant coach...I was really like taken off guard by that...so I then was hesitant to bring her to any events or hesitant to have her come wait after a soccer game or anything like that. But, you know, I didn't know what to do about it...

Coach # 1 also discussed how the other assistant coach, a male, was permitted to bring his girlfriend to work related events. She said, "...if we would go do something and the other assistant would bring his girlfriend, like to a recruiting event, a basketball game...I couldn't bring [my partner at the time] and [my partner and I] would get into arguments about it all the time." Coach # 2, who is now out in her current job, shared a similar scenario. She said, "When I was at [my former institution], the head coach asked

me not to come out...I am like of course I am going to do what you ask me to do but at the same time I don't agree with it." Similarly, when she was a head coach at a university in the northeast, coach # 6 discussed how she struggled with one of her gay assistants' openness about her sexual orientation. She said:

I had a graduate assistant who was very very open, to the point that I thought it was just a little overboard... When we were recruiting I didn't feel it was necessary to have to tell recruits...she's gay. She felt that's who she is so people should know. It was tough because I had to ask her to just kind of, not keep things under wraps, but you know, not offer the information. That was difficult, that was awkward. Because then you are called a hypocrite and you almost feel like one.

These scenarios are not isolated to the south or traditionally conservative regions of the United States. Both states where these three coaches were employed at the time are considered to be two of the more progressive states in the country.

#### *Compensational Behavior*

Previous research reveals how lesbian coaches have compensated for the "lesbian label" in job searches (e.g., Krane & Barber, 2005, Wellman & Blinde, 2005). Similarly, the coaches in this study shared how they themselves have felt and as a result submitted to the pressure by performing specific hiding or compensatory practices on the job or during job searches. Two of the four former head coaches spoke about how they tried to avoid any perception about their sexual orientation when they were on job interviews or while recruiting. In addition, coach # 2 adds a new layer to this tactic. She feels that because she is out, she must compensate by going above and beyond when trying to sell herself as a head coach or her institution to a recruit.

This dialogue describes how coach # 6 compensated during job searches for being a single woman under a heteronormative standard:

**Interviewer:** Did you ever feel that you had to compensate in any way for [being single]?

**Coach # 6:** Yeah...I always wore dresses, you know definitely made sure I would dress appropriately. You know I think that's pretty standard anyway...probably just bring conscious of it myself.

**Interviewer:** So you said you always wore dresses. Did you do that intentionally?

**Coach # 6:** Oh, absolutely.

**Interviewer:** What was the intention?

**Coach # 6:** I guess maybe to come off a little more feminine. Definitely professionally. I do think in a lot of instances it would be business suits, dresses, skirts, whatever, the attire that I think is appropriate for an interview.

**Interviewer:** But you chose dresses over pant suits just to look more feminine?

**Coach # 6:** Yeah, a lot of times.

**Interviewer:** Would you wear dresses anywhere else...

**Coach # 6:** I definitely don't wear dresses anywhere but interviews and funerals...

Coach # 8 added:

I could pass...as straight. You know, I would dress up, wear skirts on trips, you know, things like that. So I knew that's what I needed to do to compete with some of the homophobia that was engendered by some of the other coaches who were recruiting...[During job interviews] I always wore a skirt, I always wore make up to interviews. I always yucked it up with the guys on the [search]committee. I knew how to play that game... It was basically I feel playing to the men. Kind of being a little bit subservient, I knew how to behave...

On how she compensates for being openly lesbian coach in the competitive realm of recruiting, coach # 2 shared:

In my own mind, [I] am conscious [that I am gay], but I don't ever want that to be an issue, that [the students] don't...come to my school. So I would say I probably put my own barrier in my mind, like okay make sure you sell this kid on the

school and on you as a coach and on the program. It's definitely there. I would be lying if I said it's not, but I don't want them to not choose the school because of [my sexual orientation]. I would say I go overboard to make sure that that is not the case... it's been such a conscious effort of trying to do more than I normally would to be seen as just a coach, just all of those other things, than to be identified as gay.

### *Head Coaches Hiding*

Hiding their partner or girlfriend is a coping mechanism shared by seven of the eight coaches, including coach # 2. This tactic again speaks to Griffin's (1992) second manifestation of homophobia in women's sport, silence. Griffith and Hebl (2002) also found that disclosure was related to job anxiety. Furthermore, the hiding mechanism employed by the coaches in this study parallels the fears of college professors with regard to researching gay- related topics and risking both grant and career advancement opportunities (e.g., Bollag, 2007; McLemee, 2003; McNaron, 1997). In her research on lesbians in organizational settings, Gedro (2006) said:

Because lesbianism is difficult to physically distinguish, lesbians have the ability to hide their identity when their safety or security is threatened. Lesbian invisibility is therefore a two-edged sword. On one hand, this invisibility works to enable the homophobic, heterosexist, and sexist status quo of organizations. On the other hand, invisibility permits lesbians to make choices about vulnerability. (p.45)

The coaches shared how they navigate the heterosexist athletic terrain through hiding.

Coach # 1 said:

I will have team dinners over at my house. And before when I was in a relationship, I would like consciously take down all of the pictures of [my ex-partner] in the house because I didn't know how the team would feel about it... If I was married I would feel like it wouldn't be a problem... for sure he [husband if married to a man] would probably be a little but more involved, because, you know, it would be more accepted.

When asked how she introduces her partner, Coach #4 said, "I would just simply say this is my friend or my housemate. That's how I would introduce [my partner]. One of those two ways. Again we were both real comfortable with that..." Coach # 5 shared:

My partners would come to games and be sort of, sometimes inconspicuous. They would wait for me or we would just meet up later. Sometimes it was just really hard. If the person I was seeing at the time was a softball coach, it made it a little easier because they were there as a colleague and I would feel more comfortable bringing them around...bottom line I just felt like I had a reason to have my partner there if she was a softball person. Or if she wasn't, not such a good reason.

The following dialogue also depicts the measures coach # 7 took to conceal her relationship:

**Coach # 7:** [My partner] came to all of my games. Interestingly enough, parents knew her, and some were just great with her. They just knew whatever they thought they knew. I never introduced her to anybody, which is probably downright rude when you think about it (laughs).

**Interviewer:** So when you introduced her, how did you introduce her?

**Coach # 7:** This is [partner's name] (laughs). I probably even said this is my friend [partner's name]. And I think I got reprimanded for that although she is way more closeted than I am. But I probably would say this is [partner's name].

Coach # 8 discussed having to revert into the closet after spending a weekend in Provincetown, Massachusetts where she and her partner at the time bought matching rings. She said:

...[my partner] went to a couple [work] functions with me. They weren't functions where I was the center of attention and I had to get up and talk to people. I just had to attend and I would just say..."well this is a friend of mine, she's in from out of town," because we were for a while dating long distance...But I had my ring on and so did she...and I remember taking my ring off and putting it in my pocket because I was worried that someone would make that connection and I remember getting blasted for it when I got home. She said, "don't you ever take that ring off again." I said, "look, I can't be out in public with people we don't know. It's uncomfortable for me, I am afraid, I don't want people to make assumptions and they would."

### *Lesbian Coaches Marrying Men*

Several of the coaches in this study either spoke of situations where other coaches who they knew were lesbians have married men for career advancement purposes. These actions are examples of Griffin's (1992) first and fourth manifestations of homophobia, denial and the promotion of a heterosexy image. While in Griffin's conceptualization she does not dictate that female coaches actually go so far as to marry men, these coaches share that in some cases, lesbian coaches will go so far if it means career attainment.

Coach # 4 shared:

...I mean we've had gay coaches that have said they're engaged and you never met the fiancée and then all of a sudden they're unengaged. People would make up some things like that I think. Because they don't want people to know they are gay.

Coach # 5 shared a specific example of her ex-partner previously dating a Division I female coach who was married to a man at the time they were dating. She said, "I know certain coaches that get married, and they are gay. But they marry so they can recruit." Finally, although this head coach did not go as far as getting married, coach # 8 spoke of how another head coach in her department [at a university in the Midwest], who was gay, took her male assistant (who was also gay) to a recruiting event. She said, "...It was an athletic dinner, so that she could have a man on her arm for the purpose of showing that she was straight. This was in the early 90s."

The actions depicted by these coaches are strictly for the purposes of maintaining their credibility under a heteronormative athletic environment. But their stories do not stop at how they navigate the terrain. They also shared the thoughts and feelings that have resulted from their compensatory actions.



### *Sub-theme 3: Feelings*

As a result of their previously described actions, six of the eight the coaches in this study shared different feelings, both past and present. The three most common feelings between these six coaches were relationship stress, alienation from their colleagues, and feeling hypocritical.

#### *Relationship Stress*

Seven of the eight coaches in this study discussed how their actions as a result of heterosexism have caused strain on relationships with their current or then partners.

When she was an assistant at [a university in the west], coach # 1 shared her partner's frustrations when she heard that the other assistant coach brought his girlfriend to work-related events. She said:

[My partner] would say, "Well why does [male assistant coach] get to bring his girlfriend and why can't you bring me?" That was always an argument and I think it was a big point on why she and I broke up. She couldn't feel like she was involved in my life...On the phone we'd always talk about players, parents, recruiting, things, but then, at the end of it, she couldn't come to a banquet, or couldn't be a part of the recruiting process for a basketball game where people brought their [opposite sex] partners or their girlfriends or their boyfriends but not their [same-sex] partners or significant others, so that I think is tough. I've struggled a lot with that.

Coach # 5 shared the difficulties of being in a relationship with someone who does not understand the coaching demands. She said, "...unless you are in coaching, you really don't understand coaching...[I have a good friend who has gotten in] so many arguments over coaching. You know. And the relationships that I have had, likewise." Speaking about her experience in the military environment, Coach #6 said:

Well it was hard. Because especially then, I was seeing someone. So that means that you know if you had to be somewhere, like say a holiday thing or something like that, it's tough because they can't go with you. They just can't. And it's still like that. So then they are mad at you at home. You go home and your partner is mad at

you because you weren't there for the evening. You know you sacrifice that on the personal end.

Recollecting how she took off her commitment ring while at the work function with her partner, coach # 8 shared:

I remember getting blasted for it when I got home. She said, "Don't you ever take that ring off again." I said, look, I can't be 'out' in public with people we don't know. It's uncomfortable for me, I am afraid, I don't want people to make assumptions and they would. Recruiting is very very important, and trying to explain to her why we had to be so careful.

These words demonstrate the tremendous strain that a heterosexist workplace climate places on the coaches in this study.

### *Alienation*

Because most of the coaches are or were unable to openly share their true lives during casual workplace conversations, the second most common feeling discussed by them was a sense alienation from others in their respective athletic departments. In their study on identity disclosure in the workplace, Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger (1996) found that for lesbians, discrimination and homophobia in the work environment caused "constricted peer and supervisory relationships" (p. 229). These coaches echoed this sentiment. Coach # 1 shared, "...Sometimes maybe you don't feel as close with the rest of the staff..."

Coach # 4 said:

...Obviously I think it's easier to talk to coaches who you know are gay and have a partner...I would never go up to a male coach and talk about what [my partner] and I did over the weekend. Whereas I would probably do that with a female coach. So I think it definitely kind of structures your conversation with workplace employees somewhat, as to what you talk about and probably what they talk with you about.

Coach # 5 added:

You just never feel close to anybody. It's very hard to connect...So I always just felt like I lived in two worlds. Listen I didn't totally want to bring my personal life into my job, but you just feel like people are your friend, but never know you. They just really, at some level, never know you. And how can they stay in your life if they don't know you. I left [university in the mid-Atlantic] and I am not going to stay in touch. I really liked [the gymnastics coach] and we had some great conversations, but you know something, he never knew me. We were never really friends. And it keeps a wall between people. I could have a really shitty day or maybe I am worried about my partner because she is really sick and nobody would know, nobody would know. And whether you mean to or not I think it puts up walls.

### *Hypocritical*

Lastly, coach # 6 recollected the emotional toll that asking her graduate assistant to tone down her openness took on her at times. She said, "I felt was unnecessary to bring up during the recruiting process. And again that's where I feel like a hypocrite and homophobic all of the time". Now, in her current position as an athletic administrator, she recently had to address an unprofessional relationship that had developed between two coaches on her staff. This again caused her inner turmoil. She said:

The head coach and assistant coach (both females), [were in a relationship] with each other. It was a situation that I just felt like I had to be very delicate approaching. Because I didn't want to seem homophobic and I didn't want to seem like a hypocrite obviously, but at the same time professionally it's not a situation I agree with. It's an awkward balancing act no matter where you work actually.

Coach #6 did say however that if the two coaches had been professional about their relationship, she would not have taken any action against them. The following dialogue demonstrates how Coach # 1 would struggle if her assistant wanted to invite her partner to team event.

**Interviewer:** What if your assistant brought her girlfriend to a game? What is that process like for you?

**Coach # 1:** I mean it is what it is. I think it's a process more for her. She definitely looks gay, which is totally fine by me...But for me, there is nothing I can do about

it. I am not going to sit here and, you know, tell her you can't bring your partner to an event...I've never had anyone ask if they want to bring their partner to like a banquet. I mean, I guess I wouldn't have a problem with it. I would think about it.

**Interviewer:** So you wouldn't say no?

**Coach # 1:** I can't. I mean that's, I mean that's their life. I think it would be really hard for me to say no, when you know I always talk to the team about accepting people and everyone for what we bring and who we are and respecting that. So I'd have to respect that...Would it be difficult? For sure. I would have to deal with the parents. Because the kids are one thing, They don't care. It's sometimes the parents that have that problem. And at a banquet setting it's the parents and recruits. So I have never had that decision. I'd like to say that I would be like yeah, sure, no problem. But I am sure I would think about it.

Each of the feelings shared by the coaches: relationship stress, alienation, and hypocrisy, depict the inner struggles that these coaches deal with in both their work and home environment that their heterosexual counterparts do not have to grapple with. Even if a heterosexual coach does struggle with an assistant coach's outward sexual orientation, he or she does not have to worry about how it will reflect on them as a heterosexual person. One barrier, however, that all female coaches have faced or more than likely will face at some point in their careers, is sex discrimination

#### *Sub-theme 2: Sexism*

Sex discrimination in the workplace is not a new phenomenon for women. Although Title IX was implemented to ensure gender equity in schools receiving federal funding, it has gained the most publicity in the realm of college athletics. In fact, as of August 2008, there were 14 known Title IX complaints, lawsuits, or appeals pending against institutions of higher education across the United States. Women in sport have filed all of them. The cases at Fresno State University are the most notable because of the large monetary awards (more than \$14 million plus interest accruing while two appeals are pending) to two former coaches and one former athletic administrator, all women. But

cases are also currently pending against Montana State University, the University of Hawaii, Florida Gulf Coast University, the University of Southern California, San Diego State University, Cal-State Northridge, the University of California – Davis, and five junior colleges in California, (Steeg, 2008; NCLR, 2008). Most of the documented complaints are due to either discrimination in pay and resources or retaliation for complaining about gender inequities.

Without being prompted, five of the eight coaches in this study shared similar sentiments about discriminatory practices against them as both as women and as coaches of women's sport. These stories ranged from not being invited to play in the athletic department golf tournament, to inequities in access to departmental perks, to disproportionate budget cuts against their program, to retaliation for speaking up about gender inequities. Coach # 2, who is the only female head coach at her university, shared:

I am the only head coach that's never been asked to play in the [athletic department] golf tournament. But I have been asked to work all of them as a volunteer. Like sell things on holes for fundraisers and that kind of thing. Then probably, the most recent was the courtesy car. The head coaches have always had cars and they just took mine away because they said they had to sell it. It was a [four door car]. It was fine, it suited my needs... Well then the whole women's basketball staff just moved to a new university so they wanted to put me in, not the head coaches car, which was a [sport utility vehicle], but the second assistant basketball coach's car which was like an older...very unattractive [car]. So I kind of like raised heck about it. I went in to the new [athletic director]...and I was like, really? That's how I am going to be treated? And it kind of became a bit of an issue. So they ended up putting me in the [sport utility vehicle], and I have been in it for like two weeks. They called Friday and were like yeah we are actually going to take that back, we are going to put you in the [unattractive car] again...it's all come to a head in the last couple of months....I am still leaning towards, and maybe it's naïve, but I am still leaning towards the fact that I am a female...Although I have never played that card and it's kind of hard. But I am at the point now where I am like screw you I am ready to go buy my own car. I am in that bitter state right now. I am going to go sit down with the new AD...Because he was the one when I first brought it up... I was like I don't want to play this card, I don't want to be that person, but this is a breaking point for me. And he was like, no that's fine coach I totally understand. He goes hey, you are one of two winning programs on campus. He goes you can have whatever you

want. You won a big fat championship.... I am going to say something but I feel like if I am a guy, I am not having this conversation... there are only two winning programs on this entire campus... we are one of them. We turned the program around that was a losing program for two years, we've come in and had two winning seasons and an NCAA appearance and still it's like, here is this beat up [old car], here's another budget cut, I am cutting your scholarships, you know all of those things and it's like really... I think that is an experience that a lot of women that I know that coach go through...

Coach # 4 added:

I can say exactly the same thing as a male coach and it is looked at as, oh he's pushing to get his program better and the woman coach and I know this from experience is looked as a bitch. You know, well she's just bitching or she's hard to work with... You know, men in athletics just do not respect women and it's just a real conflict... but again in any workplace I think women are looked down upon or treated differently than men. I think it's very seldom they are treated equally... I'm pretty vocal about Title IX and equity and I do think there are times that had I not been so successful winning that they probably would have tried to find a reason to fire me.

Coach #5 said:

I think sexism plays a role [in the decline]... like [the male coach at a successful university in the southwest] can get a baseball job even though he has coached softball for 25 years. A successful female coach could never get a baseball job. That is real sexism. For women it's only open to coach women's sports but for men it is open to coach men and women... There have been other reasons, some guys will volunteer to do it basically for nothing. Or the good ole boys club. [One male at a university in the East] got the job because he was an equipment manager. [The university was] starting softball and he said oh yeah, I will take [the job]. That type of thing that wouldn't usually happen for women.

Coach # 5 also reflected on how she was treated differently after she went to and spoke up at an open forum on Title IX at her university. She said, "There is no doubt in my mind that my athletic director made my life more difficult for me when I got involved with a Title IX forum on campus. There is no doubt in my mind."

Coach # 8 added:

...It's the old adage, men are aggressive and they are just trying to work hard. Women are aggressive and they are just bitchy and they're just crabby and it's just sour grapes to them. But men, it's always the positive attributes and adjectives and

for women who behave the same it's just negative. I was thrilled that there were two women in the final [NCAA women's basketball tournament] game. Silly things that still have meaning to me because I think that fight against a male, first of all it's a male bastion, it still very much is. I don't care how hard women work, it's still you are working twice as hard for basically a lot of times its half the salary, half the notoriety, half the publicity, half the contracts...

Both coach # 4 and coach # 8 echoed the same sentiment that women athletic administrators shared in the NCAA (1989) study on barriers for women in sport. As one administrator in that study stated, "Aggressive women in administration are viewed as less feminine, whereas men are seen as 'go getters' or achievers" (p.22).

The coaches in this study portray that in some way, there are discriminatory practices operating in each of their departments, based on their gender. Whether the discrimination is institutional, for example women not having access to coach college baseball but men having access to coach college softball, or individual, for example coach # 2 not being invited to play in the departmental golf tournament, the coaches in this study also expressed concerns about their job status if they were to or when they do speak up. And unfortunately as the current lawsuits reveal, these coaches' stories are not an anomaly. Coach # 4 said:

It's a tough thing and I tell you I've got files of stuff at home that I have protected myself with because of that...because it just takes one thing. They won't fire you for that reason but they will fire you for some Mickey Mouse reason. And go well you are fired because you forgot to turn in your paperwork on time. Well of course all the men don't turn in their paperwork on time...

In addition to examples of discrimination in their current or former work environments based on their gender, two of the coaches also discussed how there is still a perception, even among young women, that men are better coaches than women. Coach # 4 shared:

... I think any time you ask a women's team, would they rather be coached by a male or a female, they always say a male. And I think that is because that's all they've ever had and I think until they realize that...women can be successful,

then they are not going to want to go into coaching because I don't think they think they can be successful and I think that is such a tragedy. I think women should have good role models. I think women need to coach women and I think women coach differently than men.

Coach # 8 referenced a recent report which said that "girls tend to believe that males are better coaches...more knowledgeable and can help them win and become better players than women coaches can." She added:

...towards the very end [of my coaching career], I actually got athletes telling me, I would really prefer a male coach. Whether or not I demonstrated that we made the NCAA's or not, it didn't matter. There is a mindset I think, among women today, that men win.

### *Sub-theme 3: Recruiting*

Aside from negative recruiting based on their perceived sexual orientation, nearly all of the coaches in this study also discussed their dislike for recruiting in general. While coach # 1 expressed extreme disdain on the topic and coach # 2 shared that it is certainly not one of her favorite parts of the job, it was the former coaches that had the most negative sentiment to share, all four of them feeling that it played some role in their decision to leave coaching or in having little to no desire to return. Coach # 1 said, "It's recruiting. You have to. But I hate it. I hate it. I hate it. You know kissing ass to club coaches and doing that..." She in fact said that this was one reason that she previously hired a male assistant, so that he could interact with the male club coaches during recruiting tournaments. Had she not left coaching for other reasons, Coach #5 said:

The thing that would have propelled me out of Division I would probably have been the recruiting. How cut throat it was getting. It was just getting crazy. People cheating all the time. It's like, I thought I saw a truck coming down the highway and I really didn't want to get hit by it. I just thought people were getting a little less honest..."



Coach # 4 believes that recruiting affects women coaches differently than male coaches.

She said:

...This is just a generalized, very bias statement, but I think women are more ethical than men. I think men think the recruiting rules are there and if they can break them and not get caught, that they are still okay, that's part of the game. And I think that women look at the rules as part of an ethical standard that they need to abide by. And like I said, that's a very biased statement, but it's just what I feel.

On recruiting, coach #6 said, "Oh I hated it. I hated it. I started out loving it..". In response to my question about whether she had any desire to return to coaching, coach # 7 responded, "I miss the game. I miss building a team like that. I miss those relationships with the kids. But you know, I don't want to recruit like that, like you have to at that level..." Finally, coach # 8 shared, "Recruiting was I think the number one reason I left coaching. I hated it."

Interestingly, three of the eight coaches used the term "hate" to describe recruiting. Although the negative recruiting is certainly a factor to consider in their strong feelings about recruiting, the coaches in this study shared concerns about the cheating aspect as well. But in both situations, poor ethics and negative recruiting, the coaches in this study believe that women and lesbian coaches are affected at a disproportionately higher rate than men.

#### *Sub-theme 4: Time Demands*

Dixon and Bruening (2007) reported on coaching mothers who balance work and family responsibilities in the high-pressure environment of Division I sports. While 27 of the 41 head coaches in their study were in heterosexual marriages, one participant was in a same-sex partnership and another participant identified herself as a single, adoptive parent. Regardless of whether they are parents or not, the coaches in this study (two are

parents) revealed how the time and rigor involved in Division I coaching has affected their relationships and their career decisions. More specifically, the rigorous time demands have played a role in relationship break-ups, career sacrifices, the decision to leave Division I coaching altogether, and for each of the coaches that left, why they have no desire to return to Division I as a head coach. On a recent breakup, coach # 2 said:

She was like, I don't want a partner for nine months. You are crazy in season. That was more about what it was...It's insane but [she] didn't get it. That wasn't the whole thing but that was definitely a good piece of it a...not being my number one because soccer was my number one. It was my bad but obviously it was only my second year as a head coach, I was really stressed, so I didn't put her where she thought she needed to be...

Coach # 3 discussed not only how the time demands have increased tremendously during her 30 years in coaching, but also the sacrifices that she and her wife (who is the associate head coach) have made in order to raise their children.

When I originally got into coaching 30 years ago I wanted to have my summers off. I laugh at that now. It's so many weekends. Here I am to the middle of May and I still haven't found a break. Usually 20 years ago I would pretty much take all of May off. It's much harder to raise a family as a coach just because it is so all encompassing. [My wife] could be a head coach at a lot of programs in the country but with our children we realized that we could make it work working together because we can cover for each other and help each other but if we were both working as head coaches at a top Division I program, it would have been really really difficult...I have been able to make it work with [my wife] just because we share everything so much and we work for the same program and she has had to make a sacrifice quite honestly. She has definitely had to make a sacrifice not to pursue a head-coaching job.

In addition to her wife sacrificing her own career advancement for the sake of their family, her institution's nepotism rule prevents her from formally having authoritative power on the job, over her wife. Thus, in order to comply with the rule, her wife does not take home a salary from the university. Coach # 4 added, "The time demands have gotten so heavy. You really have no personal time hardly...So it's fun. But the time is getting a

little bit much.” Coach # 5 reflected, “When I started coaching, you had summers off, and it was really a lot of fun. But then it became crazy.” On why she left coaching, coach #6 said, “It was really just quality of life...Having time, having a decent schedule, not always being on the road. Not always being out recruiting, on planes all spring and summer. Just having a little bit more routine I guess. As coach # 8 discussed her recent interest to get back into coaching in some capacity, she said, “...I do think that I will coach in some capacity that is low pressure, has time, I will put some time limits on it.”

Thus, while the time demands certainly enhance the strain for coaching mothers according to Dixon and Bruening (2007) and while coach # 3 revealed the career sacrifice that her wife has made while they raise their children, the head coaches in this study disclose that the time demands in coaching today pose an issue for all women coaches, regardless of their sexual orientation or parental status.

### *Summary*

The participants in this study reveal the main barriers they have encountered during their coaching careers. As lesbian head coaches in Division I sport, they are in the company of other women coaches who are affected by sexism, recruiting frustrations, and the grueling time demands. But for the coaches in this study, the heterosexist athletic environment adds yet another barrier to their career success in collegiate sport.

### *Factors Contributing to Lesbian Coaches’ Decisions to be Out, Open, or Closeted*

Ryba and Wright (2005) recommend that the, “analysis of sport must be based on an understanding of its relationships with other everyday sociocultural and political issues of contemporary societies” (p. 200). Under this notion, specific factors have contributed to these eight coaches’ decisions to be out, open, or closeted in their work

environments. They include *State or Region*, *Sport*, *Institutional Type*, the *Athletic Department*, and *Individual Factors*. In her dissertation research on out lesbian coaches across all divisions of collegiate sport, Kauer (2005) noted the important role of one's sociopolitical climate in their life and work experiences. More specifically, three of the six the sub-themes in this section (region, university, and athletic department) are consistent with Kauer's findings.

*Sub-theme 1: State or Region*

The coaches in this study discussed the role that state law and/or regional climate has played in their decisions to disclose or not to disclose their sexual orientation in their workplace. Badgett (1996) discussed the impact that having no federal law protecting individuals on the basis of sexual orientation could have on those who do not identify as heterosexual. For example, coaches who have worked in the Northeastern portion of the country describe their work climate as much safer than the coaches who work in other, more conservative areas of the country. Coach # 3 said, "If I did not live in a state where we were allowed to get married I could probably still be very comfortably, semi-in the closet...We are not down in the Bible belt." Contrastingly, coach # 4 said, "...I think it is a little bit taboo and it's still not something in the south you want to blatantly blow your horn about...And we don't have the protection in our job ...that some states do." Coach # 5 added, "there are some states that can still fire you for being gay."

Interestingly, coach # 2, who is in her late 30's, is out in a work environment that she considers to be situated in a rural and religiously conservative. Until she took her current position, however, she lived on the west coast, which is generally more accepting of individuals with diverse sexual orientations. The majority of the head coaches in this

study who are open, but not completely out, work or worked in either the mid-Atlantic or northeastern region of the United States. Coach #4, who is from the south and is somewhat open, stated very clearly that her state law and regional climate both play a role in her decision not to publicly disclose her sexual orientation.

### *Sub-theme 2: Sport*

The specific sport also plays a role in the coaches' choices to be out, open, or closeted in the work environment. Although there were no basketball coaches in the study, several coaches alluded to the sport of women's basketball being a difficult environment for lesbian head coaches to be out in due to its high profile atmosphere. Similarly, the softball coaches candidly discussed the lesbian stereotype that they all face. Coach # 4 said:

You have a lot of basketball coaches that are married [to men] that are gay and then they get divorced. It's harder probably [to be out or open] in those high profile sports...And I don't mean to say softball is expected to be gay but I think softball has always had that stereotype.

Coach # 5 added, "You get to a certain point where you get stereotyped. If she's single and she's at this age, she should be married. And if she's not, she's gay. And especially in the sport of softball."

But coaches # 2 and # 3 believe that the low profile atmosphere of their sport may have an impact on coaches' ability to be more open about their sexual orientation. Coach # 3 shared:

We are more of a smaller end sport that it's not like, if I were the head basketball coach where they are pouring a lot of their money it would be a big difference. I mean we definitely have our boosters. But it's not like there is anyone in there that if I mean they had a problem with [my sexual orientation], we'd lose their support and it would crush our program, that type of thing.

Coach # 3, who appears to have one of the more positive if not the most positive experience as an out head coach, believes that the sport of field hockey may just be more enlightened than other sports. It is also important to note that as a sport, field hockey is centralized in the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions of the country, both which tend to be more progressive than other areas of the country. Coach # 3 shared this experience to justify her depiction of the inclusive climate for lesbian coaches in field hockey:

[At the national convention for our sport] we would have a breakout group for families. And there would be women there that have children that are married, women there that have children that are lesbians, there would be young professionals thinking about having children there that are straight. And there would be some young professionals thinking about having children that were gay. And the discussion and their concerns were totally the same. Maybe field hockey has enlightened us all. Because that's at our national convention. It's a breakout meeting, the topic was the challenges of parenting and being a full time coach. [My wife] led the conversation. She was one of the leaders up there...everybody was sharing stories about childcare, support from your partner or your husband, it's all the same stuff. Maybe field hockey is just an enlightened sport as well...

In summary, the participants reveal that the specific sport may play a role in how coaches are perceived and therefore how, if at all, safe they feel disclosing their sexual orientation in their workplace. In the case of coach # 3, the intersection of either state or region and sport, creates an environment in which she feels that she is seen no differently than her heterosexual colleagues.

### *Sub-theme 3: Institutional Type*

This sub-theme refers to the role that the institutional climate has played in the coaches' decisions to be out, open, or closeted. Working in the military environment had the most impact on coach # 6 because not only was she not protected in writing on the basis of sexual orientation, but at this particular institution there was a specific policy,

“don’t ask, don’t tell”, that stipulated she could be fired for disclosing her sexual orientation. She spoke how the policy affected her decision to remain in the closet.

Just being afraid that, you know if people did find out or did assume, you could be the victim of a witch-hunt there at the drop of a hat. So in terms of feelings, how I felt about things, definitely fear was probably predominant...mostly because I was afraid I would lose my job.

Contrastingly, when she reflected on her different coaching experiences, she said:

I actually had two very different experiences. At [the military environment], very, very conservative. I wouldn’t have thought about basically talking about my [sexual] orientation or a girlfriend ever [there] whereas [at the University in the Northeast] it wasn’t quite that conservative there. There were all different lifestyles in the department. Some people were open, some were not. I don’t feel like anyone ever felt like they had to hide anything there. At [the military environment], definitely.

Similarly, coach # 3, who currently works at the same institution where coach # 6 ended her coaching career, said:

I am fortunate that as I sit here talking to you I don’t think that my support or experience is any different than my colleague who is our men’s soccer coach who also has two kids and is married. I don’t think our experiences are any different at all. [My current university] does a tuition exchange within the university but they also offer certificates where [employee’s children] have choice of going outside of the university [for college] and my son got one of those certificates. Our family was viewed as a family.

Correspondingly, Kauer (2005) found that the two coaches in her study who were closeted in the workplace felt that their institutions did not provide a safe environment for them to disclose their sexual orientation. But the more welcoming the university environment is, the more comfortable the coaches in both studies feel in terms of being open or out.

#### *Sub-theme 4: Athletic Department*

This sub-theme describes the climate within the athletic department, which led the coaches to choose their level of disclosure. Coach # 5, who was open but not out in her

workplace, described how she gauged the other lesbian coaches' behavior upon arriving at her former institution. She said:

Going into a place where you had [gay women] coaches there for a long time...you sort of look at the environment around you, and you never saw them mention their partners, whether it be on the website, whether they won an award, or a national championship. I think that's sort of how you get that feeling. I mean obviously for a married couple the first person they thank is their spouse...People's partner's came to games and stuff like that, but they don't get the same recognition that the partner of in a heterosexual relationship gets. And I think as you walk into a situation you sort of look around and get a feel for the landscape and sort of co-op that type of behavior.

Similarly, coach # 8 shared:

Even coaches within or athletic directors within an athletic department, I felt we were always careful even between and among them about our orientation so we just kind of hung out with those folks we knew we could trust or be comfortable with. Otherwise we feared for our jobs. I feared for my job if I wasn't, you know, closeted...

Coach # 4 shared that as her athletic department demonstrated more inclusive language, she became more open to bringing her partner to events. She said:

Early, when athletic directors used to have [work functions] I think they'd always say you and your spouse are invited like the holiday/Christmas party and in that case I'd go by myself. And pretty shortly thereafter, and I don't think it was just because of gay couples, but there were also some male coaches who were dating or were engaged or whatever, so the invitations then would start to say yourself and a guest. It didn't say partner, it didn't say boyfriend/girlfriend, it would just say yourself and a guest, which I thought was a real great way to put it and a real tactful way so that people could bring whoever they chose and then I would always take [my partner].

Likewise, coach #6 spoke about how she felt included in her most recent athletic department. She said:

When they would send out invitations for anything it would say spouse, significant other, partner, you know things to that effect. And I always thought that was pretty cool. The job I am in now they just did the same thing. I thought it was awesome."



The coaches in this study demonstrate the role that the particular athletic department climate plays or played in their decisions to be out, open, or closeted. None of the current coaches in this study would consider themselves completely closeted, while two of the coaches self-identify as out. Of the four former coaches, three of the four coaches considered themselves open, and they described their openness mostly by their willingness to have their partners at games or events, otherwise they did not name their relationships. Similar to Kauer's (2005) findings (except in the military environment which was strictly a reflection of the institutional climate), the climate within these coaches' athletic departments was a reflection of the greater regional or institutional climate.

#### *Sub-theme 5: Individual Factors*

It is also important to point out the individual factors that play a role in the coaches' decisions to be out, open, or closeted in their work environments. More specifically for the coaches in this study, family and being honest about one's life impacted two coaches' choices to be open, and conversely one coach's decision to be more inconspicuous.

Coach # 3 shared:

I honestly think for me, having children pushed me out of the closet. It totally changed my whole perception of living my life with more honesty and integrity. Because you've got to go home at the end of the day and you don't want them to feel ashamed, you can't come to the game because we don't want people to know that we have children. If anything you want them to feel that you are very proud of them and proud of our family and I think for me, particularly when you think that I have been coaching for a long time and I initially was very much in the closet, I think having children propelled me to be much more open and honest and have much more integrity and I think maybe for some of my colleagues they haven't had that to have that type of aha moment, you know?

Towards the other end of the continuum, coach # 7 shared:

My mom wasn't so comfortable with it... You know, I didn't take [my partner] to family events. That bothered me more than school events...[My] cousin's daughter's Bat Mitzvah, last big fight we had when my mom was alive because I'm like, "I'm not doing this anymore...this is ridiculous." And they didn't invite her out of respect to me because I never brought it up. And that's one of the few things I regret because my mom, I think, could have come to terms with it more because everybody in our family has been just so wonderful about it. If she saw they were okay with it, and everyone would have been, because they are, I think that would have been easier for her. So I regret it, a little for me, probably even a little more for her.

For coach # 2, the decision to be out in the workplace has everything to do with the value she places on living her life with integrity. She said:

I just feel like how can you not be open to your [student-athletes] and I am not judging at all but if you can't be real about who you are with your players that you are asking to do so much every single day, they see that stuff. These kids are smart kids when it comes to that. You don't have to tell them what you do in your home, but this is your life, this is who you are, and you give them that sense of freedom to be who they are and to express themselves as young women and be confident and you know that type of thing and I would have to think that that has something to do with the success factor, both with their teams in their professions and with themselves in their lives.

In summary, while some coaches described individual factors in their choice of how much to disclose, generally the coaches' decisions to be out, open, or closeted also depended on the climates within their respective athletic departments or within their sport. However, similar to Kauer's (2005) findings, in each of the coaches' environments, the athletic department climate appears to be an extension of the state/regional and university climate. Thus, when lesbian coaches negotiate whether to be out, open, or closeted in their workplace, they take into consideration both individual factors and the intersecting impact of their respective state/region, sport, institution, and athletic department climates.

## Progression of General Climate

In this theme the participants describe that because college sport is a microcosm of society, the overall socio-political climate in their work environment is progressing, even if slowly, toward inclusion of individuals with diverse sexual orientations. Three sub-themes, the *current generation of student-athletes*, *changing climate*, and *coaches' change in comfort level*, encompass this theme.

### *Sub-theme 1: Current Generation of Student-Athletes*

Several of the coaches in this study described the impact that each new generation of incoming student-athletes has their perceptions of the climate. Accordingly, the NCAA recently began to address the issue of inclusion of student-athletes with diverse sexual orientations both in policy and practice. Coach # 1 shared the influence of television on her student-athletes:

I think it's becoming more open, with high school kids. It's all over the place, MTV, TV stations... Sometimes, [the student-athletes talk] about oh, gay this, like, Tila Tequila...this girl who was so popular on My Space, she had a TV show on MTV where she was gonna pick [from] 7 female candidates and 7 male candidates, so she went on dates with both. And that was a big topic of conversation with our team. Tila Tequila and the girls she was dating.

Coach # 3 added, "It's a non -issue and I think for this generation of kids it is so much a non-issue now, which is just great. It's so awesome."

### *Sub-theme 2: Changing Climate*

As each cohort of student-athletes matriculates and subsequently graduates, society in general progresses as well. Thus, the coaches in this study, four of which have 18 or more years each of head coaching experience at the NCAA Division I level, indicate a continuous change in attitudes toward individuals who do not identify as heterosexual,

even in collegiate sport. The former coaches in the study reflect a less-inclusive climate than the current coaches, but even the former coaches indicate progress toward greater inclusion. Coach #5 said:

...most people will try to hide it. It's like, and I think, as we've gotten a little more progressive, it's like, people try to hide that they are racist. You know, it's not cool to be racist. The gay thing has moved a little in that direction. It's still okay to be, you know, homophobic, to an extent... It did get better as I ended my career

Coach # 7 added:

...In some ways I think it's easier to be a gay coach now because gay coaches are having children. That was never an issue, except towards the end of my career. So in that regard I think you have more options than when I was coaching.

But coaches # 3 and # 4, both with a combined 60 years of head coaching experience at the time of their interviews and located in contrastingly different regional climates with regard to the issue of sexual orientation, also notice the progression during their careers. The interview with coach #3 took place the day after the California Supreme Court declared the denial of same-sex marriages unconstitutional. She referred both to this landmark decision and to the overall climate changes since she began her coaching career. She said:

Yeah. I just think about what happened this morning on [the Ellen DeGenerous show]. She is announcing that she is getting married. Her partner is right there and she is getting a standing ovation. Twenty years ago that would not have happened. When she first came out, think about the dynamics on her show and she lost the television show. Here she is, back on television, winning awards for her daytime show and she is able to make that type of announcement and get a standing ovation and it's probably going to help her rankings. She doesn't have to worry about getting fired tomorrow whereas when she originally came out she did get fired, she lost her show. Culturally so much has changed, which is all great.

On how prospective student-athletes parents' have responded to her and her wife's honesty during recruiting, she said:

Another comment that we've had is, "hey we don't know what our daughter's choices may be as she becomes a young adult but being in this type of environment, you guys are just wonderful role models." Gay, straight, whatever. They see that as a positive. Could you see 30 years ago a parent saying that?

Even coach # 4, who lives in the south, has seen a change in attitudes toward diverse sexual orientations during her coaching tenure. She shared, "I think the attitudes are becoming more open, even I think in the south which is probably traditionally more conservative. I don't think people care as much anymore, I just think they really don't want stuff flaunted." Through their words, these coaches depict that while change may come at different paces and in varying degrees depending on where they are located, it has progressed toward more inclusion of diverse sexual orientations during their tenure as head coaches. Interestingly, however, as a governing body, the NCAA has done little to address the inclusion of coaches and administrators with diverse sexual orientations.

#### *Sub-theme 3: Coaches' Change in Comfort Level*

Consistent with societal trends, the coaches in this study indicate how they have progressed over time in their own comfort level around the issue of sexual orientation. On being open about her sexual orientation in the workplace now more so than in previous years, coach #1 said, "I think I've come a long way, developed a little but more." She also discussed how her former boss, who did not allow her to be open about her sexual orientation as an assistant coach, is now open with her own partner and child and is also one of the top coaches in the country. Coach # 2 added, "I always just live my life. Not always, but probably in like the last 10-12 years I've just been a lot more comfortable with it, just like everyone else."

The following dialogue depicts coach #3's sense of change in the overall climate and in her own comfort level during her tenure as a head coach:

**Interviewer:** Tell me what that process was like, going from being closeted to being out in the work environment.

**Coach # 3:** I would almost say it parallels culturally what was happening in the US. I live in a fairly liberal city and a fairly liberal state and I think that it pretty much parallels culturally what was happening in the United States with people being less closeted and more open about their lifestyle. And again having children, for me really put me in a situation where so essentially you are honest and comfortable about the choices that you make in your life. I thought it would be very hypocritical for me not to be 100% honest about my family. And I think prior to that it was just easier to be in the closet. It was just easier.

**Interviewer:** Do you still feel that way now?

**Coach #3:** That it's easier? No. I think it is harder and I think it is really unnecessary because I think society really has changed, at least where I live. It is unnecessary. If I were a 22 or 23-year-old coach coming out right now professionally, I am sure I would be very open and honest about who I am. Because it is so much more mainstream... When I was entering the field of coaching, there was no choice...you were definitely very much in the closet. I would say a 100-degree difference. [I went] from a bad experience as a 23, 24 year-old to where I am now as a 52 year old. It's night and day

Comparable in age and coaching experience but with a contrastingly different experience from coach # 3 because she lives in a much more conservative region of the country, Coach # 4 added:

At this point in my life it doesn't matter to say yes I am [gay]. You know whereas I think when you're younger you don't have job security and you don't have that track record so I think it's a little bit harder. I think if I were an applicant and I were younger and it came up I think I would probably try to dance around the answer, but at my age now I would be fine if somebody flat out asked me which they can't because it's illegal. But I wouldn't hesitate to answer it, you know at this point.

None of the four former head coaches were ever completely out in their work environment as coaches. Coach # 7 said that she struggles to this day with her choice not to be out in her workplace. She said that she usually waits until she leaves a position to

disclose to her colleagues that she has a female partner. For example, at her retirement party from coaching, both her partner and her partner's parents attended because she said this was about her, not her student-athletes. Similarly, when she left a previous job, she shared the following with some of her soon-to-be former colleagues:

When I was [an administrator] at [a university in the northeast], I left [there] and I took this job where I am now, for totally personal reasons. [The university in the northeast] was 320 miles away; it was way too far. I couldn't get home enough. [My partner] was way too far... That was such a great place. My boss's boss, when [my boss] told him why I was leaving, he said, "can we get her partner a job?" But you know [my partner] wasn't willing to come and it was just too far. It was at that time that I came out to a couple of coaches that I was really close with. And I basically said, "My partner is at home and this is too far." None of them were shocked or appalled of course.

Coach # 8, who is now a college professor, reflected on how she has grown in her own comfort level addressing others' derogatory comments towards individuals who do not identify as heterosexual:

I think the climate back in the 70s was much more receptive to antigay comments. Particularly if we were to travel to San Francisco or something like that, you know the athletic director would say, "Well don't get lost in any of those gay districts". I had some comments like that... So I wouldn't stand up and say, "well I don't think that's very funny," I would just typically laugh right along with them because that was one way you could straighten up... If it's my students today, I won't let them get away with saying the word fag, because it is a very purgative term, in my classroom. Without saying anything about myself I will say, "you know, it's really not a good term to use because you just never know who will be offended by that. It's inappropriate." But back in the day it was a very, very commonplace thing to occur, particularly among all the men because we are so male dominated.

These examples depict how the coaches in this study either have come out, or if not, how they have become more comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation in their work environment over time. Although coach # 8 does not indicate that she is out in her current job as a professor, she does reveal a higher comfort level than in the past, at least with regard to addressing derogatory comments at work. It is also important to consider the

factors discussed in theme four as coaches consider their respective climates and how they themselves have progressed around issues related to discussing sexual orientation.

### Positive Experiences for Out Coaches

Up to this point, both the literature and the majority of the coaches' in this study have revealed how heterosexism and homonegativism have led lesbian coaches to make compromising personal and career decisions in order to protect themselves and their careers. This current theme, however, encapsulates the positive experiences shared by the coaches who are either open or out in their workplace. The accounts from the out head coaches add to recent research (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Kauer, 2005) on the positive effects for coaches and employees who are out in their workplace. In addition, the accounts from the coaches who consider themselves open but not out also reveal affirmative experiences when steps are taken toward disclosure. Sub-themes include *coaches' normalization of lesbian identity, transformational experiences, and parental respect.*

#### *Sub-theme 1: Normalization of Lesbian Identity*

Four of the eight head coaches discussed how either how they normalized their lesbian identity or how their campus and larger community have created an environment in which their sexual orientation is seen no differently than that of their heterosexual counterparts. Coach # 2 discussed how she is the one who normalizes her lesbian identity in an environment she describes as a rural town that is religiously conservative. She shared:

I have just tried to make it as normal obviously for myself, which in turn makes it normal for everybody else. That's kind of the way I've approached it and handled it here... I had a girlfriend after [my ex] and I broke up and she came a lot during the last year and a half. And she would go to the games and she would go out with us.



Coaches hang out a lot here. We would go out all the time. She was a chef so we always had dinner parties at our house. And I would have like all the coaches, trainers over, so again, I never made a big deal out of it... I never really talk about my personal life; I just bring it to people like they would with me.

Similar to coach # 2, coach # 4 works in what she considers to be a more conservative part of the country. Although she has never verbally disclosed her relationship or identity to her colleagues, they still include her and her partner as a couple in departmental events and outings. She said:

We just acted like normal people and we didn't have any problems. And if [my partner] wasn't somewhere, somebody would ask where she was...Parties, booster events. You know if a bunch of coaches decided to go out and eat...somebody would say do you and [your partner] want to come over for happy hour. Everything was really pretty inclusive...And they always, like for our football games and basketball games they always give you two tickets. So if we went to a football game, [my partner] and I would always go. She'd always be the other person.

The two other coaches who discussed this issue shared how their athletic department colleagues treat or treated them with respect, if not full inclusion. Coach # 3 and # 6 both shared experiences working at the same university in the northeast. Coach # 3 said:

I think it is really no different than my heterosexual colleagues. I think that it is very healthy. It's a non-issue. It's totally a non-issue as far as anything that I am experiencing. I may be in la-la land but I don't think so. I really feel that it is a non-issue and it is a very, very healthy situation and I think I am fortunate.

Coach # 6, who worked in the military environment, added this about her contrastingly different experience in her most recent coaching position:

In terms of going out with colleagues...it was really a really very comfortable atmosphere there. You know, one where mixed company didn't matter. The athletic department in general was pretty tight and I honestly can say I never ever saw an instance where people were not invited because of their [sexual] orientation... There were instances too where I would see female coaches bring their partners to social functions.

Two of the coaches spoke about how they normalize their relationships or their sexual orientation, even in some of the most conservative areas of the country. In turn,

they are among the four coaches in this study who spoke about how their relationships are treated no differently than other coaches' heterosexual relationships, at least in departmental social settings. Interestingly, the coaches who were less open about their sexual orientation also described sub-par experiences with regard to inclusion.

### *Sub-theme 2: Transformational Experiences*

Several of the coaches in the study discussed how they believe their athletes have been transformed positively by them living their lives honestly, or in the case of coach #5, at least openly. Coach # 5 spoke of how whether it was student-athletes boyfriends or girlfriends, she was there for them personally. She reflected on this moment that she considers a career highlight:

I was really proud one year. My team was thinking about having a formal and the only requirement by the team was if one of the players brought a female, one of them had to wear a dress... They both couldn't be in tuxes. It was like one of the highlights of my coaching career. To me that was just a highlight.

She also spoke of a specific student-athlete who went from being oppositional to accepting of different sexual orientations during her four years on the team. Earlier in the interview coach # 5 described how this player, while she was being recruited, asked her indirectly about her sexual orientation. But upon reflecting on her experience coaching this particular student-athlete, she said, "It was really a highlight to see [this student-athlete] in particular be okay with it by the time she graduated."

Coach # 1, who is out to her supervisor and the men's soccer staff at her institution, said:

Sometimes it catches me off guard when [the student-athletes] talk about it, like really openly. I'm like, oh, wow, they are talking about it. But I think they've gotten more comfortable with it, especially the ones that have been here since they were freshmen, they are now juniors. They will talk about it more freely...I just try to develop those relationships with those kids, making them see that it's okay [to be gay].

Whereas coach # 1 is open but not completely out to her team, coach #2 lives both her personal and professional life congruently with regard to her sexual orientation. Accordingly, she said, "I guess, my mission, as long as I am here is I might as well teach people that it doesn't have to be as close minded as it always has been." Accordingly, she shared the following transformational experiences on her team since her arrival:

...In 2006 when I got here it was kind of known that I was [gay]. I had introduced [the team] to my partner. It was funny because the one that was a senior, that first year I think she was very quiet about [being gay]. Whereas as the year progressed she started dating a girl on the basketball team. [Her girlfriend] came to all the games, you could see it kind of flourish a little bit. It just became a lot more, and this is just my perception, I think the kids on the team became more comfortable with it, she started talking about her relationship, that type of thing. You could hear it in the van or on the bus. And then last year, one of our kids was dating [a female] back east and it was funny because she was like 24/7 text-messaging this girl. So it just became the total team joke. Joke in the sense of her always being on the phone. The kids were funny about it. Like they tease each other about a boyfriend, like one of the guys they are dating on the football team. It just became very normalized. That's the best way I can describe it. She was just like anyone else on the team. They teased her just as much as anyone else. Not teased, it was just kind of a fun, lighthearted type of thing, and she loved it, she loved it. She came out to her parents last year.

Although most of the coaches in the study described how they were reluctant to engage in much, if any dialogue with the student-athletes around issues concerning sexual orientation, these examples reveal the transformative encounters that the coaches have witnessed on their teams as a result of their openness.

### *Sub-theme 3: Respect*

Contrary to the accounts revealed in the NCAA (1989) study which found student-athletes to speak derogatorily about lesbians in sport, seven of the eight coaches in this study discussed how the athletes and in the cases with the out coaches, even the parents, have shown outward signs of respect toward them and toward sexual orientation issues in general. The out coaches have had the most outwardly positive experiences with their

student-athletes with regard to respect for and integration of their personal and professional lives. Coach # 2 shared how her team responded when she and her partner of seven years (who moved there with her and was their strength and conditioning coach) broke up. More specifically, how she had to address team rumors that she might be leaving the university. She said:

When [my partner and I broke up, she] moved into an apartment near campus, you know that type of thing. So I just addressed the team one day because rumors got out that I was going to leave at the end of the season. That I was leaving and was going to take another job somewhere because we had broken up...I asked the kids to ask me any questions and they were like, "Is it true you are leaving? Is it true that [X] got a job back [on the west coast]?" All of these things came up that hadn't even been mentioned... So I just addressed the team and I said, "Look, we are going to continue a professional working environment, and [X] is going to continue doing your strength and conditioning, it's not a problem, we are both mature and friends, but our lives have gone in different directions and we are going to respect that and move on and it's not going to affect you guys. I am not going anywhere. She is not going anywhere," you know, and kind of left it at that. I was just very honest. So then a few months later when [a new person I was dating] came around, she met us in [city in the southwest] when we were playing [university in the southwest]. She came to the hotel and I introduced [the team] to her and she came to dinner...and we were sitting in the lobby and everyone came over and sat down and introduced themselves...She would come around and be here for a weekend or a week at a time and the kids would like, you know, run up to her and give her a hug. Just fun stuff like that...

Coach # 3 similarly shared the family like atmosphere that encompasses her team.

The team is very much a family. And for our players they feel like and they say this to me, they say they have two more moms. Not just one mom, their biological mom or their adoptive mom. They really feel like [we] are mothers to them. We have them out to dinner and it's good. Real good. I could see that if something were to happen to our relationship that would be absolutely catastrophic to our team.

Coaches #4, # 6, and # 7 would consider themselves open, but not completely out in their work environment. While their athlete's experiences were not as intimate or family-like as coaches #2 and #3, they too shared stories of respect shown by their student-athletes around the issue of sexual orientation.

Coach # 4 shared:

Even though I don't announce it to everybody I think everyone assumes I'm gay, so I think the kids would know that they would need to be supportive of that if they were going to be playing for me...I think that becomes part of the kids that choose to come here, even though we've got a lot of straight people. It's kind of funny. We probably have more straight people than gay people, you know or other teams [with] straight coaches have...

Coach # 6 added:

I have just always been inclusive of people before during and after coaching. I do hope the team was a reflection of that. We had a lot of different personalities on our team and we had homosexual, heterosexual, we had one kid one year, really, she was struggling a little bit...She thought she was bisexual. I remember even the kids dealing with that. Again they were a pretty mature group. Very open, very inclusive. And then we had other kids too who were equally as comfortable bringing their boyfriends around. Didn't mind their boyfriend's being in that environment and if they did it was probably someone they didn't want to be with. Yeah, we had a good group. I feel lucky.

Coach # 7 shared how one year, she was concerned when one of the student-athletes on her team told her that she was going to come out in a school newspaper article about gay members of the campus community. Despite her fears about how the student-athlete and perhaps even how she herself might be perceived, she said, "As it turned out, you know a couple people were just flat out wonderful with her. And acknowledged the article. Most people didn't say anything. And we moved on."

Three of the coaches also shared situations in which the student-athletes parents' demonstrated respect for their relationships, if not inclusion above and beyond what they might have expected. These stories are important because many of the coaches in this study previously talked about how they have hidden or not publicly named their relationships for fear of how they will be perceived by parents.

Coach # 7 shared, "Interestingly enough, parents knew [my partner], and some were just great with her. They just knew whatever they thought they knew...And she had some

parents who just gravitated to her, would talk to her, you know.” Coaches # 2 and #3 shared the most positive encounters though between themselves and the parents. Coach # 2 discussed how the father of one student-athlete, who is also a leader in the [Christian] church, offered to contribute towards a strength and conditioning position for her ex-partner. She shared:

...[My ex-partner] ended up leaving and going back [home to another state] because we couldn't hire her full time as a strength coach with the team. And one of the fathers, another huge guy in the [Christian] Church, he stepped up and was like, “I know that you and [ex-partner] didn't work out but I would love to donate the money for her position if it means bringing her back.” And I was like, uh, okay. And so he did and she is coming back in June. Those are the people that I look at, I don't want to say that I am trying to gain their acceptance, but I feel like if I get their acceptance then I've accomplished my task of normalizing being gay. Not that they ever have to accept it or agree with it or understand it, but just accepting me for me. Not seeing me as gay before they see me as everything else, that's probably like the most important thing with every aspect of my life. When I get those people's acceptance that I am scared to death of really, then I feel good.

Coach # 2:

I try to treat their children with as much respect and professionalism as I possibly can. In turn I demand respect from my life and I am not going to hide my life from them. I feel like [the parents] have been very appreciative of that. I have had numerous parents take me out to dinner after a game, our staff, [and they would say], “bring [your girlfriend], is [your girlfriend] in town,” that type of thing. It was just that easy. And I am talking strong bishops of the [Christian] Church.

Similarly, coach # 3 shared:

...If anything, parents have told us, “you know we really appreciate and respect your honesty.” because obviously there are a lot of coaches who are more closeted and they really like that we are open and honest about it... Another comment that we've had is, “hey, we don't know what our daughter's choices may be as she becomes a young adult but being in this type of environment, you guys are just wonderful role models.” Gay, straight, whatever. They see that as a positive.

Interestingly and contrary to some of the coaches' fears of how their sexual orientation might be perceived, coaches # 2 and 3 especially, shared moments of respect and inclusion from the student-athletes' and their parents. Although the factors discussed

in theme four should still be taken into consideration when considering each coach's circumstance, coach # 2 especially demonstrates that even in what she describes as a rural town that is religiously conservative, she has gained respect from the student-athletes parents above and beyond what she could have expected.

### From Connections to Success

It is important to note other positive experiences that were shared by the coaches in this study. More specifically, examples of lesbian connections, gay coaches who see themselves as role models by living their lives openly if not honestly, and coaches who are out and successful.

#### *Sub-theme 1: Lesbian Connections*

Although their connections are no where near as effective as the good ole' boys network in terms of volume, several of the coaches in this study discussed their heightened interest in available coaching positions when the people leading or involved the job search were either open about their own same-sex attractions (e.g., mentioning their partner) or at least hinted at a welcoming or progressive work environment. Furthermore, several of the coaches helped their partner's find work in their athletic department, or in coach # 5's unique situation in the military environment, having a gay boss at one point may have saved her job. Coach #1 spoke about a recent interview she went to at a major university in the Midwest. She described the athletic department employees. "They were really liberal...they were completely open to me. I went on lunch date with the [head] softball coach who basically was talking about her partner, so it was very open." Similarly, coach # 6 shared:

At a major university, I was a little bit surprised that the associate athletic director who escorted me around was very open about her sexuality. And it actually made

me feel more comfortable and it made me even consider the university...The fact that the woman was so open it really made me feel a lot more comfortable. That they have a little bit more of a progressive train of thought.

The following dialogue later ensued with coach # 6:

**Interviewer:** You also mentioned at that one institution that you were looking at, the person who was driving you around was pretty open about her sexual orientation.

**Coach # 6:** Oh yeah.

**Interviewer:** And that made you feel like you might want to go there?

**Coach # 6:** Yes. I assumed right away because she was open like that that they were inclusive.

**Interviewer:** When you say open like that, what do you mean?

**Coach # 6:** I thought it was odd for her to be that open. Not odd, or maybe out of the ordinary from the normal protocol for her to be that open with someone she was interviewing.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me what she said?

**Coach # 6:** She actually was talking to me about her partner. Mentioned her by name. Because I would think too, maybe this plays into it. I would probably be afraid of doing that as an administrator now because I wouldn't want to scare anyone off either. Because you just never know how people are going to react. I mean I liked it because it was the type of environment I wanted to go to. But it struck me as a little odd also. She had to really trust my reaction. Because you never do know.

**Interviewer:** Did you feel like she was trying to tell you something?

**Coach # 6:** I hadn't thought about it like that until you just said it, but maybe. This interview too was really lengthy. It was over a couple of days and they did everything they could to make me feel comfortable. Quite possibly, yeah.

**Interviewer:** But if she had a husband, would it have been odd for her to be talking about her husband in this way?

**Coach # 6:** No, not at all. It wouldn't have struck me as odd at all.

**Interviewer:** So it was just because she was talking about her partner?



**Coach # 6:** Yes.

After my prompting, coach # 6 considered the possibility of a lesbian network operating in the above scenario. In addition to lesbian connections discussed in job searches, several of the coaches discussed how their partner's were able to find work in their respective athletic departments as a result of networking. Coach # 2 shared how her partner landed a job after a national search in which the chair of the search committee also happened to be a lesbian.

[At my previous job], when our strength and conditioning position opened up, my partner at the time was training a couple of the teams, like baseball, volleyball, and soccer. She was amazing at what she did... When that [full-time strength and conditioning] position became available, they did a national search and my partner got the job.... and the coaches I was close to, like friends in the city were like yeah way to hook that up. You know, that type of thing... But yeah she did get that position over other people that were, on paper, more qualified.

Coach # 4 also discussed how her partner found work in her athletic department through networking with other gay coaches and administrators.

[My partner] started working outside of the athletic department at first and then she met people in the athletic department just through things that we would do with other coaches and administrators and then they ended up having an opening [in the department] and she was looking to move so they ended up hiring her... So it was probably through her relationship with me that she got connected with people in athletics. And again, some other gay coaches and administrators... So that's how that all worked out.

Finally, coach # 6 described a pivotal moment when she worked in the military environment during which having a lesbian boss may have saved her job.

This woman I was with, you know when we had broke it off [she] took it upon herself to tell my boss [about our relationship]. And yeah it was really uncomfortable; I felt it could even jeopardize my job there. And luckily this person, who is now... one of my closest friends, she handled it great. She happens to be gay also, and it wasn't a big deal. But that was kind of luck. Had that been anyone else or even the boss I had right before her... I had a woman [boss] for three years who I am quite sure might not have wanted me around.

These stories reveal different cases in which the existence of other lesbians in the department might have actually helped the coaches make career decisions or their partners find work while they were employed at their respective universities.

*Sub-theme 2: Lesbian Coaches as Role Models*

Four of the coaches in this study noted either through their own perception or in the case of coach # 3, through the words of student-athletes parents', that as lesbian coaches they are serving as role models to the student-athletes. Coach # 1 shared, "I hope that they can see thru me that it's okay to be gay." Coach # 2 had the most to share on role modeling. She said:

Every time I have coached, kids have come out. I feel like it's important for me to be that role model. That they know whatever it is, they can come to me. And I am going to be open and honest with them.

Coach # 2 also dispelled one of the fears that keep a lot of coaches in the closet. She said:

I think a lot of people think that just because your coach is gay, all of these kids are going to be gay. It's not that. If you are gay, you have a safe environment to enjoy your life in. If I try to make that normal for them, and it's not my point but I just try to live my own life as normal and as positive and be as strong of a role model as I can...If I teach [the student-athletes] anything, I hope I teach them to be real. This is life, you know. You are going to make an issue as big as you are going to make it. You are going to make your opponent as big as you are going to make them. It's all about you.

Coach # 3 said:

...More than one parent has said to us...one of the reasons we chose [university in the northeast] is because you guys are living your life with integrity and if there is anything for our daughters, to role model, that is something that we really value.

Coach # 5 added:

There are some coaches who will run away from the gay issue. I felt I handled it. If there was a problem [between athletes] I would handle it. If a kid was struggling with her sexuality, I would talk to them about it. I had no reservations like that. I would do it with the straight kids and their boyfriends. I would do it with the gay kids and their girlfriends. And that was just sort of my philosophy and whatever

happened happened with it. I never burnt on it, luckily really... Even though I kept my life very private, you sort of knew that it would be okay to come talk to me about those issues.

*Sub-theme 3: Out and Successful*

The coaches in this study also demonstrate that it is possible to be out of the closet *and* successful in Division I sports. Coach # 1 sees her former supervisor as an example.

She said:

I know it can be done, I mean [a prominent coach]... I think she might be one of the few openly gay coaches with a family, with [a] child. Has she lost recruits to other schools? Yeah. I am sure [a specific coach at a university in the west] will throw down the family card. Yeah, all the time.

Coach # 2 added, “[At my previous university in the West], one of our big successful coaches on campus was a gay male with two kids, there was a lot to be said for that.” Speaking to her own experience as an out coach, she said. “I think having been successful has helped. I mean I know it sounds weird but I always say I am not your spiritual guru, I am just your soccer coach.” Similarly, coach # 3 demonstrates through an impressive record that includes 10 NCAA tournament births and appearances in the elite eight, final four, and NCAA championship game, that it is possible to be out and successful at the Division I level. While head coaches who are out and successful might still be in the coaching minority, these examples offer a glimpse of optimism for gay and not only for lesbian coaches who are contemplating whether or not to disclose their sexual orientation in the work environment, but also for administrators who have concerns about hiring single women or openly gay coaches.

## Former Coaches Desire to Return to Coaching

Despite their official departures from Division I coaching, each of the four former coaches in the study indicated that they would like to return to coaching, just not at the Division I level. Coach # 5 shared:

I enjoy working with the kids. It's all the other stuff that used to drive me crazy. If I could, I would return to coaching. I can't. But if I could, I would never do it at the level that I did. I would never make it so that my livelihood depended on it. I would go to a place where my partner could be at every game and it's okay. Because my job didn't depend on some nutty parent going crazy and then looking for me to slip up once. And that's what happened to [a coach in the west]. She had a crazy parent stalk her for basically two years, [the coach] slipped up, and this parent, the kid had graduated, got her fired.

Coach # 6 said:

...I think if I went back to the NCAA, I could see myself maybe doing it where I would be teaching and coaching, and probably Division III. I don't really ever see myself going back to Division I.

When asked why she would consider Division III, she said:

I think it's a true education. I think it's a true student-athlete experience. I think it's a great balance, perspective between not just academics and athletics, but you know I think even socially. Having the kids involved in the community. And by that I mean the community of the college. And even outside whether it is to do service or you know, just being involved. I think that's important. I think there's just a better balance.

Coach # 7 said:

I might someday like to coach like a 10-12 year old team. I think that's a great age. I can teach them a little bit about the game and a lot about loving it and having fun. At that age I think that's what you should teach them. So there is a part of me that thinks if I could just, A – live at home again, and have that and do something that's in the right place you know I might really want to do that. But I can't imagine myself ever at the college level...

Lastly, coach # 8 discussed how after being out of coaching for nine years, she is finally re-gaining the desire to step back on the court. She said:

I want to get involved and give back, just to volunteer. That's the capacity. Either volunteer or be an assistant. I really don't want to be a head coach. I don't want those hassles. But to be able to go in and share some of my knowledge... So the hunger to share my knowledge and give back a little bit, but not where I am kind of running the show, actually has peaked my interest recently... So I do think that I will coach in some capacity that is low pressure, has time, I will put some time limits on it, I really strongly believe I will do it again, yes. But it has taken me a long time to get to this point.

In summary, all of the former coaches in this study desire to return to coaching. But they emphatically indicate that their return, if at all, would be at a lower level.

### Summary

Using standpoint theory as a method of analysis, this research sought to understand non-heterosexual coaches' perceptions of the role of heterosexism in the decline of collegiate women coaches. Standpoint theory asserts that as lesbians, these eight head coaches have had a unique experience as "outsiders-within" the heterosexual male dominant paradigm of Division I collegiate coaching. Therefore, these collective experiences have shaped their knowledge. Overall, the coaches in this study described numerous examples that addressed not only the research question, but they also addressed various additional points that contribute to current research on the decline of collegiate women in head coaches. Six of the eight coaches in this study believe that heterosexism plays a role in the decline of women head coaches of NCAA Division I sport. They offer concrete examples of heterosexism and homonegativism, but they also indicate that these examples are difficult to prove because it is typically insider information. They also reveal the coping mechanisms they have employed and the feelings that have resulted under their respective heterosexist environments. They candidly demonstrate how heterosexism restricts upward mobility for lesbian coaches. In addition to heterosexism, the coaches discussed barriers that they have faced as women coaches, adding their

personal insight into sexism in collegiate sport and additional literature on recruiting and work-life balance as barriers. They also addressed factors contributing to their disclosure, or lack thereof, in the workplace. In addition to addressing how they manage their identity under heteronormativity, the coaches offer new insight into positive experiences when they are open or out in their work environment. These positive experiences are both personal and shared, through the coaches' words, by the student-athletes and their parents. Finally, all of the former coaches have an interest in returning to coaching, but not at the Division I level. In the proceeding chapter, implications and suggestions for future research will be discussed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### Introduction

Before Title IX was signed into law in 1972, only 16,000 female athletes participated on intercollegiate teams across the United States (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). Today, that number has increased to 180,000 female college athletes (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). But a problem exists in that these advancements have not held true for women head coaches in collegiate sport. In fact, for female head coaches, the inverse has resulted and their representation is at an all time low.

A sub-population of women who currently coach, have chosen not to pursue coaching, or have left collegiate coaching altogether, is lesbians. In scholarly and organizational research on the decline of collegiate women coaches (e.g., Carpenter & Acosta, 1996, 2006; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Inglis, Danylchuck, & Pastore, 2000; Lowery & Lovett, 1997; Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006; Stangl & Kane, 1991), lesbian coaches have often been grouped under the umbrella of women coaches without giving particular attention to their unique experiences under the heteronormative structure of collegiate sport. This research sought to explore what role, if any, women coaches who do not identify as heterosexual believe that heterosexism has played in the decline of collegiate women head coaches.

This chapter discusses the findings in chapter four and the implications for future research, policy, and practice. More specifically, the chapter is divided into the following parts: overview of study, discussion of findings, implications for research, implications for policy, implications for practice, and conclusion.

### Overview of Study

Prior to Title IX's implementation in 1972, women led 90 percent of collegiate women's teams (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). In 2006, thirty-five years after the law was passed, the representation of college women head coaches was at an all-time low of 42.4 percent (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). Previous research indicates three key themes that address this steady decline: homologous reproduction favoring male coaches (e.g., Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006; Stangl & Kane, 1991), work-family conflict for women coaches (Dixon & Bruening, 2007), and discrimination and stereotyping against women and lesbians in sport (e.g., Griffin, 1992b; Kauer, 2005; Krane, 1996; Krane & Barber, 2005; NCAA, 1989; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). Under discrimination and stereotyping, scholars (e.g., Griffin, 1992; Kauer, 2005) have pointed to the existence of a relationship between heterosexism and the decline of women head coaches, but no single study has looked at the decline from the perspective of lesbian head coaches.

Numerous scholars have documented the oppressive experiences of lesbians in collegiate sport (e.g., Griffin, 1992b; Kauer, 2005; Krane, 1996; Krane & Barber, 2005; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Wellman & Blinde, 1997). Using feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004) as the lens for analysis, this research sought to investigate the decline of collegiate women head coaches by exploring lesbian head coaches' perceptions about the role, if any, that heterosexism plays in this decline. More



specifically, this study aimed to reveal experiences and insight from eight current and former NCAA Division I head coaches who do not identify as heterosexual, living in the northeast, northwest, south, mid-Atlantic, southwest, and midwestern regions of the United States. Predominately speaking through a lens that Krane (2001) describes as being colored by heterosexism, the coaches discussed their experiences and perceptions with regard to recruiting, past job searches, career intentions, work-related social functions, and finally, the decline itself.

First, the interview transcriptions were analyzed using feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004). Feminist standpoint theory is an epistemological theory of knowledge that attempts to understand a specific environment through the words of those who have been marginalized or oppressed (Krane, 2001). Standpoint theorists seek individuals and groups that are on society's margins and actively engage them in describing the experiences and interpretations of their social existence (Allen & Barber, 1992; Krane, 2001). As "outsiders-within" the world of collegiate coaching, standpoint theory provides lesbian head coaches with a distinctive perspective, one that tends to be uniquely different from their heterosexual colleagues (Harding, 1991, p. 265; Krane, 2001). The findings from the research study are discussed next.

### Discussion of Findings

Using feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004) as the framework for eliciting and understanding perceptions and/or experiences of lesbian coaches within the patriarchal structure of collegiate sport, the findings in chapter four were grouped into the following eight themes: (1) Coaches perceptions of the role of heterosexism in the decline, (2) the impact of heterosexism on lesbian coaches' upward

mobility, (3) barriers for women in coaching, (4) factors contributing to lesbian coaches' decisions to be out, open, or closeted, (5) progression of general climate, (6) positive experiences for out coaches, (7) from connections to success, and (8) former coaches desire to return. These themes were intentionally ordered. First the initial research question is answered. The proceeding themes were organized according to prevalence amongst the participants. The discussion follows the same organizational flow.

#### Coaches Perceptions of the Role of Heterosexism in the Decline

This study aimed to understand lesbian head coaches' perceptions of the role, if any, of heterosexism in the decline of women coaching collegiate sport. As a reminder, heterosexism is defined as "an ideological system that denies, denigrates, or stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community" (Smith & Ingram, 2004, p. 57). Six of the eight coaches in this study believe that heterosexism does and has played a role in the decline. These accounts confirm Griffin (1992) and Kauer's (2005) suggestion of a connection between heterosexism and the decline of collegiate head women coaches, and the NCAA's (1989) assertion that unfavorable stereotyping of women in athletics may be driving current student-athletes away from considering a career in sport. In addition, the findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Griffin 1998, Griffin, 1992b; Jacobson, 2002; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane & Barber, 2005; Rotella & Murray, 1991; Wellman & Blinde, 1997; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphew, 2001) suggesting an unwelcoming, if not hostile environment for lesbians in collegiate sport. Additionally, these findings add to Griffith and Quiñones's (2001) research, which found that discrimination against gay men and lesbians in hiring remains a prevalent practice.

Of the six coaches who believe that heterosexism plays a role in the decline, three of the four former coaches shared how it played a role during job searches that they were either a part of or in which they were privy to information. These findings in particular add to Wellman and Blinde's (1997) research, which indicated that the participants' marital status was a point of contention during their job searches. Both of the current coaches who believe that heterosexism plays a role in the decline shared different ways heterosexism has affected who they have hired as assistants. For coach # 1, heterosexism led her to hire a male assistant in order to promote a heterosexy image. Coach # 4 discussed how heterosexism privileges both male and female heterosexual coaches in the job negotiation process, particularly when the search committee chairs seek to find work in the community for a coach's husband or wife. She discussed how after an offer is made, lesbian coaches are never asked if their partner needs a job, potentially leading them to turn down a job if they are partnered and unable to find work for their partner on their own. Standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004) is important to this finding because of the six coaches who believe that heterosexism plays a role in the decline, each speaks from a position of being in the closet or perhaps somewhat open in their work environment. More importantly, none of these six coaches are out in their respective workplace. Therefore, their collective perception as "outsiders-within" the patriarchal and heteronormative environment of collegiate sport have shaped their knowledge.

The two coaches who are out in their athletic departments could not speak to heterosexism playing a role in the decline. In fact, both of these coaches hope that it would not play a role in one's decision to leave the field, with one coach in particular stating that if it became an issue, she might leave that specific environment but that she

would not leave collegiate coaching altogether. On role of heterosexism in the decline, although there is a clear difference in perceptions between the two out coaches and the other six coaches in this study, as a group, lesbian collegiate head coaches' experiences and perceptions on this topic confirm Griffin (1992b) and Kauer's (2005) presumptions that there is a connection.

Consistent with Griffin's (1992b) research on manifestations of homophobia in women's sport, the coaches in this study discussed how other female head coaches hire men as assistants to lend a heterosexual persona. In fact, among the soccer coaches, one shared how heterosexism impacted her decision to hire a male assistant in the past. Furthermore, two of the four softball coaches in the study spoke about this manifestation in the sport of softball and the field hockey coach discussed how she could see this happening in women's basketball because of its high profile status. Once men gain entry into collegiate women's sport, one coach elaborated on the domino effect that takes place when male assistants are successful and move on to become head coaches. More specifically, she believes that men coaches will typically hire at least one male, decreasing opportunities for qualified female coaches. These assertions of male head coaches in general being more likely than female head coaches to hire a male assistant, contribute to the insignificant availability of research in this area.

Whereas some scholars (e.g., Griffin, 1992b; Wellman & Blinde, 1997) discuss how heterosexism has persisted in the preference for male coaches, Krane and Barber (2005) describe that if and when women are considered for a coaching position, there is often an inquiry into their sexual orientation. All four former head coaches discussed how they could see this occurring. More specifically, three of the four former coaches

discussed examples of these inquiries in either searches that they have been a part of or privy to, or in coach # 8's experience, she learned that a search committee chair at a university in the Midwest asked past colleagues about her own sexual orientation.

Although the coaches in this study discuss how heterosexism has played a role in qualified female coaches not being hired and in some cases, in coaches being fired, they are also clear in their position that the connection between heterosexism and the decline of women coaches is difficult, if at all possible, to prove. Whether a less-qualified male applicant is hired for a position over a female applicant or a female coach does not get an interview because of her perceived sexual orientation, the coaches in this study believe that their stories speak volumes concerning the decline. While lesbian coaches' silence is well documented in Griffin's (1992b) research, the participants' unprompted remarks about why the relationship is difficult to prove are not stated in the literature beyond Griffin's notion of silence. As one coach shared, in some cases lesbian coaches who are fired will simply choose not to push the issue because they would rather remain silent than risk future collegiate coaching opportunities. Though unintentional, their silence perpetuates heterosexism and as Griffin (1992b) discusses, passes this coping mechanism onto the next generation of women in sport.

Standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004) provided an important roadmap for this theme by offering an open platform for the coaches in this study to speak candidly as a marginalized group under the patriarchal and heteronormative domain of collegiate sport. As a vehicle for the emergence of their collective knowledge, previous literature on silence and a preference among female head coaches to hire male assistants (Griffin, 1992b), as well as inquiries into the sexual orientation of single,

female coaching candidates (Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997) were established and strengthened. In addition, through this particular method of theoretical inquiry, previous suggestions of a connection between heterosexism and the decline of college women coaches (Griffin, 1992b; Kauer, 2005) were answered. This connection has been masked in previous research by grouping lesbian coaches under the larger category, woman. Moreover, new literature on the difficulty proving a relationship or even heterosexism at all was established by paying specific attention to how these coaches navigate, and more specifically, survive the collegiate coaching environment.

#### The Impact of Heterosexism on Lesbian Coaches' Upward Mobility

Regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation, most if not all individuals who aspire to coach at the NCAA Division I level seek to work at an institution where they are provided with the support and resources to be successful. For the coaches in this study, this includes salary, scholarships, and state-of-the-art facilities. But consistent with Driscoll, Kelly, and Fassinger's (1996) research on lesbians in the workplace, job mobility for lesbian coaches is restricted due to homophobic sentiment in the work environment. Although formal discussion about job mobility for lesbians is limited in previous research (Bollag, 2007; Driscoll, Kelly, & Fassinger, 1996; McLemee, 2003), the findings in this study add the prior research and reify how heterosexism has an impact on lesbian coaches in particular. Accordingly, if a desired job became available, six of the eight coaches in this study (including the two who are out) have contemplated or said that they would consider if the position and/or job location would allow for them to be comfortable working and residing there as a gay woman. Of the two coaches for which sexual orientation has not played a role in their job considerations, one has close ties to

the local community and therefore she has minimally considered pursuing other options. The other coach stated that her sexual orientation never deterred her from pursuing a position, although she also noted that regardless of her sexual orientation, she could always pass as heterosexual, therefore it was never an issue for her in job searches.

Another common thread amongst five of the eight coaches was their references to the restricted upward mobility that they face as lesbians in the heterosexist culture of intercollegiate sport. More specifically, Coach # 1 has intentionally not considered a number of highly touted recent position openings because she does not believe that she would have been able to live comfortably in those environments as an openly gay woman. Similarly, coach # 2 discussed limiting her next search to an area that is more progressive than her current location. In 1999, coach # 5 turned down a base salary offer of \$90,000 to coach at a university in the Midwest and the number one factor in her decision was the inability to live there comfortably with her partner. This salary would have been a significant increase from her institution, where she ultimately remained. Coach # 3 has no desire to move or seek another position because she lives in a state that has legal same-sex marriages and is content in her position. For different reasons, coach # 4 has no desire to leave her current location. Coach # 6 said that had she remained in coaching, she would have never worked at another institution where she felt she could have lost her job if her sexual orientation was discovered. Of the three coaches who did not discuss heterosexism limiting their upward mobility, two had little to no intentions of leaving their positions due to family connections near their institutions. The other coach expressed no concerns about the opportunity for upward mobility because she was certain that she could always “pass as straight”.

The coaches in this study reveal that like most NCAA Division I head coaches, factors such as salary, departmental support and resources, and top-notch facilities are important when deciding whether or not to consider or accept an open head coaching position. But adding to more general literature (Boatwright et. al, 1996; Chung, 2001; Driscoll, Kelly, & Fassinger, 1996; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002; Waldo, 1999) on discriminatory workplace experiences for individuals who do not identify as heterosexual, lesbian coaches compared to heterosexual women coaches have an added layer of complexity concerning their career decisions for two reasons: (1) they tend not to disclose their sexual orientation or relationship status for fear of being discriminated against. As a result, lesbian coaches are often on their own to seek employment opportunities for their partner if they have one; and (2) in most cases, lesbian coaches must consider the socio-political climate of a university's local and surrounding community when deciding whether or not they will pursue or accept an open position.

For this theme, lesbian standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Krane, 2001; Sykes, 1996) confirms an environment through which the participants could speak openly about the struggles they face or faced as lesbians in sport, experiences that are largely invisible from a heterosexual perspective. More specifically, as a group, the coaches' upward career mobility remains an ongoing struggle under a heteronormative social order that is emphasized even more so in collegiate sport.

#### Barriers for Women in Coaching

The coaches in this study described different barriers they have faced both as women and as lesbians in collegiate sport. These barriers include heterosexism, sexism,



recruiting, and excessive time demands. Regarding heterosexism, the coaches discussed their perceptions about the “don’t ask, don’t tell” climate around sexual orientation in college sport, being asked if there is a “gay issue” or “gay problem” on their teams, negative recruiting between coaches, and how a preponderance of these experiences or recollections have been directed by men. The coaches also discussed the coping behaviors that they have employed as lesbians under a heteronormative structure, as well as how they have personally grappled with their selection of survival mechanisms. Not surprisingly, the two out coaches shared much different perceptions about heterosexism than the other six coaches in this study. Second, the coaches discussed how they have been affected by sexism as women coaches under the male domain of sport. Alarming, many of their experiences mirror those of other women coaches who have recently filed Title IX complaints or lawsuits against their institutions. Third, recruiting quandaries have plagued these coaches not only because of negative recruiting but also due to their lack of interest in dealing with the parents and club coaches of prospective student-athletes. In addition, the coaches expressed concerns about other college coaches cheating during the recruiting process, particularly as the pressure to win mounts. Finally, the coaches discussed how the rigorous time demands, which have drastically increased over the last 30 years, have contributed to relationships ending, career concessions, and departure altogether from the profession.

*Heterosexism.* Results from an NCAA (1989) study on barriers for women in sport revealed that nearly 50% of the student athletes surveyed considered the lesbian label to be a possible barrier for those who desire to pursue an athletic-related career. But only 19.7% said that it would impact their decision to not pursue a career in athletics.

Similarly more than half of the athletic administrators surveyed in the study said that their sport involvement regularly led others to presume that they were lesbians. These results led the NCAA (1989) to suggest a relationship between negative stereotypes of women in sport and the limited interest of student-athletes surveyed to pursue a career in collegiate sport.

In collegiate sport, scholars and mainstream media outlets (e.g., Jacobson, 2002; Rotella & Murray, 1991; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001) consider athletic departments to be the most homophobic and heterosexist environment on the college campus. The head coaches in this study reveal the barriers that heterosexism has posed for them as lesbians in collegiate coaching. More specifically, a heterosexist environment has led them to incorporate specific coping mechanisms in order to survive as outsiders-within the heteronormative climate of collegiate sport. They also collectively discussed common feelings including hypocrisy, alienation, and strain on relationships with their partners that have arisen as a result of their coping behaviors.

Consistent with Kauer's (2005) research findings in which two of the coaches in her study discussed the "open secret" or "don't ask, don't tell" policy around lesbians in athletics, six of the eight coaches in this study offered evidence of a *don't ask, don't tell* climate operating within collegiate sport. Such accounts indicate that these coaches continue to be marginalized by an environment that remains not quite ready to embrace coaches with non-normative sexual orientations. Not surprisingly, the only two coaches in this study who did not articulate a "don't ask, don't tell" climate were the two coaches who are out in their work environments.

Adding to previous research in which coaches discussed feelings associated with being questioned about lesbian issues on their teams, on other college teams, or being asked about their own sexual orientation or marital status (Wellman & Blinde, 1997; Krane & Barber, 2005, Kauer, 2005), five of the eight coaches in this study shared situations in which their colleagues or they themselves have been asked by prospective student-athletes or parents during the recruiting process if there was a “gay issue” or “gay problem” on their team or if they themselves were married. These statements reveal the continued lesbian stigma associated with women who have defied gender expectations and succeeded in sport. However, consistent with their previous accounts in this study as out coaches, coach # 2 and coach # 3 have never been asked these questions by parents or by prospective student-athletes. There could be several reasons for the contrastingly different experiences between the two out coaches and the other six coaches. It could be that their degree of openness has transformed parents and prospective student-athletes, even as early as during the recruiting process. Another reason could be that as coach # 5 shared in her observation of recent societal trends, it’s not as politically correct to portray homophobia, heterosexism, and homonegativism as openly as people once felt they could, even in sport, and especially around individuals who may themselves might not identify as heterosexual.

The NCAA recently began paying close attention to the issue of negative recruiting, particularly ethically poor tactics which have affected lesbian coaches and as a result, all women in sport (McKindra, 2006). Consistent with previous research on negative recruiting (e.g., Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997), five of the eight coaches in this study discussed how negative recruiting impacted

them or other lesbian colleagues. These experiences are not limited to rivalries within particular conferences. One coach shared how a coach in a different conference who she considered to be a friend brought up the “family-values” issue while they were recruiting similar student-athletes. Another coach shared how she knows of a particular coach who will bring up the “family-values card” when recruiting against an out lesbian coach in their region. The “family values” reference, as one coach shared, appears to be a relatively new term that emerged under the current presidential administration. For each coach who shared a story about negative recruiting, they or their colleagues were on the receiving end of male attacks. These accounts are consistent with previous research in sport that describes men to be more homophobic and heterosexist than women (e.g., Gill et. al, 2006; Kimmel, 2007; Sandler, 2008; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001).

*Actions as a Result of Heterosexism.* The coaches in this study discussed how they have employed certain behaviors as a result of the heterosexist climate. More specifically, when they were assistant coaches, two of the coaches shared how their bosses asked them to conceal their sexual orientation from student-athletes and parents, and another coach embarrassingly revealed how she asked her assistant to be more discrete about her sexual orientation around recruits. Interestingly, each time these requests were made, a lesbian coach directed them. Similarly, Boatwright et. al. (1996) found that lesbians who chose not to disclose their sexual orientation often felt guilty or troubled by the realization of their own internalized homophobia. Another trend amongst the participants was that four of the eight coaches in this study discussed how under heteronormativity, they have compensated for being gay in their own job searches or while recruiting. Furthermore, six of the eight participants have strategically hidden their partners, in some way, in their

respective work environments. Similarly, Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, and Ketzenberger (1996) found that many women feel pressure to remain in the closet due to the impact that anti-LGB discrimination might have on their careers. But Powers (1996) also noted the draining effect that hiding has on individuals who do not identify as heterosexual. Finally, although each of the coaches in this study is either single or partnered with another woman (except one coach who is legally married to a woman), three coaches discussed how they know of other lesbian coaches who have strategically married men or publicly displayed an interest in men as a method for career advancement. As these coaches describe, they feel or felt that they have or had no choice but to employ such strategies in order to survive as outsiders-within the heteronormative climate of collegiate sport. These findings on lesbians intentionally marrying men for upward career mobility purposes advance Griffin's (1992b) research about women coaches who compensate for heterosexism and homophobia by promoting a heterosexual image.

*Feelings Resulting from Actions.* DiPlacido's (1998) model of minority stress describes external stressors for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals due to anti-LGB related discrimination and daily aggravations. DiPlacido (1998) considers anti-gay jokes and constantly feeling the need to be on guard as persistent stressors for lesbians. In addition, Balsam (2001) says that although choosing to remain partially or completely in the closet may prevent some forms of homophobic discrimination, stress as a result of hiding may have harmful effects on an individual's well being. Six of the eight coaches in this study shared how they have been personally and emotionally affected by their own decisions to either hide their relationships, to compensate in some way for being gay, or in the case of one coach, to ask her assistant to be more discrete about her sexual

orientation. More specifically, two coaches in this study discussed feeling hypocritical at times, four of the coaches shared how they have felt alienated from their colleagues, and five of the eight coaches (including one of the out coaches) discussed specific examples of relationship stress due to hiding. One specific result of their choice to hide, feeling alienated, adds to Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger's (1996) research on lesbians and how discrimination in the work environment negatively impacted or constricted relationships with their colleagues.

Griffith and Hebl (2002) state that employees who do not identify as heterosexual face barriers regardless of whether or not they choose to disclose their sexual orientation. In their study on lesbians in the workplace, Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger (1996) found that occupational climate influenced job stress and coping, and therefore influenced work satisfaction. Furthermore, individuals who feel compelled to hide their sexual orientation expend energy that could be spent on work and career development (e.g., Rocco & Gallagher, 2006; Rostosky & Riggle, 2000). Likewise, the participants in this study reveal the cause/effect relationships between heterosexism in collegiate sport, their coping mechanisms, and the feelings that have resulted from their actions. These coaches illustrate the immense pressure that contributes to their drastic, and in many cases, emotionally compromising personal and career decisions. These findings are important not only to better understand the stressors that cause and ultimately accompany compromising decisions made by lesbian coaches in the heterosexist environment of collegiate sport, but also because they add to the literature on career development issues for gay men and lesbians in general.

*Sexism.* Adding to previous research (e.g., Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 2000; Lowery, Lovett, & Lopiano, 1991; Sweeney, 2004), which found sex-role conflicts to be contributing to the attrition of female college coaches, this research found sexism to be a major contributor to the frustrations experienced by the coaches in this study. Although there was no intention to explore sexism in this study, five of the coaches' unprompted accounts are consistent with the 14 known Title IX complaints, lawsuits, or appeals that are currently pending against institutions of higher education across the United States (Steeg, 2008). Interestingly, the most recent known lawsuit alleges discrimination on the basis of both gender and sexual orientation following the 2007 dismissal of two lesbian coaches at San Diego Mesa College (NCLR, 2008). The Mesa coaches, who were successful as coaches at Mesa, were fired after a local newspaper identified them as domestic partners (NCLR, 2008). Similarly, the most common fear expressed by the coaches in this study was retaliation if they were to bring up gender equity concerns to their administration. In fact, coach # 5 explicitly stated that her athletic director treated her differently after she attended and spoke up at a Title IX forum at her university. The coaches in this study also discussed specific examples of sex discrimination within their athletic departments and how men are able to coach women whether or not they have played the sport at the college level. But the reciprocal opportunity is generally not available to women coaches of the same or comparable sport. In addition, when men and women's teams are combined, for example often in the sports of swimming and diving or cross-country, it is commonly expected that the head coach is a male. These accounts of sexism, which as a topic appears to have fallen under the umbrella theory of homologous

reproduction in previous research (Sagas, Cunningham, & Teed, 2006), is an underrepresented area with regard to the decline of women head coaches.

*Recruiting.* Knoppers et al. (1991) found that women were significantly more likely to leave coaching than men and one reason cited was too much time spent recruiting. Similar to previous literature (Griffin, 1992b; Krane & Barber, 2005; Longman, 2007; Wellman & Blinde, 1997), all of the coaches in this study except for one expressed their disdain for recruiting, with three of the coaches using the term “hate” to describe these experiences. While negative recruiting certainly plays a factor in their feelings, these coaches also described their apprehensions with regard to interacting with parents and club coaches, as well as their concerns for cheating and other tactics that coaches incorporate to gain an edge in recruiting. As a reminder, negative recruiting takes place when coaches try to lure a prospective student-athlete to commit to attend their institution by making derogatory remarks about another school or coach that the recruit is in contact with. These accounts are important for NCAA policymakers as they consider future recruiting reform initiatives.

*Time Demands.* Among the coaches in this study, the time demands associated with Division I coaching have contributed to relationship break-ups, career sacrifices, and for each of the coaches that left, the demands play some role in why they have no desire to return to Division I coaching. Dixon and Bruening (2007) found that time demands increase strain for coaching mothers. Although just two of the coaches in this study have children, six of the eight coaches discussed how the increased time demands have affected relationships at home and career decisions. Of the three current coaches who shared their perspective on the time demands, each has dealt with the consequences



differently. One coach believes that the time demands played a significant role in a recent relationship break-up. Another coach's wife sacrifices her entire salary in accordance with university policy so that as a couple, they can coach together and be present for their children. Another coach indicated that time demands are becoming an issue for her as she contemplates whether or not she will remain in coaching. Similarly, Hart, Hasbrook, and Mathes (1986) found that women left coaching due to perceived time and role conflicts with their individual lives. Of the three former coaches in this study who discussed this issue in detail, two said that the time demands played some role in their decision to leave and the other is considering time restrictions as she decides whether or not to return to coaching in a lower, less-competitive capacity. These accounts raise concerns for the future of women in Division I coaching and they further the NCAA (1989) research on both why student-athletes are not considering a career in athletics and how the time-demands continue to negatively affect the work experiences of current coaches.

Epistemologically, standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004) legitimates and justifies women's lived experiences in the discovery of knowledge, particularly in power relationships (Campbell & Wasco, 2002). Accordingly, this conceptual framework regards the participants' assertions and experiences with heterosexism, sexism, recruiting, and time demands as previously invisible under the patriarchal and heteronormative governance of collegiate sport.

#### Factors Contributing to Lesbian Coaches' Decisions to be Out, Open, or Closeted

Previous literature reveals that individuals who do not identify as heterosexual face a predicament when deciding whether or not to reveal their sexual orientation at work (e.g., Boatwright et al., 1996; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). As

a refresher, an individual who is closeted or “in the closet” will incorporate a variety of behaviors to deliberately hide his or her sexual orientation. A person who is out or “out of the closet” displays an assortment of behaviors that inform individuals of his or her sexual orientation. A person who is “open” exhibits a conglomeration of behaviors that signal, most often subtly, that one is not heterosexual. Griffith and Hebl (2002) found a positive relationship between disclosure and work satisfaction. But scholars have also found a relationship between disclosure and job anxiety (Waldo, 1999; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996). One factor that contributes to a person’s decision to disclose his or her sexual orientation is how safe he or she feels in the work environment (Croteau & Lark, 1995; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1995; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). Only one of the eight coaches in this study feels completely safe (and this has not always been the case for her) disclosing her sexual orientation at work.

Factors that affected these coaches’ decisions to be out, open, or closeted at work include: state or region, sport, institutional type, the athletic department, and finally, individual circumstances. The coaches’ discussions about the role of the state and regional climate add to Badgett’s (1996) research, which discussed the impact of legal protection, or lack thereof, on individuals in the workplace who do not identify as heterosexual. Likewise, the coaches in this study range from being legally protected to having no protections, on the basis of sexual orientation, under state law. It is important to note that unlike most minority populations in the United States, no federal law provides protection for individuals on the basis of sexual orientation.

The participants in this study also discussed how coaches of certain sports might be more at risk when choosing whether or not to disclose their sexual orientation. The

field hockey coach sees her sport as perhaps more enlightened than other sports. Both she and one of the soccer coaches alluded to the stakes being higher for women's basketball coaches. In addition, several of the softball coaches in this study noted how the lesbian stereotype for their sport has impacted them. Each of the softball coaches in this study has handled this stereotype by choosing to be cautiously open about her sexual orientation. In doing so, their personal relationships and experiences with the student-athletes and their parents have been affected to varying degrees.

Kauer (2005) found that the two coaches in her study who were closeted at work felt that their institutions did not provide an environment that was conducive to being out. Three of the eight coaches in this study specifically mentioned the impact of their institutional climate on their decisions. In the case of the coach who worked in the military environment, the institutional climate directly had an impact on the athletic department climate. But research demonstrates that regardless of institutional climate, athletic departments tend to be more conservative than the general campus community (e.g., Jacobson, 2002; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001; Rotella & Murray, 1991). Five of the eight coaches discussed how their athletic department climates led them to be either cautiously open or in the case of two coaches, completely closeted. One of the two closeted coaches, however, did say that she was out to other lesbians in the athletic department. The other coach was closeted when she worked in the military environment and more open when she worked in what she described as a more progressive athletic department environment at a university in the northeast. While the coaches in this study discussed how they strategically navigated each situation differently, these findings are consistent with Kauer's (2005) research that described athletic departments as a reflection

of the greater regional or institutional climate. Findings from both of these studies reveal the role that intersecting environments play as coaches consider how much, if at all, to disclose with regard to their sexual orientation.

Also of importance are the individual factors that led the coaches to their decisions. For the coaches in this study, family (having children) and valuing honesty impacted two coaches' choices to be out. Another coach, who would consider herself cautiously open, said that her choice to be guarded was mainly out of respect for her mother who lived locally and was not particularly comfortable with her disclosing her sexual orientation. These findings reveal that when lesbian coaches decide whether to be out, open, or closeted in their work environment, they consider both individual factors and the intersecting impact of their particular state/region, sport, institution, and athletic department climates.

Standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004) confers that there are epistemological implications in a person's everyday encounters, including those in the workplace. Once again, this conceptual framework provided a non-judgmental forum for the participants to freely consider and discuss how they manage or managed their sexual identity under the patriarchal and hyper-heteronormative environment of collegiate sport. Thus, these experiences have shaped how the participants perceive their existence and understanding of this environment.

#### Progression of General Climate

As society progresses in tolerance, acceptance, inclusion, and ultimately normalization of marginalized social groups, the participants in this study describe that the climate around sexual orientation within collegiate sport is also progressing, albeit

slowly. Six of the eight coaches discussed the generational changes that they have observed during their coaching tenure. In general, the coaches describe this generation of student-athletes as more open and inclusive than ever before. One reason for this might be the recent emergence of gay-straight alliances (GSA's) in public high schools. GSA's are co-curricular student organizations that emphasize unity between all students, regardless of sexual orientation. Compared to 1997 when only 100 GSA's existed in high schools across the United States, today there are more than 3,000 (DeMitchell & Fossey, 2008). In addition, several of the coaches discussed the influence of lesbian and bisexual media personalities on their student-athletes. Thus, each new cohort of college students enters their institution of higher education usually having at least some exposure to either the topic or to peers with diverse sexual orientations.

Amongst the coaches in this study, perceptions generally indicated recognition of the changing climate. There were, however, differences in perceptions between the current and former coaches, with the current coaches offering more detail and optimism regarding progress than the former coaches. Each of the four current coaches is more open or out at work than each of the four former coaches was at the time of their departure. The different perceptions might be generational, among other factors, with regard to the two coaches under forty. But the other two current coaches in this study are over the age of 50, implying that other factors have led to their optimism about the changes. For them, their degree of openness in the work environment has progressed, and in one case quite drastically, from the time they entered coaching. Perhaps their perceptions about the changes are more positive than the former coaches because they have not only witnessed, but also personally experienced these changes over time. These

perceptions contradict previous literature (Griffin, 1992b; Griffin, 1998; Jacobson, 2002; Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001; Rotella & Murray, 1991) that historically depicts an unwelcoming, if not hostile environment for lesbians in sport. On a positive note, the coaches' perceptions demonstrate a potential shift in attitudes toward non-heterosexuals, even if slowly, amongst each new generation of student-athletes.

#### Positive Experiences for Out Coaches

Kauer (2005) suggests that future research should give voice to women in sport who have transgressed the traditional expectations of gender and sexuality. This suggestion emerged due to the minimal amount of literature available on women in sports who have defied social expectations, beyond their mere presence in sport, under patriarchy and heteronormativity. This research found two of the eight coaches to have successfully transgressed these boundaries as out coaches under a largely sexist and heterosexist athletic climate. These findings add to Griffith and Hebl's (2002) research, which found a positive relationship between sexual orientation disclosure and satisfaction. One coach specifically discussed how her family, which includes herself, her wife, and their two children, is treated no differently than any other family at her university. This coach has been working at her current institution for 30 years. Her experience is consistent with Friskopp and Silverstein's (1995) research, which found that employees are more likely to remain working for an organization that overtly demonstrates intolerance for discrimination. Her experience is also consistent with Croteau and Lark (1995), who found a positive relationship between LGB support in the workplace and disclosure.

The two coaches who discussed how they have normalized their sexual orientation in all aspects of their work environment reported the most positive responses and experiences amongst the eight coaches. These positive accounts are not just between and amongst the coaches and their colleagues but they also include the student-athletes and their parents. This is an important finding because it challenges assertions made by other more closeted coaches in this study who fear or feared how parents would respond and in turn, how that could affect their recruiting efforts and job stability.

In addition to their positive experiences as head coaches, both out coaches believe that they have created an environment within their teams where all student-athletes, regardless of sexual orientation, can be themselves. One coach specifically spoke about how she has seen gay athletes grow more comfortable with their sexual orientation over time and heterosexual student-athletes mature in their inclusion of their non-heterosexual teammates and their girlfriends. This coach perceives these transformations to be related to how she has normalized her own sexual identity in an environment that might otherwise not be inclusive of diverse sexual orientations. In addition to her observations, most of the coaches discussed how their teams were transformed positively as a result of their own openness or inclusion.

#### From Connections to Success

Although almost all of the previous literature (e.g., Griffin, 1992, Griffin, 1998; Jacobson, 2002; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphew, 2001; Rotella & Murray, 1991) reveals an unwelcoming, if not hostile environment for women in collegiate sport who do not identify as heterosexual, the coaches in this study, especially those who are out or fairly open, offer glimpses of more positive experiences, including benefiting from

lesbian connections within college sport, serving as role models, and being out, or at least open, and successful as head coaches.

Whereas homologous reproduction has worked to the systemic benefit of men in sport, the lesbian connections discussed by five of the eight coaches in this study served different purposes. Two of the five coaches who discussed this shared how when they were at a particular campus for a job interview, a coach or administrator's openness about her own sexual orientation during their visit led them to consider the job more seriously. In both of these situations, the coach and the administrator casually mentioned their partner in one-on-one conversations. Two other coaches discussed how their partner's at the time were able to utilize networking opportunities with lesbian and other administrators on their athletic department staff to help secure a job in their athletic department. Although it is uncertain that the coaches' partner's secured these jobs because of their connections, it is important to note that their sexual identity did not prevent from them being considered for the position. In one of these circumstances, a lesbian administrator chaired the search. In addition, it was known in both situations, even if covertly that the particular candidate was the coach's partner. Similarly, one coach shared how after she interviewed for a head coaching position at a university in the Midwest, she later learned that the senior women's administrator (SWA) asked colleagues about her sexual orientation. She was hired despite the SWA knowing that she was a lesbian, and in this case, the SWA was also a lesbian. This coach stated that this was one of the few instances where the women's network was helpful. Finally, the coach who worked in the military environment discussed how having a lesbian supervisor while



working under the don't ask, don't tell policy probably saved her job during a difficult time.

Consistent with Kauer's (2005) research, four of the eight coaches in this study discussed that as open or out coaches, they see themselves as role models for all of their student-athletes. Coach # 3 also shared how on more than one occasion, parents have told her and her wife that they see them as role models for living their lives with integrity. Such accounts demonstrate the progress made since 1990, when tennis star Martina Navratilova was criticized as a bad role model for merely hugging her partner following her ninth Wimbledon Championship (Griffin, 1992).

Recent research offers insight into the benefits of being out in the workplace (e.g., Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Fassinger & Gallor, 2006; Croteau, Bieschke, Fassinger, & Manning, 2008). Correspondingly, coaches in this study demonstrate that it is possible to be out and successful in women's sport. The two out and one open coach in the study, each working in vastly different socio-political climates, have combined for seven conference championships in the last five years. In addition, coach # 1 shared how she knows of another head coach in her sport that is both out and extremely successful. It should be noted, however, that these out coaches consider their sports to be less affected by heterosexism than women's basketball or softball. Furthermore, two of the four softball coaches in the study, both who consider themselves open, have coached their teams to a combined nine trips to the women's college world series. While these coaches are by no means implying that all lesbian collegiate coaches should feel safe being out or even open, they offer insight into how they have been successful despite their relatively open level of disclosure.

In addition to offering important insight into the marginalized and invisible experiences of lesbian coaches, the non-judgmental combination of standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004) and in-depth interviews also allowed for unexpected, yet promising themes to emerge. Themes five, six, and seven add to Kauer's (2005) research and to an extent, challenge previous literature (Griffin, 1992b; Griffin, 1998; Jacobson, 2002; Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001; Rotella & Murray, 1991) that reveals an unwelcoming and marginalizing environment for lesbians in collegiate sport.

#### Former Coaches Desire to Return to Coaching

Interestingly, each of the four former coaches in this study would like to return to coaching in some capacity. As a group, they indicated that if they did return it would be in a lower-pressure environment. In fact, coach # 6 was the only former coach who indicated the possibility of returning to coach at the NCAA level. She said, however, that if she returned to coaching it would more than likely be at the Division III level where she could both coach and teach. Regarding women coaches, it is recommended that scholars consider standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004) as a conceptual framework for understanding the different coaching experiences between the three NCAA divisions.

#### Implications for Research

This study points to seven compelling questions for future research. First, using standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004), a future study should specifically examine lesbian coaches' experiences with *male* heterosexism, homophobia, and/or homonegativism. Previous research indicates that men tend to be more homophobic than

women (e.g., Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001; Gill et. al, 2006; Sandler, 2008). Each time a coach in this study spoke about heterosexist, homophobic, or homonegative behavior, a male coach or administrator directed it. Thus, more research should be conducted on lesbian, and perhaps all women coaches' experiences working under the heteronormative and male dominant structure of college sport.

Second, several coaches in this study alluded to a population of gay male coaches. Under male hegemony, the expectation of heterosexuality for men in sport marginalizes gay males and fosters a heterosexist and homonegative environment for all men in sport (Sandler, 2008). Future research should therefore consider the experiences of gay men in collegiate sport. More specifically, DiPlacido's model of minority stress can be used to understand the impact of heterosexism on gay men in college athletics.

Third, each of the former coaches in this study expressed a desire to return to coaching at a lower level, particularly NCAA Division III if they were to return to collegiate coaching. This indicates a perception amongst the former coaches that coaching at a lower level would be more congruent for them. These perceptions might stem from factors such as less pressure at the NCAA Division III level, both in recruiting and competition; scholarships available based on a prospective student's need and academic merit in Division III, versus the Division I level where scholarships can be awarded solely based on athletic ability; and finally, more emphasis on a holistic college experience at the NCAA Division III level, one for which time spent practicing and competing are much more restricted at the Division III level compared to the Division I level. A future study should compare the experiences of NCAA Division I, II, and III female head coaches to see how, if at all, the coaches' experiences differ between

divisions. Particular focus should be on the barriers discussed in the NCAA (1989) study and in chapter four of this study.

Fourth, this study revealed positive experiences for coaches who are out of the closet. With only two out coaches in this study, additional interviews should be conducted with “out” college coaches. Furthermore, several coaches in this study alluded to a more hostile environment in collegiate women’s basketball. Therefore, efforts should be made to include lesbian women’s basketball coaches in the participant population.

Fifth, Carpenter and Acosta (2006) indicate a continuous rise in men coaching collegiate women’s sport. In fact, prior to Title IX, women coaches led 90% of women’s college teams. Today, the representation of women coaching collegiate women’s sport is at an all-time low of 42.4 % (Carpenter & Acosta, 2006). This means that the representation of men coaching women’s collegiate sport is at an all-time high of 57.6%. A future study should examine why men coach women and the experiences that led them to pursue coaching collegiate women’s sport.

Sixth, this research found sexism to be a major barrier for the head coaches in this study. Five of the eight coaches discussed discrimination based on their sex or retaliation against them when they expressed concerns about gender equity. In addition, there are currently 14 known Title IX complaints, lawsuits, or appeals pending against institutions of higher education across the United States (Steeg, 2008). A female coach has filed each of these cases. Using standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Harding, 2004), future research should explore collegiate women coaches’ perceptions of sexism in their work environments.

Finally, despite previous research (Krane & Barber, 2005; Wellman & Blinde, 1997) and current court cases (Steeg, 2008) that infer a homonegative collegiate sport environment, homonegativism only emerged in this study when the coaches discussed negative recruiting and comments made by other men. One reason for this might be that the research question addressed heterosexism in the coaches' work environments. A future study should examine homonegativism in collegiate sport (both men's and women's) and perhaps the role, if any, of homonegativism in the decline of college women head coaches.

### Implications for Policy

This study points to two important considerations for policy-makers. Again, feminist standpoint theory allows for marginalized voices to emerge in research. Thus, listening to these coaches' perceptions has triggered important policy questions. First, the NCAA (2007a) principle of non-discrimination states:

It is the policy of the association to refrain from discrimination with respect to its governance policies, educational programs, activities and employment policies including on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, creed, or *sexual orientation*...it is the responsibility of each member institution to determine its own policy regarding discrimination. (p.4)

Interestingly, under NCAA (2007a) bylaw 13.1.2, permissible recruiters include the spouse of a staff member, but not a staff member's domestic partner. More specifically, it reads:

#### 13.1.2.2. General Exceptions. Spouse of Staff Member.

- (1) **On Campus.** A spouse of an institutional staff member on campus
- (2) **Off Campus during Official Visit.** A spouse of an athletics department staff member during a prospective student-athlete's official visit and within

a 30-mile radius of the institution's main campus during the prospective student-athlete's official paid visit. (p.83)

One of the coaches in this study suggested that there is an inconsistency between the NCAA principle of non-discrimination, which explicitly states its policy to abstain from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and NCAA bylaw 13.1.2. If the NCAA claims to refrain from discrimination based on sexual orientation, then under general exceptions it should also include the domestic partner of an athletics department staff member as a permissible recruiter. Because this bylaw does not include the domestic partner of an institutional staff member in its policy, it would be an NCAA violation if a coach brought his or her partner to any aspect of recruiting. Although some coaches may choose not involve their domestic partner in recruiting, it is the researcher's suggestion that consistent with the NCAA principle of non-discrimination, each coach, regardless of sexual orientation, should have the same option available to involve their spouse or their domestic partner in the recruiting process.

Second, the NCAA (2006) offers each member institution a self-study instrument to assist them in the Division I athletics certification process. In the self-study, member institutions are asked to address the issue of sexual orientation for student-athletes, but not for coaches or administrators. To be exact, this particular question in the self-study asks member institutions to:

Describe the institution's educational and support programs in the area of sexual orientation. Also, describe the institution's structure and/or policies that ensure the provision of a safe environment for all students, including student-athletes with diverse sexual orientations. (p.31)

While it is extremely important that this issue be addressed for student-athletes, it is suggested that the NCAA add a section in this self-study that asks member institutions to

also describe the structure and/or policies in place to ensure a safe environment for coaches and administrators, including those with diverse sexual orientations. It is further suggested that the NCAA ask the institution to describe *athletic department policy* in place for all coaches, administrators, and student-athletes, including those with diverse sexual orientations. This would be in addition to institutional policy. This suggestion stems from previous research (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Muñoz & Thomas, 2006; Rostosky & Riggle, 1996; Smith & Ingram, 2004) which found a positive relationship between the existence of a workplace non-discrimination policy and both less internalized homophobia and the degree to which an individual was out, and satisfied, at their place of employment.

#### Implications for Practice

The NCAA has recently made positive strides on issues concerning student-athletes with diverse sexual orientations. The self-study instrument is a start. It is encouraged, however, that the NCAA ask member institutions to go further with their self-study report regarding the structures, programs, and policies in place to ensure a safe environment for student-athletes of all sexual orientations. One suggestion is that the institutional self-study also addresses programs in place for coaches and administrators, and that member institutions describe specific departmental practices or intended practices in addition to the already required structure, programs, and policies. While structures, programs, and policies are an important framework for facilitating the inclusion of individuals with diverse sexual orientations, ongoing practices should also be encouraged. Thus, the researcher suggests that member institutions move beyond just focusing on student-athletes and institutional structures, programs, and policies. More

specifically, collegiate athletic administrators themselves are encouraged to use these as a framework for deliberately inclusive practices within their respective environment. Furthermore, in an effort to remove bias and offer a more holistic institutional self-study report, institutional faculty and staff beyond the athletic department are encouraged to actively take part in their institution's NCAA self-study process.

Second, how can collegiate athletic departments partner with other athletic organizations and campus departments to better support and/or understand and reduce conflicts that non-heterosexual student-athletes, coaches, and administrators experience in their workplace? Such partnerships might include opportunities for these student-athletes and coaches/administrators, together or separately, to gather in a safe space. An additional suggestion includes educational workshops. The NCAA and the Women's Sports Foundation's *It Takes A Team!* Project currently offer tailored workshops for collegiate athletic departments. Furthermore, many college campuses now have a specific department that offers lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) safe zone training sessions to the campus community. It is important to note, however, that whereas LGB issues have to do strictly with one's sexual orientation, transgender issues focus on gender variance, more specifically when a person's gender is not congruent with their assigned sex. Thus, the experiences of LGBT individuals should not always be considered the same when considering educational programs. Other ideas include an LGBT speaker's bureau or a speaker series focusing on LGBT issues in sport; either an NCAA or campus-sponsored mentoring program available to both students and staff who do not identify as heterosexual; a diversity committee within each institution's student-athlete advisory council (SAAC) in which LGBT issues are written into the committee's



responsibilities, and visibility of student-athletes, coaches, and administrators who do not identify as heterosexual.

Third, the NCAA (2007a) principle on non-discrimination states that, "...it is the responsibility of each member institution to determine its own policy regarding discrimination" (p.4). It is suggested that member institutions and athletic departments themselves publicly adapt and follow the NCAA principle of non-discrimination. This would make an overt proclamation of support for all student-athletes, coaches, and administrators, including those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Furthermore, it would again lay the foundation for attentiveness to sexual orientation issues in sport.

### Conclusion

Six of the eight coaches in this study perceive heterosexism to play a role in the decline of collegiate women head coaches. Additionally, in their work environments, all of these coaches have been affected by heterosexism. As a result, at different points in their coaching careers these coaches have employed specific coping mechanisms, including some aspect of hiding their partners or simply compensating, in different ways, for being gay. These actions have caused them inner turmoil and strain on relationships with their partners. Another consequence of heterosexism for most of these coaches is that their upward mobility has and continues to be limited to locations where they can feel comfortable living in the community with a partner and perhaps a family. For the second research question, multiple findings emerged that encapsulate the participants' workplace experiences. More specifically, other barriers have been paramount to their coaching experiences. They include sexism, recruiting issues, and time-demands.

Although only two coaches in this participant population identified themselves as out, five identified as open to different degrees, and one identified as closeted when she coached (except amongst other gay coaches). They discussed important systemic factors such as state or regional climate, particular sport, institutional type, and departmental environment, as well as individual factors including having children or simply wanting to live honest lives. For these coaches, their negotiation regarding how much, if at all, to disclose about their sexual orientation, typically involved an intersection of these factors.

The two out and five open coaches also revealed relatively positive experiences, to different degrees, as a result of societal trends and their own decisions to disclose their sexual orientation. In general amongst the participants in this study, the more open or out a coach is, the better their off the field or court experiences are with the student-athletes and their parents. In turn, these accounts add to previous research which demonstrates that individuals who do not identify as heterosexual but feel comfortable disclosing their sexual identity in the workplace are more likely to be satisfied and productive and therefore will be more prone to remain in their work environment (e.g., Croteau & Lark, 1995; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1995; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Consequently, the opposite is true for employees who do not feel safe disclosing their sexual orientation. These participants' perceptions and experiences, whether they are in the closet, open, or out, tend to be consistent with the previous research.

Despite more optimism from some of the participants than in previous research, the challenge for collegiate coaches who do not identify as heterosexual is that their environment is often more closely associated with the patriarchal and heteronormative

structure of sport rather than the college campus environment. Thus, coaches and administrators tend to co-op the heteronormative principles and practices of a larger sport environment rather than the more holistic, inclusive, and socially just principles that many college campus environments espouse. Therefore, scholars, policy makers and practitioners must encourage, create and implement policies and practices that promote all aspects of diversity on the college campus, with a special focus on departments that lag behind the rest of the campus. In sum, if collegiate sport as an entity is serious about reversing the declining numbers of women head coaches, then policy-makers and practitioners must not only provide a safe forum for all women coaches to voice their concerns, but they must subsequently enact strategies that incorporate the uniquely different experiences of all women in sport, including those with diverse sexual orientations.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Interview Questions – For Current Head Coaches

##### General Questions:

1. How many years have you been a head coach?
2. How old are you?
3. What sport do you coach?
4. How do you identify your race?
5. How do you identify your religion?
6. How do you identify your sexual orientation?
7. Would you please tell me what it's like to be gay in your athletic dept?
8. How do you decide whether or not to disclose your sexual orientation to your coworkers?
9. Have you ever heard antigay jokes or comments on the job. If so, how, if at all, did or would you react?

##### *Recruiting*

10. Talk about your experiences recruiting student-athletes with regard to sexual orientation.
  - a. Can you recall any specific positive or negative experiences that you encountered as a result of your sexual orientation?

##### *Hiring process/es*

11. During job searches, when you were a candidate, can you recall any specific positive or negative experiences that you encountered as a result of your sexual orientation? Other reasons?

- a. If you have served on any athletic search committees at your institution, what kinds of non-professional issues related to the candidates did the search committee, when deciding who to hire, discuss? (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, marital status)

#### *Career Intentions*

12. What role, if any, did your sexual orientation play in your decision to take this job or turn down others?
  - a. What other factors led you to take this job?
  - b. Did any factors take preference over others? If so, what?
  - c. If this is not your first job as a head coach, what factors played a role in your decision to take previous jobs?
  - d. What factors played a role in your decision to leave previous jobs?

#### *Social/ Outside of Work Functions*

13. How do you negotiate going to work social functions or socializing outside of work with coworkers? (Happy Hour? Holiday Functions?)
  - a. Have you ever brought or considered bringing someone of the same sex to a work function?

*Heterosexism is defined as: the assumption that everyone is or must be heterosexual and therefore activities, programs, conversations, and events are driven by this framework.*

14. Talk about workplace heterosexism and how it affects or affected you as a coach?
  - a. In your athletic department?
  - b. On your staff?
  - c. With your team?
  - d. With student-athletes' parents?
15. Talk about any inclusive practices that affect you as a coach.
  - a. In your athletic department?
  - b. On your staff?
  - c. With your team?
  - d. With student-athletes' parents?
16. In college, the representation of women head coaches of women's sport continues to decline. Talk about what role, if any, you see workplace heterosexism playing in this decline.
  - a. How significant of a factor is it for you?
  - b. Has it been or is it a factor for any of your coaching colleagues?
  - c. Have you ever thought about leaving college coaching because of the stressors associated with heterosexism in college sport? If so, please explain.
  - d. If not, what keeps you motivated to stay in coaching?

- e. Other factors you think might be leading to this decline? For you personally?

17. Do you have anything you would like to add?

## Interview Questions – For Former Head Coaches

### General Questions:

1. How many years were you a head coach?
2. How long have you been out of coaching?
3. How old are you?
4. What sport did you coach?
5. How do you identify your race?
6. How do you identify your religion?
7. How do you identify your sexual orientation?
8. Would you please tell me what it was like to be gay in your athletic department(s)?
9. Did you ever hear antigay jokes or comments on the job. If so, how, if at all, did you react?

### *Recruiting*

10. Talk about your experiences recruiting student-athletes with regard to sexual orientation.
  - a. Can you recall any specific positive or negative experiences that you encountered as a result of your sexual orientation?

### *Hiring process/es*

11. During job searches, when you were a candidate, can you recall any specific positive or negative experiences that you encountered as a result of your sexual orientation? Other reasons?
  - a. If you served on any athletic search committees at your institution, what kinds of non-professional issues related to the candidates did the search committee, when deciding who to hire, discuss? (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, marital status)

### *Career Intentions*

12. When you were a head coach, what role, if any, did your sexual orientation play in your decision to take or turn down a particular job?

- a. What other factors led you to take previous head coaching jobs?
- b. Did any factors take preference over others? If so, what?
- c. What factors played a role in your decision to leave coaching?
- d. Do you have any desires or intentions to return to coaching? If so, in what capacity?

*Social/ Outside of Work Functions*

- 13. How did you negotiate going to work social functions or socializing outside of work with coworkers? (Happy Hour? Holiday Functions?)
  - a. Did you ever bring or consider bringing someone of the same sex to a work function? Why or why not?

*Heterosexism is defined as: the assumption that everyone is or must be heterosexual and therefore activities, programs, conversations, and events are driven by this framework.*

- 14. Talk about workplace heterosexism and how it affected you as a coach?
  - a. In your athletic department?
  - b. On your staff?
  - c. With your team?
  - d. With student-athletes' parents?
- 15. Talk about any inclusive practices that affect or affected you as a coach.
  - a. In your athletic department?
  - b. On your staff?
  - c. With your team?
  - d. With student-athletes' parents?
- 16. In college, the representation of women head coaches of women's sport continues to decline. Talk about what role, if any, you see workplace heterosexism playing in this decline.
  - a. How significant of a factor is/was it for you?
  - b. Has it been or is it a factor for any of your coaching colleagues?
  - c. Other factors you think might be leading to this decline? For you personally?
- 17. Do you have anything you would like to add?



## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT



### INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Education Leadership

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**TITLE OF STUDY: Perceptions of “Others”: The Role of Heterosexism in the Decline of Collegiate Women Coaches**

**INVESTIGATORS: Vicki Rosser, Amy Sandler**

**CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: Vicki Rosser (702)-895-1432**

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#### **Purpose of the Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the decline of women coaching collegiate sport by exploring non-heterosexual coaches' perceptions of the role, if any, that heterosexism plays in the decline. Previous researchers have pointed to the existence of a relationship between heterosexism and the decline of women coaches, but no single study has actually looked at the decline from the perspective of women coaches.

#### **Participants**

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are a current or former female head coach of an NCAA Division I women's intercollegiate team who identifies either privately, publicly, or openly as a non-heterosexual and is between the ages of 21 and 75.

#### **Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: participate in one audio-recorded interview about your workplace experiences with

regard to sexual orientation. The interview will take between 60 and 120 minutes. The interview will be scheduled with your agreement and confirmed via email.

### **Benefits of Participation**

There may be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. You may be empowered and legitimated by sharing your personal stories and knowledge about your experiences with regard to sexual orientation in your current or former work environment. This research will benefit society by contributing to the limited knowledge base regarding the impact of heterosexism in the collegiate athletic environment. In addition, this research will help collegiate athletic administrators better understand the importance of promoting inclusive environments for individuals of all sexual orientations.

### **Risks of Participation**

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. You may feel discomfort in answering some of the questions from the interviews, but the amount of discomfort should be limited. The interviews could trigger emotional and psychological distress that includes but is not limited to anxiety and the recollection of unpleasant memories.

### **Cost/Compensation**

There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take no more than a total of 2 hours of your time over two days. You will not be compensated for your time.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Vicki Rosser at 702-895-1432. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.**

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

### **Confidentiality**

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. Once the interviews are transcribed, the recorded interviews will be destroyed. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time, the information gathered will be shredded.

## APPENDIX C

### EXAMPLE OF DOMAIN ANALYSIS

#	COMMENT	CODE
	then there was something that came up in a meeting the other day. It was a graduation party for all of the student athletes. And our AD was like: feel free to bring your wives. And I was sitting next to the assistant basketball coach who is a good friend of mine and he is like bring your wives because of course that is all he has to say because all of the coaches are married. And then he looks around and he says or your husbands or boyfriends or like whatever you know (laughs), and I go, he could have left it at wives. So the associate started cracking up. It was just funny, it's the little things. Of course he never says anything about like, I think he like feels awkward about it. So I don't know that he obviously knew how to announce it but anyway, that was kind of. his tone kind of went down like he was like okay we are going to move on now	
2	(laughs).	HET
	The only other thing that I can think of that stood out that has bothered me and it's such a stupid little thing, the phone list that goes around. And I probably should step up and say something but like it has your name, office number, cell phone and all that, then on the far right column it says "spouses name" (HET). And to me it's like I can't get married so I don't have a spouse. If it said partner or even like, I don't know if it's like important for our assistant coaches who have boyfriends or girlfriends, maybe that is not as important to just list that. I see that point but with [my partner] we were together seven years. Obviously that is my partner, you know. I would have put her down, but I don't have a spouse. You know what I am saying, just things like that. That's probably one	
2	that stands out.	HET
	That has been a little bit of an issue here. It's just one of those things when you open the excel sheet and I'm like, well I guess I won't put anybody in there because I don't have a spouse. You know. And I just clicked it off, like whatever. Chalk it up to being here instead of really doing something about it.	
2	Which probably wasn't the best, but that's what I did. (ELANG, HET)	HET
2	I feel like the more, that's why I wish there were more females here so I could	HET

see and get a sense of if this was more a female issue (SEX) or a homophobic issue (HET), you know.

This guy was a great guy that I worked with and he was [Christian] as well. Again this was when I was in my early 20's and I was not here I was at [university in rural Northeast]. He would be like [coach #3] you need to be a breeder, you are athletic, you are attractive, you gotta get married and be a breeder. And again it was kind of tongue and cheek but it wasn't at that time. He is a great guy, I love him. He is really an awesome guy. But that comment

3 was made to me. (HET)

HET

I have an experience. The person I hired, probably 20 years ago as an assistant, she was recently married and I remember her making a comment to me. I was in a relationship. Not married but fully into the relationship and I remember her saying to me at one point because coaching can take a lot of hours and a lot of demand on you and she was trying to ask for more time off and she said, "[coach #3], I am married, I have a life you know". And I remember at that point being like, and I am not? I don't have a life? That may be like one of the few times I can really say that I got so angry, she just couldn't understand that what she had just said to me was so insulting or that her free time was any different than my free time (HET), more valued because she was married and mine was less valued because I was not married. (HET) She didn't work for

3 me much longer.

HET

[My partner] does not travel on team trips. That's the other area that we just decided professionally not to do that because we didn't want kids saying anything or making things up or whatever so she would never travel on team trips whereas husbands would always have their wives on team trips. So that was kind of the one area we did not, you know, just have her go. Because we just felt that was too open to people misconstruing things or gossiping and that kind of stuff. And you know the way kids are and their parents. If they're not playing they're gonna make up stuff. So again, we took that out of the equation. So that no kid could ever say, well [Coach #4] didn't spend time with us because she was off with her partner doing something. So I just eliminated that part and we just both kind of agreed that was a pretty smart thing to do

4 actually.

HET

And I've had, again, parents ask if I'm married or do I have any kids and you know I just answer the questions. I just say no I'm not married and I have 18 kids. I don't have any children of my own. Or I say hey I have a dog and that's all I need...If I was married obviously I would say yes I'm married. Again I think it is a little bit taboo and it's still not something in the south you want to

4 blatantly blow your horn about.

HET

We just got a clarification on this. If you are married. And I was thinking about how to write the NCAA. I think if you go out to eat dinner and you are married, I think your spouse can go with you. But if you are not married, your significant other cannot go with you. And that's an NCAA interpretation. So I am about to write them and say okay that makes no sense because if it is a recruiting advantage, you shouldn't just give it to the married coaches. And if it is not a recruiting advantage, why are we preventing people from going? So, I am trying to figure out how to do that. But yeah, right now, your partner can't mingle with your recruits.

My thing is, if you are letting someone take somebody else, then who cares. Then you are opening that door. And if it's not a benefit, then just say that married people cannot take their spouse either. That's the way I think they need to change it anyway. Because like you said, somebody could have a partner one day and not a partner the next, but you know what, so can you with a marriage. My thing is just say you can't take a spouse or a partner or anybody, just be a coach who has passed a certification test. It is heterosexist because first of all, is it going to benefit me to take my partner on a recruiting deal? If we are eating at outback steakhouse? Is that really considered a benefit? See I think it came up because one of our coaches must have taken her partner you know, to a meal. It had to be what happened because we got this interpretation that said you know, maybe you all are unaware but. You know and my thing is, if a coach is willing to come out and say they got a partner then to me that is not really a benefit. So why are you going to penalize

4 somebody? If they've got the guts to do that, let them do it. You know.

HET

You have to understand, athletics is the last bastion of conservatism [on campus]. (HET) You can be on the most conservative campus and you walk in the athletic department and it just doesn't co-op the whole atmosphere of the

5 campus.

HET

You could never come out and say I am racist. But some people will wear a badge that says I am against gays and they are applauded by certain groups of

5 the population (HET).

HET

All the social events, that was all awkward. You know, very family oriented, but who they considered, bring or include your family, your husband, wife,

6 children, very military obviously. Not very open. (HET)

HET

Just being afraid that, you know if people did find out or did assume, you could be the victim of, you know, a witch-hunt there at the drop of a hat. So in terms of feelings, how I felt about things, definitely fear was probably predominant

6 doing things mostly because I was afraid I would lose my job. (TYPE, HET)

HET

Again that constant military presence was definitely something I was uncomfortable around. You know they, to them everyone is straight and that's  
6 it. Anyone that is not, there is something wrong with them. (HET) HET

...It came up often times. What's a woman like you doing without a man? What aren't you married? Or are you married? Do you have a boyfriend? I would just be kind of coy. I would say well I don't have a husband. And they would say well why not. They would say complementary things and I would say, "I'm too busy". We'd laugh and joke. Occasionally people would ask me out and I would say, "this really isn't a good time, I would use recruiting and traveling 50 or 60,000 miles a year as an excuse, or I would say I am married to my job. I would say whatever I felt. I'd size the person up and say just what would get them off my back. Typically that worked. It seemed to work in those types of functions. I would just say you're silly, or I'm not your type, I did what most of us do when we are trying to get rid of someone that we don't  
8 want to spend time with. (HET) HET

I would say that personally and privately between and among the lesbians in our department, no [heterosexism did not play a role]. Publicly, absolutely it was driven by heterosexism. None of us really were willing to go out on a limb and be open about our sexuality. Privately, absolutely not, a very comfortable place to work. Publicly, fundraising, foundation work, during our matches and events, absolutely we were under that cloak of heterosexism. We all felt like  
8 we were all trying to act like we were just everybody else. (HET) HET

I think heterosexism plays a huge role in why we are finding diminishing  
8 numbers of women coaching women in sport. (HET) HET

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